

Dialogue Among Civilizations: Ancient and Future, Transitions and Potentials

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Abstract

The dialogue between the ancient Chinese civilization and the nascent Bahá'í civilization is in its beginning phase. We note in the Chinese system many images and ideas that resonate with Bahá'í thought and enable us to examine how this very old civilization contemplated the role of embodiment and transformation. This article briefly examines some similarities as found in a meditation upon the *Book of Changes* 《易经》. It then highlights the differences that exist between western and Chinese philosophical thought, drawing out how these ideas are similar to what we find in Bahá'í philosophy, while transcending them. It will present brief considerations of language, epistemology, and ontological foundations. Further, it will look at the notion of embodiment as presented in the Chinese view of the noble person, the *junzi*, from Confucianism, as well as its presentation in Bahá'í thought. Finally it will consider the place of filial piety and world civilization in the two systems. It is contended that these motifs, themes and images in Chinese culture that resonate with the Bahá'í Faith lie at the roots of the Chinese psyche. In Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation, we find the re-expression of these truths since they are what are needed to re-vitalize and re-animate human civilizations and transform them from the materialistic basis that is dominant to one founded upon spiritual principles. In order to perform this, the roots of our soul need to be reactivated and it is the Power of the Manifestation, we are told, that can best effectuate this collective transformation to the stage of maturity.

1. New and Old

If we simply state that all civilizations are undergoing great transition, we speak nothing novel. Most people living will assert such a truism. If we, on the other hand, assert that we are living in the midst of and witnessing the destruction of civilizations and the consequent rebirth of civilizations, we speak a thought that echoes through the veils of time. Chinese thought, as embodied in the *I Ching*, the *Book of Changes*, and myriad other philosophical treatises in its history, recognizes the implicit cycles of ascent and descent of civilizations. Likewise, Bahá'í thought presents for our consideration the fact of the birth of a new civilization founded upon spiritual premises and principles, and the destruction of civilizations founded upon materialistic premises. We are at the dawning of such a process, and it is at dawn that one centers oneself and decides the events of the future.

This paper will briefly examine the congruence of Bahá'í and Chinese thought as it pertains to metaphysics, humanity and the earth. In fact, what I hope to express clearly is how Chinese philosophy strove and how Bahá'í thought enables us to live an embodied metaphysics, a metaphysics that demands action, that cannot be separated from living, from building and maintaining civilization. In this way, we are enabled to glimpse how it is that the Bahá'í Faith, as enunciated by Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi, reach back through the veils of time in activating modes of being that have strong resonance in the human psyche, while at the same time propelling us into a more mature contemplation of these modes. This dialogue, then, will permit us to know why and how we can live a life characterized as "personified intellect and embodied spirit."¹

This embodiment is the hallmark of both Chinese civilization's roots, and core of the nascent and future Bahá'í civilization. The images, symbols and motifs we find in the Bahá'í corpus have a deep resonance with myriad symbolic systems throughout the world. We should not find this surprising since religion seeks to transform the human psyche from its total involvement with physical life to a life characterized by a connection with the spiritual order informing mundane existence. Symbols serve the human soul in its process of transformation by serving as foci for such

¹ 'Abdu'l-Bahá *Tablets of the Divine Plan*, p. 88.

changes. In order to implement a global civilization, the Bahá'í religion seeks to transform the myriad human societies from their concern with limited national interests to planetary perspectives, and the personal to the collective, without thereby losing individuality. The differentiation of the particular unit is a vital process; it must be accomplished by an integration with the universal so that a mature stage of development is achieved. By reaching back through the depths of time, this religious system (the Bahá'í Faith) awakens and transmutes symbolic systems, revitalizing them and infusing them with new energy. Such revitalization strikes to the core of human psychospiritual being, activating modes of being that have been cast aside. These powers are ones that ennoble the individual and enable her or him to attain self-mastery. Through self-mastery, one enters a dialogue with others on different grounds, on equal footing. Equal footing enables social cohesiveness and development along peaceful lines.

These lines of dialogue are followed by many scholars pursuing a Chinese-Western debate, though without the spiritual and religious implications addressed by the Bahá'í position. It is contended that the Bahá'í Faith provides for our edification and spiritual transformation by presenting a clear principle in the Bahá'í Writings that explains this simply and clearly. Bahá'u'lláh says,

“From the heaven of God's Will, and for the purpose of ennobling the world of being and of elevating the minds and souls of men, hath been sent down that which is the most effective instrument for the education of the whole human race. The highest essence and most perfect expression of whatsoever the peoples of old have either said or written hath, through this most potent Revelation, been sent down from the heaven of the Will of the All-Possessing, the Ever-Abiding God.”²

One reason why we find within the Bahá'í corpus such resonating concepts is because they are what are needed for the transformation of the individual, spiritually and psychologically. Once transformed, the individual then proceeds to effect transformation within societies, with transformation ultimately extending throughout the entire world system. The loss of true interconnection with the cosmos, and interconnection with others has resulted in a fragmented world system. The time we are

² Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 95.

living in is truly an "Age of Transition" from a world of divided, self-seeking nations to a world federation. "The tumult of this age of transition is characteristic of the impetuosity and irrational instincts of youth, its follies, its prodigality, its pride, its self-assurance, its rebelliousness, and contempt of discipline."³ Bahá'u'lláh, so he claims, has brought what is needed for the passage of the species from a stage characterized as adolescent to that of maturity. The words he used were what the collective species of humanity has used in its attempts to order life. Bahá'u'lláh's languages were Arabic and Persian, though the concepts he used were universal. The archetypal nature of these concepts are such that they resonate with the deepest chords of the human psyche, from distinct and diverse civilizations, beliefs, and time periods.

Let us not be naïve and assume that what we find within the Confucian, Taoist or Buddhist texts were universally or fairly applied in China. The beauty they aspire to, the injunctions they enjoin, the virtues they inculcate, remained limited in application and inaccessible to the majority. More than this, some were misused by the minority that theoretically held to them, used for control or manipulation of an uneducated population. The feudal bureaucratic system established by Confucians, and the changes in Buddhist texts to entice the population to donate to monasteries, indicate how these systems were adapted for socio-economic purposes.⁴

Chinese philosophers, especially after the rise of Neo-Confucianism, held to the universality of their ideas, and ascribed a superiority to their cultural views compared to the 'barbaric' western nations. This system offered a code of conduct and virtues to delineate it, but no belief system. Taoist thought offers these components, but the belief system is transpersonal only inasmuch as the Tao (道) is transpersonal. The debate currently among modern scholars is to what degree the Tao can be said to be transpersonal in a transcendent meaning. It is transpersonal in that it transcends the individual but its transcendental aspect is questionable. Buddhism proffered a code of belief, but by the time it reached China, it had undergone many transformations and interpretations, and many

³ Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day is Come*, p. 117.

⁴ For a detailed look at the relation of early Chinese Buddhism and socio-economics, see Liu, Xinru, *Ancient India and Ancient China: Trade and Religious Exchanges*.

superstitions were overlaid onto it. The intermingling of Confucian, Taoist and Buddhist philosophies indicates the fluidity, harmony, and, at times, tension that existed in Chinese thought. Each system impacted the other, flavored the language and philosophical concerns, and often vied for priority in the society. There was often a large gap between the religious hierarchy and popular religious thought, with the popular level blending all three indiscriminately. With the transformations of time and interaction with other nations, these Chinese notions were forced to change.⁵ In contemporary China, these roots are unknown by the majority, but they lay at the core of their psychological being.

This in no way belittles these concepts' immense value for "rectifying conduct," acquiring virtues, or pondering how one becomes a stable and mature being within the midst of change and chaos. Perhaps the restatement of such concepts within a new religious system is due to their unplumbed value for humanity; this time, these symbols and ideas come with the power required to effect such change within the hearts. It derives from a Divine Power born of God, we are told. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the son of Bahá'u'lláh, founder of the Bahá'í Faith, informs a potential teacher of the Chinese that they "must be imbued with their spirit, know their sacred literature, study their national customs, and speak to them from their own standpoint and using their own terminologies."⁶ One reason for this is that the Chinese views are profound in their wisdom, and detailed in the mannerisms of personal transformation. Based on a desire to maintain order within change, Chinese philosophical thought contributes greatly to our understanding the necessary psychological processes and demands for such transformation. It takes a power transcending the human realm to transmute effectively and on a large scale the natural impulses and instinctual drives of human beings in order to implement the ideals embodied in Chinese philosophy on a social scale. Divine Revelation proffers to humanity such a power, one that transcends and yet is immanent within the realm of humanity. A personal relationship with the Logos principle, the Manifestation of God, is what revealed religions offer to facilitate such transmutation. The Bahá'í Faith offers a code of

⁵ For a good discussion of this transition and its impact on and within Confucian philosophy, see J. R. Levenson, *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate: A Trilogy*, Berkeley. This book is a compiled work of Levenson's three works, thus the three dates.

⁶ Cited in *Star of the West*.

conduct, a code of virtues, as well as a code of beliefs in a transpersonal, transcendental order that provides a personal relationship as well.⁷

2. Order and Change

Richard Wilhelm, an early German scholar, wrote much regarding the *I Ching*, the *Book of Changes* (*Yijing*) and even translated the work into German. The eight primary trigrams of the *I Ching*, composed of three lines each, either broken or solid, combine in various manners to compose the 64 hexagrams, each with six lines, and have “very interesting psychological implications.”⁸ These trigrams are “symbols standing for transitional states; they are images that are constantly undergoing change.”⁹ In order to grasp the meanings behind these images, time and contemplation are required. Kongzi is recorded to have stated when he was already an old man, “If I could add 50 years to my life, I would study the Changes and become free of error.”¹⁰ This work is a treasure house of symbols. “Symbols are representations, speaking of one thing to allude to something else.”¹¹ The *I Ching* is an ancient symbolic system used for myriad purposes through thousands of years of time; it has impacted many civilizations, but perhaps none as deeply as the Chinese. It impacted the 18th century German philosopher Leibniz, and the arrangement of his binary system, and through him changed aspects of Western thought. It is this binary system that is at the roots of computer technology.

