MULTI-CRITERIA DECISION MAKING (MCDM) AND THE SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY OF RELIGION IN CHINESE, THAI AND JAPANESE THOUGHT

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I. Introduction

With such an ambitious title, it may well serve to delineate the epistemological outlook of the author before embarking on the treatise proper. Since he is a physicist, for the author the expansions of the World View of the physics profession from Laplace's mechanics of the 19th century to the geometrodynamics and quantum theory of the 20th century basically spelled the death-knell of a completely materialistic World View, since even the definition of what is meant by matter had become problematical.[1] At the same time, studies of the human consciousness both individually[2] and in groups (culturally)[3] have led to alternative phenomenological descriptions concerning what is meant by "reality."[4] Thus the World Views of major (and minor) religions have acquired an alternative (and primary) significance in what would be considered epistemologically "reality." This has not only rendered a deeper ecumenism feasible, but also allows us the practical application of a holistic but multidimensional approach to resolving problems about issues in the modern world, such as the ends of development, the aims of existence, and the role of the environment.[5, 6, 7]

In this respect, the great religions of China (Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism)[8, 9] as well as the culturally related thought-patterns of Japanese Shintoism,[10] are at one end of a scale, and Thai Buddhism is at the other, and may be especially illuminating.[11, 12, 13] An attempt was recently made by the author to apply such thinking to current world problems.

II

Chinese value-systems and the role of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism

In what follows I shall largely follow Harris,[15] Benedict[16] and Etiemble.[17] To start with, an understanding of the nature of the reality of consciousness at the individual human level through psychology points to the triple identity of "superego," "ego," and "id" as making up the "personality," utilized in transactional analysis to understand human behaviour. At the cultural level, different cultures can be considered the "home" of various aspects of this complex personality, suppressing, perhaps, other aspects. The great