In the historical presentation of the *I Ching*, there are two circular arrangements of importance. The “Earlier Heaven,” or “Primal Arrangement,” is attributed to Fu Xi, a legendary sage who is also given the credit for designing the eight trigrams. These symbols were derived before Kongzi and before the Zhou Dynasty. They are set out in a pattern, similar to the Later Heaven Arrangement as given below, but these

⁷ This trichotomous code is derived from Ci, Jiwei, *Dialectic of the Chinese Revolution: From Utopianism to Hedonism*.

⁸ Wilhelm, R. “Lectures on the I Ching: Constancy and Change” in *Understanding the I Ching: The Wilhelm Lectures on the Book of Changes*, p. 164.

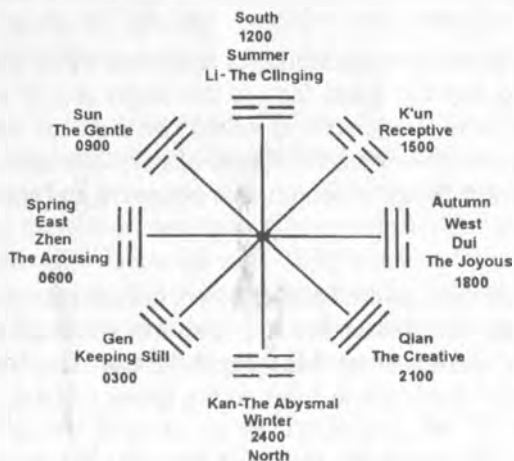
⁹ Wilhelm, R. *The I Ching, or Book of Changes*, p. li.

¹⁰ *Lunyu*, 7:16, A.C. Muller.

¹¹ Chang Po-Tuan, *Inner Teachings of Taoism*, trans. T. Cleary, in *The Taoist Classics: The Collected Translations of Thomas Cleary*, Vol. 2, p. 266.

trigrams are arranged differently. The arrangement is set up as polarities with each trigram's "opposite." Each trigram is characterized as male or female, and is given a "family" placement consisting of the father, mother, three male, and three female offspring, along with myriad natural symbols.

According to the "Later Heaven," or "Inner-World" Arrangement, a method for diagramming the trigrams attributed to King Wen of the Zhou Dynasty (1122-256 BC), the trigrams are presented as they unfold in the temporal progression in the world. A meditation upon these present an arrangement such that these symbols become placed in the sequence of time: daily time.



**The Later Heaven or Inner-World
Arrangement of King Wen**

Thus, we note that each of these trigrams can describe different states of psychological bearing, and each stage lasts three hours, with the climax at the mid point, that is, 1½ hours into the particular period. We have, for example the time period from 4:30 am to 7:30 am, with the climax at 6:00 am. This coincides with sunrise and is explained in the Commentary of the *I Ching* as "God comes forth in the sign of the Arousing" and the

arousing is the trigram *chen/zhen*, the eldest son that symbolizes awakening, thunder and a host of other images. It represents new movement of life:

“The sun rises, morning slowly dawns, and things attain reality. At first, only psychic, innermost elements are awakened to life; the shell of sleep is cast off. But this casting off is the first budding connection with the outside world. And here, immediately at the beginning of day, an act of conscious decision must take place. For at the first movement of life, things are still far removed from us, but just because they are far we must influence the budding beginnings of the surrounding world in such a way as to permit only the approach of what is suitable for us. The trigram, the Arousing, is very suitable for us. And the nature of its activity determines the way events of the surrounding world will take shape for us.”¹²

Here we see a symbolic explanation, as presented by an ancient culture, of a very profound psychological fact: at the beginning of each day, as our awareness returns to the terrestrial world, we need to make a conscious choice to align ourselves with the forces of life, with spirit. Likewise, we note very clearly in Baha’i thought that believers are enjoined and given this advice:

“Blessed is he who, at the hour of dawn, centring his thoughts on God, occupied with His remembrance, and supplicating His forgiveness, directeth his steps to the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar and, entering therein, seateth himself in silence to listen to the verses of God...”¹³

This Mashriqu'l-Adhkar is the House of Worship, the term literally means “Dawning Place of Remembrance.” It is not just a religious edifice, but a social institution offering benefit to humanity. Currently there are seven such Houses of Worship, each on different continents. Each of these buildings is the center of the social institution that will provide care for all peoples, regardless of belief, nationality or gender. Each is built with nine doors, symbolizing the openness to all directions of the planet and the major religions of the world.

¹² Wilhelm, Lectures, op. cit., pg. 165. The following diagram has been modified from this same work.

¹³ Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitab-i-Aqdas*, pg. 61

Lest we think this is only a physical location, we are provided an understanding that transcends place. 'Abdu'l-Bahá states that: "In reality pure hearts are the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar and from them the voice of supplication and invocation continually reach the Supreme Concurrence."¹⁴ So, we are given to understand that the individual enters the symbolic heart and there communes. This entering is focused upon meditation and prayer, a communion with the interior reality of existence. Through these actions, the heart is purified, the behavior is rectified, and the personal is made to harmonize with the social and cosmic. We witness here a symbol apt for an embodied metaphysics, a metaphysics that is intimately connected with daily living, self transformation, and ultimately transformation of the world. The Supreme Concurrence is a Bahá'í term that refers to the spiritual world, and we are told that the spiritual world exists "within this world."¹⁵ No separation except in our physical dimension is conceived for these worlds; the separation is only in our thinking and perceiving.

Following the *I Ching* placements further, we notice that, in the same Later Heaven Arrangement of the trigrams, the trigram *ch'ien/qian* (乾) stands in the position of night, 8:30 to 10:30 pm. *Qian* is the Creative, characterized as the father, and the *I Ching* states: "God does battle in the sign of the Creative."¹⁶ Wilhelm adds: "The work of the day is done; with pleasure and joy things have been concluded. But now the question arises: has this day been of productive value, or was it a petty emptiness? Hence the Creative, because man must justify himself."¹⁷

In a similar vein, we find an injunction in the Bahá'í Writings: "Bring thyself to account each day ere thou art summoned to a reckoning; for

¹⁴ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, Vol. 3, p. 678.

¹⁵ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 195.

¹⁶ Wilhelm, H. *Heaven, Earth, and Man in the Book of Changes*, p. 39. This book is a collection of a series of seven lectures given at the Eranos Meetings held in Switzerland. It is interesting to note that the word in this commentary for God is the Chinese word *Ti* and occurs only at this point in the Book of Changes. It has a similar meaning to the divine, *divus*, in Latin and often referred to a ruler.

¹⁷ *op. cit.*, p. 171.

death, unheralded, shall come upon thee and thou shalt be called to give account for thy deeds."¹⁸

From these short passages from Chinese and from Bahá'í thought, we observe the injunction and advice to center our thoughts, during the hours of dawn, and make a connection with the deep roots of existence. To center oneself, to contemplate, with the heart and dawn as the place and time of remembrance, enables us to profoundly reconnect with the spiritual dimension of life, and to do so when the day first begins so that we may order and choose the response we might maintain as the day unfolds. This centering permits us to have conscious response-ability to the day's events. Likewise, to review the progress or events of the day permits one to examine behaviors, thoughts and deeds that impact the world and self. It is striking that in both views the same message is spoken. In the Bahá'í Faith, we are given symbolic images that connect with the deep recesses of our being and, in the *I Ching* we discover how these symbols were envisioned before. Each system has as an integral component a centering of the self within the spiritual, and a daily examination of the self.

3. Maturity and Metaphysics

This transition of time and consciousness, this centering one's thoughts and making conscious decisions, as well as taking conscious account of our actions, heralds us into the stance of maturity. It takes a mature being to attain such an awareness, and this is not dependent upon chronological age. It is noteworthy here that Bahá'u'lláh has set the age of maturity, with respect to religious duties, at age 15 years. This imposes upon all at and above such age a conscious awareness and responsibility of our daily activities, and for one at such a young chronological age, portends much for psychological development. The Bahá'í Faith has as one of its central premises that humanity, collectively, is now embarked upon this stage of evolution and that Bahá'u'lláh brought the spiritual power required for humanity to attain this stage of collective and personal maturity.

¹⁸ Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 31.

A mature understanding requires that we fully realize the fact that the Eastern and Western civilizations held metaphysical views which relied upon ancient thought, and developed differently. Thus, in the West, all proponents of such views looked backwards to Plato, Aristotle, or Plotinus and Neoplatonism for proof of their suppositions; in China, all Confucians receded to Kongzi or Mengzi to negate speculative views, while the Taoists went to Lao Zi or Zhuangzi to bolster their views. While the Confucian school did not develop views that were construed to be as metaphysical as the Taoists, it was an inevitable later development, given the mutual influences and the passage of time.¹⁹

Bahá'u'lláh, on the other hand, overturns many such formative ideas and presents a re-visioned view of those ideas that we witness in Western as well as Chinese civilization and philosophy. In order to approach this, let us begin by also looking back, but do so with full awareness and intent to re-think these ideas.

Chinese metaphysics has been called “the least metaphysical of all metaphysics or is non-metaphysical” compared to Greek, that is Western, metaphysics.²⁰ If this is true, then we should be able to differentiate these two metaphysical views with some clarity, briefly address a Bahá'í stance, and thus establish a further dialogue among civilizations. Indeed, this can be done with simplicity. To pursue these ideas deeply will lead us astray from our intent of a Bahá'í-China dialogue. The interested reader may turn to the many sources available to verify or negate the truthfulness of such views.

First, Chinese and Greek languages differ greatly, the former being image based, the latter phonetic. Among contemporary scholars, Cheng asserts that the phonetic basis of Greek language has nothing in it “to suggest the presence of sensible objects.”²¹ As such, the Greek language contributed

¹⁹ The influence of Buddhist thought in this arena, in similar motifs presented and images used, is vital to grasp, but is outside the scope of this brief article. Sim Tze Hong's article in this publication holds many insights. Also, see A. Khurshed's article commenting on the influence of Buddhism in Chinese philosophy, “Science and Religion in Chinese Culture,” in *The Singapore Bahá'í Studies Review*, especially, pp. 147-154.

²⁰ Cheng, C. “Chinese Metaphysics as Non-metaphysics: Confucian and Taoist Insights into the Nature of Reality” in *Understanding the Chinese Mind: The Philosophical Roots*, ed. Allinson, R, p. 167.

²¹ Cheng, op. cit., p. 167.

to far greater abstract thought, greatly divorced from practical empirical reality. Greek thought searched for Being, that is, the nature of the One, or the Unmoved Mover. Christianity took up this quest with the nature of God, the Logos (Word), the interrelation between these and this world of temporal existence. This world was the domain of becoming, and as such held for Greek thought little value for truth. The search for permanency was the ideal Greek quest, epitomized by Plato and his *Eidos*, the Platonic Ideas that were supposed to exist in a "supercelestial place." For Plato and his successors, these ideas were the Universal Forms of each Particular existing thing. The transitory particular derived its nature from the permanent universal which was conceived as a static reality. These universals contained no matter, and how something that contained no matter could engender things with such matter was a severe challenge to later philosophers. Aristotle refuted his teacher's notion, but held to the assertion that there were universals; however, these universals derived their existence after the particulars. The debates over universals versus particulars or essence over existence is the hallmark of many Western philosophical theses. The nature of Greek language lent itself to abstract thought more divorced from physical reality, thus these debates, centered upon rhetorical truth, could likewise be divorced from any mandate for living. In fact, the Platonic ideal for the philosopher was epitomized in his myth of the Cave.

The Chinese language, being character based, derived the characters' images from physical reality and the Chinese philosophers were thus constantly reminded of the connection to the world and society. Chinese thought never separated the sensible world from the spiritual, earth from heaven. Chinese thinkers saw in the changes of physical nature the permanent feature of existence: change. These philosophers did not retreat from change to seek an underlying permanency: they embraced it as a fact of being, and a manner of knowing. The lack of terminological clarity in their writings was a reflection of the lack of conceptual clarity they knew could be attributed to any permanent delineation of existence. More than this, each character contained a physical *and* abstract referent; meaning is pluralistic. In part this was due to the fact that early Chinese thinkers did not have the interest in logical debates in the same way as we see in the Greeks, and realized that human understanding is limited by language.

We also find arguments that assert an opposite viewpoint to Cheng's, however, and warrant our attention. Even though his view is one that was widely held, there exist views to counter this understanding and seem to be warranted. Significant here is a comment by A.C. Graham in his work, *Unreason within Reason*,²² where mention is made of this "fallacy." While it is true that the phonetic script contains less a concrete referent, and the Chinese characters present a composite (concrete and psychological) referent, the reason lies not in script, but in philosophical orientation. The practically-minded Confucian tradition was based upon knowledge as being empirically oriented and scholarly. "The nature of this knowledge was not theoretical and abstract, but concrete and factual."²³ Hansen likewise asserts that while western language is construed "as descriptive or representative, Chinese theory treats the function of language as socializing, regulating, and co-ordinating behavior."²⁴ If Cheng's contention were true, then we should expect to not see the presence of abstract metaphysical thought within Chinese philosophy, but this is clearly not the case. If we just consider two of the Classics, the *Doctrine of the Mean* (*zhongyong*: 中庸) and the *Great Learning* (*daxue*: 大学), both attributed to the Qin or early Han dynasty (222 BC – 220 AD) it is clearly seen that while the latter is concerned with social and political issues, the former is more focused on psychology and metaphysics, or as Wing-tsit Chan expresses, it is "religious and mystical."²⁵ Furthermore, the Neo-Taoist tradition that began in the third century AD, perhaps due to the chaos and turmoil in the Wei Dynasty (220-265 AD), shows us much abstract thinking and flights from the "real world" of fact. The introduction and translation of Buddhism into Chinese culture never reduced its abstractions, and its impact on the Confucians and Taoists prompted these systems to speculate more metaphysically. Perhaps we can safely assert that the *Analects* of the Confucian canon reveals little abstract use of language, but the *Doctrine of the Mean* and later Neo-Confucian thought assuredly do, as do Taoism and Buddhism.

²² Ill: Open Court, 1992, p. 152.

²³ Schwartz, "Some Polarities in Confucian Thought," in *Confucianism in Action*, ed. Nivision & Wright, p. 58.

²⁴ Hansen, C., "Language in the Heart-Mind," in *Understanding the Chinese Mind*, p. 77

²⁵ Chan, W. *Historical Charts of Chinese Philosophy*, notes to chart I.

The difference between Greek and Chinese language systems, then, is that they both used words and different styles of logic, but for different purposes. Its application is what matters most, and the systematic manner in which it is applied.

The sophist thinker Hui Shi (380-305 BC?), friend of Zhuangzi, attempted to attain understanding of the great One by the use of logic and rational knowledge, but the former was opposed to Kung-sun Lung (b. 380 BC?) another thinker who attempted to use logic as well. Hui Shi saw all things as relative and constantly changing, while Kung-sun Lung taught that they were absolute and permanent. Wing-tsit Chan asserts that this trend towards logical and rational understanding did not catch hold in China due to the disinterestedness of the philosophers in the science of logic as well as the political upheaval during this time. "Moreover, the common emphasis of the major schools on solving human problems, as well as the attempts of some thinkers to strive for social reform, made the Logicians look like idle debaters."²⁶ This trend towards logic, began by Mozi (Mo-tzu), founder of Mohism, and carried on by the "Logicians," failed to capture an arena because it failed to win the people's hearts.

Schwartz presents a good discussion of the similarities and differences between Greek and Chinese philosophers.²⁷ First, the Greeks wanted stability; the Chinese witnessed flux. Greek thought focused on the divide between these realms, Chinese thought strove for harmony and integrity. Chinese philosophy arose within the context of politics and ethics, not merely the "rectification of names" by describing particular functions or causes of things. While it is also true that Greek thinkers conceived of the ideal social and political order, it was projected into a mythical future; Chinese thinkers looked to their past in the Xia or Zhou Dynasties as their model. Even when the Chinese thinkers spoke of some standard of cause or behavior, the locus was *Tian* (天: often translated as "Heaven," though better left untranslated) not the transcendental realm of pure form we find in Greek thought, but an embodied principle that is reflected in the sages' lives, and eventually accessible to all. Tao is not a transcendent force, but an immanent field of reference; it is the Way *and* the path upon which one walks.

²⁶ Chan, W., *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, p. 233.

²⁷ Schwartz, B. *The World of Thought in Ancient China*.

Second, Greek thought and its Western inheritors construed the role of the spiritually-minded philosopher and mystic to be aloof from society, to be unconcerned with its unfolding, and to remain detached from its needs. Plato's "Cave Allegory" provides the best example of the philosopher's perceived role. Chinese philosophers, even of the Taoist school, viewed humanity as being intimately connected with "Tian," Earth and all of humanity, and realized that the individual is a social being. This implies that one fulfil one's "experience of the cultivation of one's nature toward the fulfilment of oneself and others in society" which is the principle of ethical fulfilment.²⁸ Greek civilization sought the elevation and isolation of the individual, the "Alone with the Alone" of Neoplatonism, while Chinese civilization and thought never lost the immediacy of relationships, social and cosmic. For the Confucian school, the scholar, who was in service of the bureaucracy, strove to integrate his inner moral character with his impact upon the social order. In fact, the bureaucratic system in China was, in theory, created for this very purpose. It is true that certain aspects of Taoism, such as what was seen in Neo-Taoism, proposed isolation over social ties; however, these views never dominated in the same way as Confucian ideology. We do know that in the Early and Late Han dynasties, the upsurge in Buddhist monasteries contributed to this social withdrawal and breaking of family ties and presented a challenge to the Chinese filial system.

Third, epistemology, the theory of knowledge, differs. Greek thought construed a view that thought and idea were the same, and equated thinking with being. It mattered not if thought and being—that is, lived being—were identical; it was enough that thought and idea were. The great quest was ontology, which produces different results depending upon the ascribed nature of *being*. There existed realms of being superior to this human realm, and in one of these realms, there existed the archetypes, the Platonic *eidos*, the ideas. These archetypes, such as Love, Truth, Beauty, Justice, etc., were observed in the world, but originated in a realm far beyond it. The value lay not necessarily in embodying these, but in contemplating them detached from all concern for this world. The cosmological order established these patterns and the philosopher or mystic experienced them. This has, of course, created many problems for

²⁸ Cheng, *op. cit.*, p. 180.

philosophical thought and western civilization that has never been reconciled. The unity that was conceived to exist in reality was not perceived in the world, but in abstractions; the world could provide no certain truths. These Greek philosophical discussions greatly influenced Christian and Islamic doctrines.

Chinese thought witnessed principles (*li*: 理) in nature, including human nature, and believed that an individual must strive to apply these into daily life for them to have real personal value. The one who embodies humanity/benevolence (*ren*: 仁) becomes the noble person (*jun zi*: 君子). The practical was fused with the cosmological and gave rise to the theoretical. Knowledge was based upon this practicality and concerned itself with life as lived, no matter how abstract thought became. Thought and action were wedded, and derived from "investigation into the nature of things" in the natural world, not the higher spheres of thought. "In Chinese philosophy, man not only develops a holistic outlook on the universe and man in the universe, but comes to see the dynamic unity of all things and experience the dynamic source of all things."²⁹ The epistemology that develops out of this conception embodies the intention of the individual. "Whenever man has to learn to know the world by his actual engagement with the world in his conduct and action, at the same time he has to learn to act according to his knowledge of the world."³⁰ This implies that one *becomes* one's thought, in the fullest implications.

This discussion could be lengthened, but hopefully it suffices. It needs commenting here that we are looking at the roots of systems of thought, and not whole philosophical systems. It is noticeable that in Bahá'í thought, both lines of speculation can be found. The dominant view, however, is on the integration of thought and being; in order to help transform another, one must be transformed first.

To speak of a non-metaphysical metaphysics may seem to be mere academic or philosophical word play. It is far from it, however. It is first and foremost practical and embodied. If we peruse this further, extending it to large cosmological views, we must face the concept of the Deity; call It God in whatever language and it still remains our concept. Western

²⁹ *ibid.*, p. 173.

³⁰ *ibid.*, p. 172.

religious thought, from the time of the Zoroastrian Religion (about 600 BC) also contended with a personification of an opposing force, Ahriman, Satan, Iblis; call it what we will, it still remains our concept. Chinese thought never witnessed such a split in its metaphysics, as the dark Yin force requires the light Yang force for essential balance. Dark and light were not opposites, but polar necessities. This world never became the domain of darkness with humans as pawns in a great cosmic drama. Bahá'u'lláh says little about this notion, other than to have us realize there is no such demonic entity: it is a symbol for the darkness that exists as a result of humanity's own misdeeds. We can never know light if we do not know darkness.

Taoism speaks much of the Unknowable that is termed Tao. It asserts that it is unnameable, yet offers various descriptions in the famous *Tao de Jing*. In Taoism, the *Zhuangzi* presents views of metaphysics which are conceived as a dynamic process, not a stable or fixed spiritual reality underlying existence. The Tao "is the formlessness which forms the form."³¹ Spirit is not conceived to be something transcendental, for there is no *separate* metaphysical realm. The notion of interconnection, the absence of separateness, is characteristic of Taoist thought. Language cannot adequately express Reality, and the Taoists realized this early on. Words cannot convey Tao, and the limits of language are vociferously expressed.

The Confucian school, on the other hand, never asserts that the Tao is unnameable, but offers no definite description. From the Confucian tradition, Tao can be seen thusly:

1. The Tao is immanent in human history, culture and human practice; thus the Tao is both transcendent and immanent.
2. The Tao expresses itself in moral principles that we abide by, in rites and institutions within which we operate; thus, the Tao is the universal that is embodied in the particular.
3. The Tao is embodied in the ways of the ancient sage kings or present good rulers and princes, etc.; thus, the Tao is the universal that evolves historically.

³¹ *Chuang Tzu*, cited in Doeringer, F "Imaging the Imageless," in *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, p. 10.

4. The Tao is the truth; in terms of it all other truths are understood and interpreted.
5. To understand Tao, one must reflect on what is near at hand, that is, what one experiences daily and culturally in real life.³²

4. Bahá'í contributions to metaphysics and epistemology

If we briefly examine the Bahá'í position on the nature of philosophy, we will see a similar vibrancy as witnessed in Chinese thought. Even though Arabic and Persian, the two dominant languages of Bahá'u'lláh's writings are very amenable to abstraction, and in spite of the presence in his writings of names and phrases that are numerologically nuanced, Bahá'u'lláh himself focuses our attention on the living world, while enjoining us to integrate the abstract and concrete. He constantly enjoins us to study those branches of knowledge that do not "begin with words and end with words"³³ but contribute to the advancement of civilizations and peoples. Even though Bahá'u'lláh lived in a culture and spoke to an audience that was steeped in abstruse and obtuse metaphysics, he overturned this tendency and focused upon the rehabilitation of culture as the fairest fruit of religious thought. His concern was to bring unity to a world that was languishing because of divisions. The greatest of divisions that distressed his being was that of religious intolerance.

One of the fundamental purposes of this intolerance was the belief in the finality of religious truth. Adherents of the Abrahamic religions typically believed that their religion was *the only correct* religion, the others being false or incomplete.³⁴ Here we see the philosophical notion of permanence operating on and in western religious understanding. Contrariwise, Bahá'í thought presents us with certain essential principles: one is the constancy

³² Chen, Xunwu, "A Hermeneutical Reading of Confucianism," in *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, vol. 27:1, p. 106. It is important to note that this rendering by Chen is a contemporary or "third wave" of Confucian hermeneutics.

³³ See, e.g. *Kitab-i-Aqdas, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, where this is mentioned, referring to metaphysical hair splittings.

³⁴ It is worth noting here that Chinese religious systems never developed this insular view, and Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism often vied together and were blended together. Wing-tsit Chan discusses this in his article "The Historic Chinese Contribution to Religious Pluralism and World Community," in E. J. Jurgis, ed. *Religious Pluralism and World Community*, pp. 113-130.

of the Divinity in sending Messengers to guide humanity. Seen in this light there is no difference between any of the Prophets, they all speak the same Message, though the language and ideas may differ to suit the times and needs of the times in which they appear. They can be "regarded as one soul and the same person."³⁵ From a different perspective, "the principle of change is vindicated"³⁶ inasmuch as we notice change upon the earth, within the realm of thoughts and ideas, knowledge and ignorance, as well as change among the names, birth places, and themes of and expressed by each Prophet. It is unique to Bahá'í doctrine, among the Semitic religious traditions, to espouse the essential principles of permanency as well as change. In this manner, we may notice the bridging of Eastern and Western philosophical thought; Greek blending with Chinese in a harmony that transcends both.

Bahá'í philosophy and epistemology can be seen to be a gnosis, but not in the manner of gnosticism. It is a gnosis that is intimately integrated with transformation. In order to know, one must *become*. Of the truths embedded within Revelation we are told, "some can be disclosed only to the extent of the capacity of the repositories of the light of Our knowledge" which is a relative and progressive comprehension.³⁷ To know, one must *be engaged in transformation*. This is so because philosophy, the "love of wisdom," is a receptive sort of undertaking as well as active. "Sophia," translated as "wisdom," is feminine. It takes a receptive stance to realize that there are limits to rationality, it demands an openness to intuition, a realization that in order to learn, we must immerse ourselves in Revelation in order to "unravel its secrets, and discover all the pearls of wisdom that lie hid in its depths."³⁸ To understand we must be willing to "stand under" in a receptive mode of being. This wisdom has its limits; it revolves around the knowledge of the hidden dimension of our being, a sign of God, we are told. This "inner" dimension is a reflection of the divine.

Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá provide for us a directive regarding this search for understanding the Unknowable Reality underlying and informing creation:

³⁵ Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Iqán, (The Book of Certitude)*, p. 152.

³⁶ Bahá'u'lláh, *Gems of the Mysteries*, provisional translation by J. R. Cole.

³⁷ Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 176.

³⁸ *ibid.*, p. 136.

"Having recognized thy powerlessness to attain to an adequate understanding of that Reality which abideth within thee, thou wilt readily admit the futility of such efforts as may be attempted by thee, or by any of the created things, to fathom the mystery of the Living God, the Day Star of unfading glory, the Ancient of everlasting days. This confession of helplessness which mature contemplation must eventually impel every mind to make is in itself the acme of human understanding, and marketh the culmination of man's development."³⁹

"That which we imagine is not the Reality of God; He, the Unknowable, the Unthinkable, is far beyond the highest conception of man."⁴⁰

Not only do we discover that the knowledge of this Unknowable Reality is unattainable, but we also must humble ourselves before the profound realization that the Reality which is "within" us is beyond our comprehension. The Deity as proffered by Bahá'í thought is said to be transcendent in its Essence, but immanent in its manifestation; we are unable to say anything about Its true nature. In fact, Bahá'u'lláh asserts that It is "exalted beyond all proximity and remoteness."⁴¹ Our language cannot adequately express this Reality, and whatever we may say is not about this Reality, but our limited and finite understanding. We do find passages that indicate immanence, such as, "Within every blade of grass are enshrined the mysteries of an inscrutable Wisdom..."⁴² and an injunction to turn our sight to ourselves and find the Divinity "standing within thee."⁴³ Likewise we find passages indicative of transcendence. It seems clear from searching the Bahá'í Writings that we can neither assert nor deny absolute immanence or transcendence: these are our concepts, and the Reality they attempt to delimit is beyond our conceptual word plays. The limits of language is a certain proposition of Bahá'í thought. One fact is certain, however. The Deity as presented in the Bahá'í Scriptures is personal *through the intermediary of the Manifestation*.

³⁹ Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 165-166.

⁴⁰ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 25.

⁴¹ Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 185.

⁴² *ibid.*, p. 269.

⁴³ Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, from the Arabic #13.

Another perspective that Kongzi realized centuries ago is echoed in the Bahá'í corpus. As Kongzi expressed, "Before you have learned to serve human beings, how can you serve spirits?"⁴⁴ We find this echoed in Chán thought as well. Concomitantly Bahá'u'lláh informs us that instead of pondering upon this Unknowable Reality we should instead "Be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in, and center your deliberations on its exigencies and requirements."⁴⁵

Epistemologically, the Bahá'í religion imposes upon us a standard of knowledge that honors the fullness of the embodied human. 'Abdu'l-Bahá gives us the criteria humans have at our disposal to understand truth that are our foundation of epistemology: 1) sense perception; 2) rationality, reason; 3) tradition; and 4) inspiration. Individually applied, the conclusions arrived at are faulty, as clearly demonstrated through history. However, "a statement presented to the mind accompanied by proofs which the senses can perceive to be correct, which the faculty of reason can accept, which is in accord with traditional authority and sanctioned by the promptings of the heart, can be adjudged and relied upon as perfectly correct, for it has been proved and tested by all the standards of judgment and found to be complete. When we apply but one test, there are possibilities of mistake. This is self-evident and manifest."⁴⁶

This epistemic foundation demands the integration of methods: those which are exclusively rational and those which are construed to be arational. The western reliance upon reason, a characteristic harkening back to the Greek roots, re-expressed in the Renaissance with its humanistic overtones (in part impacted by the resurgence of Aristotelian philosophy), and the so-called Enlightenment, is counter-balanced in Bahá'u'lláh's world view. It is intriguing to note that Bahá'u'lláh lived merely half a century after the end of the Enlightenment. Reason has limits. It is important that we notice the counter-tendency appearing in the Islamic milieu that Bahá'u'lláh appeared within: the hailing of

⁴⁴ *Analects* 11,11, trans. by DeBary W. and Bloom, I. in *Sources of Chinese Tradition* Vol 1, p. 54.

⁴⁵ Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 213.

⁴⁶ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 255; see also *Some Answered Questions (SAQ)*, section 83.

imagination as a non-corrigeable epistemological basis.⁴⁷ Never before in religious history had a prophetic figure to contend with and respond to two such highly developed philosophical systems, differing in that in one system, reason was stressed, and in the other, imagination. In fact, the traditions that Bahá'u'lláh dialogued with can be seen clearly in his writings. It is telling to note here that Chinese thinkers were averse to placing emphasis upon imagination and, in meditative techniques, encouraged the contemplator to keep the eyes opened slightly, focusing upon the "one square inch" as we find in Taoism and Chan Buddhism. This technique has many purposes, but one is exclusively to prevent the initiate from becoming lost in the images presenting themselves, or which one may construe to be reality.⁴⁸

'Abdu'l-Bahá provides a perspective for our consideration that may have resonance with Chinese understanding, but requires more investigation to ascertain. We read: "The other kind of spiritual discoveries is made up of pure imaginations, but these imaginations become embodied in such a way that many simple-hearted people believe that they have a reality. That which proves it clearly is that from this controlling of spirits no result or fruit has ever been produced. No, they are but narratives and stories."⁴⁹ To delineate why and how this is so has been the thrust of much of my research and writing; to correlate it with Chinese thought remains a current and future endeavor. To integrate the fourfold approaches or criteria of truth, provides us with an epistemological thrust that has not been clearly articulated or delineated before.

Having expressed these fundamental points, we must pursue further to see if there is a metaphysic that Bahá'u'lláh brings for our consideration. We surely note the continuation of certain terms and views that held dominance in the Islamic world, however, if we search deeper, we notice a thrust towards an embodied metaphysics as well, more profound.

⁴⁷ This trend was initiated in early Islamic thought, carried to its pinnacle in Sufism, specifically Ishraqi Sufism, whose prime motivators were Suhrawardi, Ibn 'Arabi, and their lineage.

⁴⁸ This is demonstrated in *The Secret of the Golden Flower*, trans. by R. Wilhelm, commented upon by Carl Jung, pp. 34-35. It is noteworthy that this work has been retranslated by T. Cleary and been challenged in its interpretation and commentary thereto. See Cleary, T. *The Secret of the Golden Flower*.

⁴⁹ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *SAQ*, section 71.

Bahá'u'lláh speaks of various worlds, such as the World of Creation, the World of Command, that is, the World of the Manifestations, and the World of God. This is symbolized clearly in the Bahá'í talisman of the "Greatest Name" referred to commonly as the "ringstone symbol." This emblem was designed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá. We find it worn as a ring stone or pendant among many Bahá'ís. This design enables us to see dramatically and simply that the World of Creation is connected to the World of God through the link of the Manifestation. The Prophet, or Manifestation, is that Divine Being who is the Mouthpiece of the Unknown Essence we humans refer to as God.⁵⁰

The purpose here is to simply mention this, not develop it. Such mentioning will enable us to appreciate how it is that the Bahá'í stance is so focused on "living the life," that is, embodiment, as the fruit of belief, in the same way the world is the fruit of the spirit.⁵¹ Bahá'u'lláh does not present a coherent theory of metaphysics, nor does 'Abdu'l-Bahá; what They focus on more is the transformation of the heart, character and ultimately, society. This position, so rooted in the world as lived, acknowledges the interconnection of the spiritual world and the human world. Religion is even defined as "the essential connection which proceeds from the realities of things."⁵² Connections are relationships. 'Abdu'l-Bahá clearly states: "I swear by the true Teacher that if ye will act in accord with the admonitions of God, as revealed in His luminous Tablets, this darksome dust will mirror forth the Kingdom of heaven, and this nether world the realm of the All-Glorious."⁵³ Lest we think that this Kingdom of Heaven refers to a transcendental realm, beyond the reach of humanity, we are given to contemplate, as mentioned above that it "is within this world."⁵⁴ The mission of the Prophets is not to speak of

⁵⁰ There are references in Bahá'í works to a five-fold hierarchical cosmological schema as found in Ishraqi thought. Some scholars think that the presence of this terminology affirms the cosmological views of the Islamic theosophers, while others assert that it is merely literary and customary usage, not an affirmation nor denial of such metaphysical speculations. The current writer views the issue according to the second viewpoint, and has explored this in his previous works.

⁵¹ This view has a Zoroastrian heritage and was discussed in my work, *Re-Visioning, Re-Thinking, Re-Placing*.

⁵² 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *SAQ*, p. 158.

⁵³ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections From the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, pp. 11-12.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p. 195.

abstract and transcendent spiritual realms, but to enable us to embody Their teachings and make of this Earth a spiritual world.

When we consider the fact of embodiment, I might be remiss to not mention one vital aspect of Chinese thought that we find re-expressed in Bahá'í philosophy. This vital link is that of correspondence between different aspects of existence. The current forces of postmodernism see a future beyond the current notions of fragmentation and alienation in existence, and for a connection with the whole. As an effective assistance, Bahá'í thought presents us with the dominance of ideas indicating correspondence and inter-relationship. We find in a talk of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's an expression of this relationship: "The worlds of God are in perfect harmony and correspondence one with another. Each world in this limitless universe is, as it were, a mirror reflecting the history and nature of all the rest. The physical universe is, likewise, in perfect correspondence with the spiritual or divine realm. The world of matter is an outer expression or facsimile of the inner kingdom of spirit. The world of minds corresponds with the world of hearts."⁵⁵ Likewise we read, "the material world corresponds to the spiritual world." The interconnection of various levels of existence is also addressed in many modern theories deriving from quantum mechanics and systems theory. We see this clearly explicated in the ecological spheres, and in Bahá'í philosophy we notice its extension to the cosmic. Bahá'u'lláh asserts that humanity should be thought of not as the "lesser world," but in fact as the "greater world."⁵⁶ The microcosm and macrocosm are in intimate relationship, as are humanity and the environmental surroundings.

The correlative thought that characterizes Chinese cosmology is well documented and expressed in literature. This mode of thinking began to arise in the fourth and third centuries BC and reached its height in the Former Han Dynasty of 200 BC to the first century AD. Benjamin

⁵⁵ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation*, p. 270; see also *SAQ*, p. 283. It would be remiss of me to not note that this correlative view dominated in many pre-scientific systems of thought; this scientific thought referred to is *modern science*, not that which predated this system, and was developed in Europe. *Modern science* is particular to a western approach, and currently is the mathematico-deductive system that began with Galileo and Bacon. Be that as it may, the foundations of correlative thought, especially the "action at a distance" so popular within these systems, are still open to investigation and there are experiments that indicate such features are empirically verifiable.

⁵⁶ Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 340.

Schwartz has termed this "correlative cosmology."⁵⁷ It is observed in the School of Yin and Yang and described clearly in the doctrine of the "Interrelation of Heaven and Man." "It is a kind of anthropocosmology in which entities, processes, and classes of phenomena found in nature correspond to or 'go together with' various entities, processes, and classes of phenomena in the human world."⁵⁸

We note that in the works of Dong Zhongshu (Tung Chung Shu), a minor philosopher who lived from 179-104 BC, there is developed a doctrine which saw the universe as an organic whole, and man as a microcosm. With Nature the macrocosm and Humanity the microcosm, the dynamic interplay observable in Nature was reflected in Humanity. Tian / Heaven has its forces of yin and yang, the opposites of passive and active, etc., and Humanity likewise has its opposites of humanity, or benevolence (*ren*), and greed. As Tian can restrict the operations of these two forces, so can a person. From this, we are given to learn that Tian and Humanity operate in a similar manner. On the personal level, humanity was viewed to have inherent goodness, but potentially so. What was needed was education to discipline this nature. "The activity of Heaven extends to a certain point and then stops. What stops within the operation of Heaven is called human nature endowed by Heaven, and what stops outside the operation of Heaven is called human activity."⁵⁹ This dimension of human endeavor needs to be trained, thus the king and the sage are set up to provide the society in which these aspects can be cultivated. Dong Zhongshu even went so far as to make a correspondence with Tian and the physical body. We notice this also in Jewish and Islamic mystical speculations, with the human mind resembling the spiritual intelligence of heaven.

It would be interesting to pursue further this similarity, but space does not permit. It is telling that 'Abdu'l-Bahá uses this correlational pattern within a system that demands the harmony of science and religion. While Chinese philosophy derived this correlative thinking from the natural world and applied it to the spiritual or cosmic, the Bahá'í perspective is

⁵⁷ Schwartz, B., op. cit., p. 350.

⁵⁸ *ibid.*, p. 351.

⁵⁹ Wing-tsit Chan, op. cit., p. 275. This concept is reminiscent of a work by P. D. Ouspenski, *The Psychology of Man's Possible Evolution*, in which he asserts a similar construct.

derived from the spiritual and is applied to the natural world. Perhaps there is a dimension to this correlative thinking that humanity has not yet fully explored and comprehended. The differences between these systems must be pursued before we can assert a strong similarity. While Chinese organismic thought is presented with existence and Nature as being self-generated, in Bahá'í thought there is a Creative Force that operates within the physical order, and there is a dimension of self-generation within this created order.

5. The Embodied Human

One fundamental hallmark of Western philosophy, at least as it pertains to living a life concerned with the spirit, is its ascetic nature. The philosophical heritage that the earth is a prison of the soul, that humanity "fell" from the heights of spirit, or from God's grace, to the mortal world deeply influenced Western philosophy.⁶⁰ Asceticism, monasticism, and various forms of self-renunciation became the way to salvation, the manner of ascent. The body was often looked upon as a burden to be gotten rid of and a hindrance to spirit. Emphasis was on spirit to the detriment of body. The lack of concern for the physical nature showed its impact on lack of concern for the body. Life was not about embodying spirit, it was about fleeing from the flesh. We witness the psychological counterbalance of this early tendency, beginning in the Renaissance and with humanism, with the dominating views of humanistic pleasure and materialistic empiricism. Asceticism often is counterposed by hedonism.

Chinese people have been characterized as being realistic in the sense of philosophy and life. Lin Yutang expresses this clearly in his work *The Importance of Living*. In one section where he is comparing Chinese and Western views of living he states,

"This over-emphasis on the spirit was fatal. It made us war with our natural instincts and my chief criticism is that it made a whole rounded view of human nature impossible. It proceeded also from an inadequate knowledge of biology and psychology, and of the places of the senses, emotions and, above all, instincts in our life. Man is made

⁶⁰ For a thorough discussion of this concept, see Lovejoy, A., *The Great Chain of Being*.

of flesh and spirit both, and it should be philosophy's business to see that the mind and body live harmoniously together, that there be a reconciliation between the two."⁶¹

Yutang's position is clearly correct. In part the lack of inclusive thinking was due to the abstract language used in Western philosophy, in part due to developmental stages of thought. (It is important to note, however, that in some aspects of Islamic philosophy, the body was viewed to be the temple of the spirit and one was to strive to embody the highest virtues of spirit.) This absence, of course, can be attributed to the stage of thought that was dominant at an earlier phase of human evolution, a stage that was not as integrative but tended towards differentiation of functions.

It is very apparent that this last position is similar to that found in Chinese thought. The Chinese thought regarding the threefold integration of Humanity, Earth and *Tian*, as well as the emphasis on becoming a *junzi* (君子), a noble person, is where we find means of establishing further dialogue. "For Confucius, the *junzi* is a qualitative term denoting someone who has an ongoing commitment to personal growth..."⁶² Further, "The *junzi* is what he says, and where he is exemplary, the world is as he speaks it....The Confucian model of personal realization does not permit distinctions between ethics and politics, between personal and social, between the private and public."⁶³ Through the terms *xin* (信), "living up to one's word,"—composed of the characters *ren* (人) "person" and *yan* (言) "to speak"—and *cheng* (诚), which means "sincerity" or "integrity," one strives to become *zhenren* (真人). Zhuangzi defines *zhen* as "the highest degree of purity and integrity."⁶⁴ *Zhenren* can also be defined as a genuine person, one whose words and deeds are integrated.

Speaking to a group in Paris, France, 'Abdu'l-Bahá spoke about the reality of the human. He stated that our reality is our thought, and that thought and action must be so wedded because "the power of a thought is dependent upon its manifestation in deeds," and He characterizes the

⁶¹ Yutang, L. *The Importance of Living*, p. 25.

⁶² Hall, D. L., and Ames R. T. *Thinking from the Han: Self, Truth, and Transcendence in Chinese and Western Culture*, p. 160.

⁶³ *ibid.*, p. 161.

⁶⁴ cited in *ibid.*, p. 161, 163.

spiritual philosopher in these words: "His thought is himself."⁶⁵ In another context, the Guardian of the Faith, Shoghi Effendi states emphatically that:

"One thing and only one thing will unfailingly and alone secure the undoubted triumph of this sacred Cause, namely, the extent to which our own inner life and private character mirror forth in their manifold aspects the splendor of those eternal principles proclaimed by Baha'u'llah."⁶⁶

If we do not know the history of such a profound thought, this presents us with a challenge that shakes our foundations and demands action. Here we find words spoken that resonate with the deepest components of being. We find in the Chinese civilization an injunction so similar that it is uncanny. In the *Doctrine of the Mean*, the *Zhongyong*, we read:

"What Heaven has endowed is called the nature. Following the nature is called the Way. Cultivating the Way is called instruction. The Way cannot be departed from for so much as an instant. If it were possible to depart from it, it would not be the Way. Therefore the noble person is cautious and watchful about what is unseen and fearful and apprehensive about what is unheard. There is nothing more visible than what is hidden, nothing more apparent than what is minute. Therefore the noble person is watchful over himself while alone."⁶⁷

Another version reads a bit differently in translation and focuses our thought more coherently. The beginning sentences are the same:

"One cannot depart from his way for an instant, what can be departed is not a way. A man of moral integrity is always discreet and vigilant when he is beyond others' sight, apprehensive and cautious when beyond others' hearing. One should never misbehave even when he is in privacy, nor should he reveal evil intentions even in trivial matters. So a moral person remains circumspect especially when he is alone."⁶⁸

⁶⁵ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 18.

⁶⁶ Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá'í Administration*, p. 66.

⁶⁷ *The Doctrine of the Mean*, trans. by W. DeBary, op. cit., p. 334.

⁶⁸ *The Doctrine of the Mean*, trans. He Baihua.

Furthermore, the “unity of knowledge and action,” a long and pivotal idea of Confucianism, reached its pinnacle expression in Wang Yang-Ming’s dynamic idealism (1472-1529). To Yang-Ming, sincerity of will must precede the investigation of things, and “knowledge is the beginning of action and action the completion of knowledge.”⁶⁹ For the one who knows, the two are integrated; one who is not integrated does not know.

It is important to keep in mind the passage from Bahá'u'lláh cited in the opening of this article, that this Revelation presents “for the purpose of ennobling the world of being and of elevating the minds and souls of men” that which is the most perfect expression of such a process. Therefore it should come as no surprise that we find such similarity. The education of the whole human race is what has been undertaken. The Chinese civilization and its sages and philosophers strove to embody virtues that would maintain the balance between the cosmos and humanity, between Heaven and Earth. This relationship was central to their understanding. That it should find its restatement in this new Revelation is not surprising. Chinese civilization attained great heights and great insights. A dialogue with Western and a developing Bahá'í civilization offers great potential.

6. World Civilization

We have already looked at the areas for future dialogue regarding the cosmic, or heavenly, aspect, and the human component. If we discuss a bit about the earthly component, we will have completed the traditional trilogy found in Chinese civilization. Indeed, the thrust of Chinese philosophical thought, as well as Bahá'í religious thought, is transformation of the world and civilization. The interconnection of the earth, the environment and society is so integrated that Shoghi Effendi was prompted to remark:

“We cannot segregate the human heart from the environment outside us and say that once one of these is reformed everything will be improved. Man is organic with the world. His inner life moulds the environment and is itself deeply affected by it. The one acts upon the

⁶⁹ Wing-tsit Chan, *op. cit.*, p. 656.

other and every abiding change in the life of man is the result of these mutual reactions."⁷⁰

If we look on the dimension of this passage regarding the oneness of humanity with the world, but focus on the human element, we do so with the background of how this harmony of humanity will eventuate the rebalance of the world's equilibrium.

It has already been mentioned that one of the central principles of the Bahá'í Faith is the attainment of the stage initiating the maturity of the human race. Fused with this position is another essential principle: the oneness of the world of humanity. This thought, part and parcel of our daily dialogues now, was unique when it was spoken in the 19th century. Yet its roots were so deeply gripped into the human psyche and heart that when it was broached it heralded new opportunities, transitions and potentials.

Bahá'u'lláh spoke emphatically about the oneness of mankind, the fact that we all live on one planet, are nourished by one interconnected ecological system, and created by one Creative Source. When he was a prisoner of the dynasties in Iran, Iraq and Turkey, from 1852-1892, he loudly proclaimed this call at a time when industrialist, separatist and nationalist tendencies were on the rise. Race, nationality, creed or religion cannot sever this fundamental unity. He has made it the central feature of the religion established in his Name: "We, verily, have come to unite and weld together all that dwell on earth."⁷¹ This vital principle ushers us into a new level of consciousness, one that is more and more permeating the entire planet and its peoples.

This principle is so vital to Bahá'u'lláh's claim that Shoghi Effendi elaborated upon it in great detail in his writings. Among them we find this:

"Let there be no mistake. The principle of the Oneness of Mankind—the pivot round which all the teachings of Baha'u'llah revolve—is no

⁷⁰ Shoghi Effendi, found in "Conservation of the Earth's Resources", compiled by the Research Dept. of the Universal House of Justice, Oct. 1989, cited in *The Compilation of Compilations*, p. 84.

⁷¹ Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, p. 24.

mere outburst of ignorant emotionalism or an expression of vague and pious hope. Its appeal is not to be merely identified with a reawakening of the spirit of brotherhood and good-will among men, nor does it aim solely at the fostering of harmonious cooperation among individual peoples and nations. Its implications are deeper, its claims greater than any which the Prophets of old were allowed to advance. Its message is applicable not only to the individual, but concerns itself primarily with the nature of those essential relationships that must bind all the states and nations as members of one human family. It does not constitute merely the enunciation of an ideal, but stands inseparably associated with an institution adequate to embody its truth, demonstrate its validity, and perpetuate its influence. It implies an organic change in the structure of present-day society, a change such as the world has not yet experienced. It constitutes a challenge, at once bold and universal, to outworn shibboleths of national creeds—creeds that have had their day and which must, in the ordinary course of events as shaped and controlled by Providence, give way to a new gospel, fundamentally different from, and infinitely superior to, what the world has already conceived. It calls for no less than the reconstruction and the demilitarization of the whole civilized world—a world organically unified in all the essential aspects of its life, its political machinery, its spiritual aspiration, its trade and finance, its script and language, and yet infinite in the diversity of the national characteristics of its federated units. It represents the consummation of human evolution—an evolution that has had its earliest beginnings in the birth of family life, its subsequent development in the achievement of tribal solidarity, leading in turn to the constitution of the city-state, and expanding later into the institution of independent and sovereign nations. The principle of the Oneness of Mankind, as proclaimed by Baha'u'llah, carries with it no more and no less than a solemn assertion that attainment to this final stage in this stupendous evolution is not only necessary but inevitable, that its realization is fast approaching, and that nothing short of a power that is born of God can succeed in establishing it.”⁷²

This passage was cited in full because it proffers to us one of the clearest insights into the audacious assertion of the Bahá'í Faith. Yes, this claim is

⁷² Shoghi Effendi, *World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 42-43.

very bold, blatant and demands attention. It is fit for an extensive dialogue, with serious implications.

It is also very clear that modern Chinese civilization and government is working along these lines, striving to maintain peaceful relations with other nations and build a system of inter-relationship that has heretofore eluded it and the rest of humanity. This should not surprise us, either.

Embedded in the history of Chinese civilization, within the foundations of Confucian thought, is the essential feature of filial piety. Honoring of one's parents is vital to the maintenance of civilization and thus the world. Confucianism felt that this one area, the continuation of family ties and the honoring of parents, was what made Taoist thought incomplete. The isolationist practices, the aversion for social organizations could not, the Confucianists maintained, honor filiality. The Confucian school could not integrate filial piety with living in isolation from society. This doctrine is the center piece of the *Doctrine of the Mean* (中庸) as well as *The Great Learning* (大学) and of course the *Classic of Filial Piety* (*Xiaojing*: 孝敬). A Chinese Confucian scholar of the early 20th century commented thusly on the implications of filial piety:

"The family group underlies the whole fabric of society. Each smaller group is gathered up into a larger group, so that all trace their relationship to the prime ancestor....Therefore Tso Chuan says, 'The way of men is to love one's relatives. Because of love for relatives, ancestors are honored; honor for ancestors brings respect for distant relatives; respect for distant relatives brings a sense of kinship.' This family concept constitutes the fundamental basis of political organization. When this conception is further strengthened by religious ideals, its effect is the more vigorous....The logical result of such concepts is the recognition that all mankind is but one large family."⁷³

The roots go deep, indeed. In fact we find in the *Book of Poetry*, from a time before the *Lunyu* (*Analects*) the foundation of this idea. In the *Book of Filial Piety* we read:

⁷³ Liang Ch'i'ch'ao *History of Chinese Political Thought*, cited in Jingpan, C., *Confucius as a Teacher*, pp. 284-285.

“Filial piety is the root of virtue and the origin of culture....To establish oneself and walk according to the right Way (*Tao*), in order to glorify one’s parents: this is the culmination of filial piety. Filial piety begins with serving one’s parents, leads to serving one’s king, and ends in establishing oneself...”⁷⁴

If this were not enough to establish a foundation of dialogue with a developing Bahá’í civilization, a brief mention of the Chinese word for religion, *jiao* (教), which is derived from the character for filial piety, *xiao* (孝), plus a causative radical, will enable us to see more. So, the word for religion, *jiao*, means to make filial in a deeper sense.

The publication *China Critic* writes:

“Filial piety is the alpha and omega of his [Confucius’] ethics. It includes and logically presupposes every other virtue under heaven. Thus, honesty, justice, courage, self-control, modesty and loyalty, all come under the single rubric of devotion to parents.”⁷⁵

Likewise, we find in the *Kitab-i-Aqdas*, the *Most Holy Book* of Bahá’u’lláh, these words:

“The fruits that best befit the tree of human life are trustworthiness and godliness, truthfulness and sincerity; but greater than all, after recognition of the unity of God, praised and glorified be He, is regard for the rights that are due to one’s parents.”⁷⁶

The foundation of society is rooted in the family; the pivot of the Bahá’í Faith is in the recognition of this essential oneness which is dependent upon harmony within the family and with one’s parents. Second to the recognition of the ‘unity of God’ is that of giving due regard for parents, a very central obligation, indeed.

To conclude this section, we must address the component of physical Earth. It is very apparent that in Chinese civilization, the interconnection

⁷⁴ cited in *ibid.*, p. 276.

⁷⁵ cited in *ibid.*, p. 278.

⁷⁶ Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitab-i-Aqdas*, p. 139.

between humanity and Earth, between morality and environment, was centrally recognized. In the concept of the "Mandate of Heaven" ("*Tian Ming*"), ancient Chinese thought realized how vital it was for the kings and people to live lives of morality and harmony. When the empires failed in this compulsion, when a dynasty became morally lax and carnal pleasures dominated, the Mandate determined that it was to be overthrown. This was used, of course, for political legitimacy, but the harmony and potential dialogue with Bahá'í thought is very apparent. Humanity is organic with the world, and morality and godliness impact the environment in direct ways that we have not yet discerned clearly. When peace prevails in the world, when expenditures for armaments and weapons of destruction are diverted into revitalizing societies and assisting the peoples of the world, a new consciousness and manner of being will embrace the world. Tensions that now exist between groups and nations will, in the flowering of time, pass away and the long awaited peace and harmony will prevail. This is the assertion of all ancient thoughts, and the claim of the Bahá'í religion.

7. Prospects for Future Dialogues

In this brief presentation, we have considered how the Chinese civilization and the nascent Bahá'í civilization can establish a dialogue around various areas of common concern. We have clearly seen similarities between ideas from Chinese philosophy and Bahá'í teachings that enable us to deepen this dialogue and pursue the transitions and potentialities inherent within the human reality and social structures of civilization. We have reflected upon the cosmic or heavenly component, as well as the human and earthly components of dialogical possibilities. While this article focused more on the Confucian school, some of the views are applicable to the Taoist and Buddhist views. It remains for further investigation, however, to explore a deeper analysis of these three thought systems as they pertain to Chinese civilization as a composite entity, and to the nascent Bahá'í civilization. For analysis, these three Chinese systems can be separated, as long as we realize that by so doing we are considering the parts. The intermingling of these three philosophies provided fertile ground for much exchange and influence of ideas. In fact, it is clear that

the influence of Buddhism prompted the Neo-Confucians to begin more metaphysical extrapolations.⁷⁷

While we have examined briefly the roots of Chinese as well as Western thought, we must not forget that present civilizations are built upon these roots. The various changes that philosophers of each culture have introduced, the fine tuning of ideas; all have their roots in these foundations. While the civilizations that we inhabit today differ markedly from these roots, the roots go deep. We are witnessing such change, technological, economic, political and religious, that mandates we search our roots to find what is valuable and enduring. From these, then, we must prune that which has become dead and contributes to separation, and foster those that nurture integration. The "third wave" of Confucian scholars, using modern academic, philosophical, and hermeneutic techniques, are beginning to examine the viability of Confucian thought for contemporary society.

When one examines the Bahá'í Writings, the historical and psychological roots that are presented and the ideas that are brought forth, clothed in a new manner, may enable us to attain what was a vague and distant vision in these older philosophies and civilizations. World unity has demands that differ greatly from feudal or national unity. Again, in the Bahá'í system, it takes a Divine Power to transform on a global scale and implement new patterns of living.

There is need to express here what has so far been unexpressed. We find in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's thought a number of statements that warrant attention as scholars begin to look closer at Chinese philosophical thought. Presented here are two of these passages that impinge upon our awareness:

"In short, all sections and parties have their aspirations realized in the teachings of Baha'u'llah. As these teachings are declared in churches, in mosques and in other places of worship, whether those of the followers of Buddha or of Confucius, in political circles or amongst materialists, all shall bear witness that these teachings bestow a fresh

⁷⁷ For a succinct overview of Buddhism in China, see deBary, *op. cit.*

life upon mankind and constitute the immediate remedy for all the ills of social life.”⁷⁸

“Confucius became the cause of civilization, advancement and prosperity for the people of China. Now it is not the time when we discuss concerning the stations and positions of those who are passed away. We must concentrate our attention upon the present. What hath transpired in a former time is past. Now is the time when we restrict our discussion to the Most Great Luminary of Peace and Salvation in this Age, to talk of the Blessed Perfection [Bahá'u'lláh] and to voice His exhortations, behests and teachings.”⁷⁹

It seems that in these two selections we are given a manner of approaching further dialogue. It is tempting to merely seek similarity of concepts in religious and philosophical thoughts, especially as they pertain to one dominant feature of Chinese and Bahá'í positions: embodiment. So far much of the Bahá'í-Chinese dialogue has striven to highlight points of commonality. This is always a healthy and necessary way to enter any long term relationship. Within the context of this article, this is the approach taken, while at the same time setting out some dissimilar points.

I propose that the two passages above imply for us an approach that is warranted and will contribute to further dialogue. This stance is one of beginning to draw out the differences, while continuing to look at the commonalities. In the second passage we are given a position to focus “our attention upon the present.” In another work, we read, “Sciences of former ages and philosophies of the past are useless today. Present exigencies demand new methods of solution; world problems are without precedent. Old ideas and modes of thought are fast becoming obsolete.”⁸⁰ If we seek only common points, perhaps we will overlook the discontinuities that are embedded within Bahá'í thought. We need to explore more what old ideas and thoughts are obsolete, while mining those that are enduring. And here there subsists an echo of Kongzi's

⁷⁸ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablet to August Forel*, pp. 26-27

⁷⁹ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá Abbas*, vol. 2, pp. 469-70

⁸⁰ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation*, p. 140

personal position and practice, "A man who reviews the old so as to find out the new is qualified to teach others."⁸¹

While we must seek common ground, we need to not seek *only* for this. I am here reminded of the Jesuit entrance to China under the personage of Mateo Ricci, who, from 1583 until his death in 1610, taught the Jesuit understanding of Christianity. In so doing, he adopted Chinese clothing, language, customs and terminology. By so doing, he not only taught the Chinese, he also, so some historians assert, failed to differentiate the Christian faith enough from Confucianism, so that many were left wondering what he offered that Kongzi did not. One such historian writes about it this way:

"One Christian assumption, then, has been that any particular cultural wrapping can cover the core of universal truth. Yet, this assumption, which should have precluded any Chinese emotional need to balk at Christian foreignness, was but a net to catch the wind. It was meant to persuade a Chinese that the truth belonged to everyone, but the assumption could simply confirm the Chinese in his predisposition to see truth in what belonged to him. Thus, the early Jesuits in China, in their fear, for their religion, of its fatal indictment as a western, passing thing, hopefully expressed it as a sort of 'perennial philosophy.' Its truths were supposed to be evident even in the Chinese Classics, if the Chinese would only look. Revelation, the emphasis on what is *sui generis* to the religion, was deliberately shadowed in mysticism, in the insistence that truth is free of temporal, historical context. And this tactic, though born of a sound instinct that some sort of tactic was necessary, was self-defeating..."⁸²

Of course with the new trends in Chinese thought and culture, there is no concern of *not* demonstrating the foreignness of the Bahá'í religion while likewise showing its universality. The trend towards anything foreign makes this faith and social context different. The differences that exist between Bahá'í and Chinese thought have been little explored yet, in part because the dialogue is so new. The cultural openness in modern China provides many more different opportunities than Ricci or others had.

⁸¹ *Analects* 2:11, trans. Chan, Wing-tsit, *Sourcebook*, op. cit., p. 23.

⁸² Levenson, J. *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate: A Trilogy*, pp. 118-119.

However, the other dramatic changes, more essential than the openness to new ideas, warrant our attention as well.

It is well known that the failures of Maoist communism, acknowledged at the highest governmental levels, has left a vacuum in Chinese spirituality. More than this, it has bred a distrust of any utopian idealism; religion, as historically presented, offers utopian ideals: universal brotherhood, universal peace, collective security, the well-being of all humankind, etc. It seems that if a Bahá'í-Chinese dialogue does not seriously contemplate this element, this leerness of any doctrine that sounds utopian, the dialogue may not penetrate to the core of the debate.⁸³ If it is true, as Jiwei Ci expresses, that Confucianism provided a code of conduct and a code of virtues to support it, but did not have a code of belief, it is this last aspect that many are seeking to find.⁸⁴ This is what the belief in communism purported to offer and could not. It offered the possibility of a utopian ideal that failed to materialize, and that left a nation searching for meaning. However, the adage of "once bitten, twice shy" may apply to the current Chinese situation. The thrust of much current Chinese scholarship focuses on the religious dimension of Confucianism and Taoism, and while this is surely valid in the sense used, it differs

⁸³ While the recent incidents involving the Falun Gong Movement, labeled as a cult by the Central Government, and widely discussed in the media of the West and East, may indicate a continued repression and control of religious freedom in China, especially of an organization that can easily mobilize millions of people, I assume the reasons are more complicated. While it may be valid that any perceived threat to Party control is curtailed for political reasons, to assert that this is the only reason in the case of Falun Gong is simplistic. Freedom of expression needs limits, as the prevalence of anarchistic tendencies in many western democracies blatantly indicate. It is a delicate balance, especially when a transition is being made from feudalism-communism to a socialist-capitalist market economy in a country of 1.3 billion people! The psychological reasons for the success of the cult are clear to one who has investigated it. A question looms here: because the western countries, America in particular, allow the rise and flourishing of cult movements, and then the mass suicides that occur because of this "freedom," does this prove that such is the best way to handle such movements? Are there logical and reasonable limits to freedom that must be seriously addressed in incidents like this? Indeed, we notice in both Chinese and Bahá'í positions the great virtue of the "middle way" between extremes. Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá express cogently that freedom needs limits. 'Abdu'l-Bahá espouses freedom, but it is one that is "moderate."

⁸⁴ See footnote #7. It is also valid that the Confucian Dong Zhongshu elevated the Confucian notion of *Tian* to a transcendent principle, but this never became the dominating concept in Confucianism at the time.

markedly from a religion based on revelation.⁸⁵ It is well documented that many of the religious documents in the Taoist canon are considered to be outright plagiarism of Buddhist texts.⁸⁶ Likewise it is significant to note that deBary and Bloom's work refers, in the chapter titled "Daoist Religion," to the "Shangqing and Lingbao revelations,"⁸⁷ but more research needs to be undertaken to discern the implications and usage of this term in its historical and contemporary contexts.

Added to these are the suspicions that arise when one dialogues about "religion" or "revelation" from God. The dominant education in Marxist ideology gives the common people different ideas about a Deity and religious systems, and presents a challenge when confronting those faiths that exist there. It would be unwise, it seems to my limited understanding, to not acknowledge fully that belief in a Deity that governs and controls, that has created and sustains physical existence, is not a widely held conception in modern China, though we may find traces of it in the syncretism of folk religion. There are many contemporary scholars, Chinese and Western, who are taking great pains to argue that it has *never* been part of Chinese thought; that Chinese humanistic religion is founded upon human ingenuity and understanding, not divine revelation as espoused in Bahá'í thought. Are the two systems reconcilable? In fact, can humanistic religion be justifiably considered a belief system? And if so, then we need to clarify in what ways it is, and how it differs from a revealed religious system. The "grounds" of belief differ significantly. There are many issues herein that are worthy of dialogue.

One voice that provides current discussion in this dialogue is Kow Mei Kao. His previous article in the pages of this journal, "Chinese Religions: Evolution, Compatibility and Adaptability," provide us with an alternative view to Ci's.⁸⁸ Kow expresses the presence of a belief system that characterizes Confucianism in the Han period. He asserts that it presented

⁸⁵ In a previous article, I argued that the notion of religion that may be dominant may need to be reconsidered in light of the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith's views of religion being the "necessary relations that emanate from the reality of all things" rather than *just* a doctrine. This is true. However, we must integrate it with the fact of revelation as source of religion. See my article, "Heaven in China without 'Religion' and Manifestation."

⁸⁶ For a good presentation of this fact, see, e.g., Liu Ts'un-Yan, *Selected Papers from the Hall of Harmonious Wind*.

⁸⁷ *op. cit.*, *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, p. 393.

⁸⁸ *The Singapore Bahá'í Studies Review*, 2000, vol. 5, no. 1, pp. 63-85.

a belief in Heaven with a personal god; a belief that mankind is the noblest creature composed of the trinity of Heaven, Earth and humanity; belief in the rewards or punishments in afterlife; belief that good deeds done in this life accumulate favors from Heaven unto the earth in the portends of nature; and belief in astrological forecasting.⁸⁹ This presents an interesting thesis, and one worthy of investigation. However, it might indicate, as Kow himself proposes, that it represents the Han period of Confucian ideology and not an enduring feature, as Ci's stance seems to indicate.

We cannot dialogue with the past, with texts of an ancient civilization, divorced from people who express them or their applicability to contemporary society. While the Chinese government openly discusses "socialist spiritual civilization,"⁹⁰ the understanding of such a term greatly differs, from in the minds of the common people, to those at higher levels, as well as from its historical referent. This should be openly acknowledged. A dialogue about what "spiritual" means, both within current and historical Chinese contexts, as well as the Bahá'í stance, implies clarity about these matters. Words used differently provide substantially different meanings; the terms used need to be clarified so that dialogue may proceed smoothly, and each party grasp the meanings as used.

A saying attributed to 'Abdu'l-Bahá indicates to us that the Bahá'í who wants to teach the Chinese should, among other things, "know their sacred literature, study their customs, and speak to them from their own standpoint and using their own terminologies."⁹¹ While this is an attributed saying rather than a quotation, it does us well to contemplate it deeply.

⁸⁹ *ibid.*, p. 66.

⁹⁰ This term is commonly used in current Chinese thought, and can be found in President Zhu Rongji's report submitted to the National People's Congress on the Outline of the Tenth Five Year Plan for National Economic and Social development (2001-2005).

⁹¹ This passage is found in many places. It is noteworthy that in the book about Martha Root, *Lioness at the Threshold*, by M. Garis, p. 510, we find a footnote to this passage. The note (#1) reads: "Since neither documentation nor an approved translation exists for this passage, it cannot be considered authentic and must be regarded as 'pilgrim's notes.'—Ed." This traditional saying, in fact, perhaps the development of a Bahá'í *hadith*, reflects the spirit needed for those of us engaged in Bahá'í-Chinese dialogue.

To know the Chinese sacred literature implies a knowledge (deep or cursory depending upon the individual propensities) of: *The I Ching* (易经: *Book of Changes*), *Daxue* (大学: *Great Learning*), *Zhongyong* (中庸: *Doctrine of the Mean*), *Zhuangzi* (庄子), *Tao de Jing* (道德经), *Lunyu* (论语: *Analects*), and other works from the Taoist and Buddhist canons. To speak “from their own standpoint” implies that we know their *current* standpoint, not merely the historical one that many are only vaguely familiar with. It is vital, it seems to me, for one who would be a teacher or scholar to grasp deeply the historical views and the development of Chinese thought, so that s/he may relate an understanding of terminologies that are now unused but lie at the roots of Chinese consciousness. To show contemporary Chinese the beauty that resides in the depth of their civilization’s sacred and philosophical roots is a sacred undertaking. These roots are widely unknown but often referred to. Many of my students know, when it is drawn on a blackboard, or seen on a sign, what the sign of the Yin-yang (阴阳) or the *bagua* (八卦) is, but have only the most vague idea what it means and its import for their culture.⁹² This is a great service, it seems, to dialogue about and to connect with the roots again.

Finally, to “use their own terminology” seems to imply that when we speak of the Tao, or *Tian*, *ren*, or any other term, we know what it means historically, in its many guises, and currently. Phyllis Chew’s work, *The Chinese Religion and the Bahá’í Faith*, provides some preliminary insights into these terms and their similarities with Bahá’í thought. To pursue and deepen this is now the task in providing for a fuller dialogue.

Considered from a different angle, and from much personal experience, to be able to cogently and intelligently discuss the assertion of “the harmony of science and religion” implies to “use their own terminology” as well. “Their” education and terminology is steeped in scientism, and to know this, to respond to these features, recognizes their validity. To be able to articulate in a scientific manner—that is systematically, clearly and with strong logical evidence in support—enables many contemporary Chinese

⁹² For those readers who are unfamiliar with this, it is the traditional circular figure half white, half black with a fluid (not straight) line between the halves (looks like a large S), and the black side contains a small white circle in it and the white side a small black circle, see p. 10 of this journal.

to value their learning in science, and to integrate it with a system of belief that supports it. We need, however, to clarify that this harmony spoken of does not mean harmony with any *assertion* of science, but with its principles, system of pursuing truth, and reasonableness. Modern science is only one dimension of science. We must make a distinction between the *spirit* of science and the scientific, that is materialistic, views that dominate it today. Discussion on this component holds much potential as well.

It also seems prudent to mention herein the establishment in 1999 of the Center of Bahá'í Studies (CBS) in association with the Pacific Rim Institute for Development and Education (PRIDE), and The Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), Institute of World Religions, in Beijing. This Center holds great potential for dialogue as well.

Further dialogue about Chinese and Bahá'í views of civilization will need to focus upon these issues as well as upon the ethical, moral and psychological implications of each culture as discussed in their sacred texts. It will need, moreover, to be integrated with the scientific world view that is demanded in the Bahá'í civilization being built. Much of Chinese philosophy has been termed pre-scientific; it has even been termed as non-philosophical compared to Western philosophy. However, what is vital to grasp is that Western philosophy has been more cognitively oriented, grappling with abstract ideas. Chinese philosophy, on the other hand, has been described as more orientative, that is oriented to the transformation of the individual and thus society.⁹³ This is the purpose of true philosophy and religion, and the purpose of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh.

As we glance around us at the world at large, at societies and civilizations, at individuals and families, we observe the upheavals of great convulsions. The establishment of a spiritual civilization is not an easy task, and only the power born of God, working through humanity in the world, is capable of effectuating it; this is the claim of the Bahá'í Faith. We can only do our small, albeit significant, part to make others aware. In so doing, when the dialogue with the Chinese civilization is deepened, we will observe ideas that may revolutionize the understanding that many

⁹³ For a discussion of this distinction see, Cheng, C., op. cit.

westerners have of it. Likewise, it is proposed that as the dialogue progresses, so too, will humanity's understanding of the Bahá'í Faith's contribution to civilization. It is without doubt an exciting venture to be able to help establish some parameters for a dialogue with a civilization as ancient as the Chinese and as burgeoning as that envisioned in the Bahá'í Faith as delineated by Bahá'u'lláh, and his son 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "the Architect of His World Order."⁹⁴

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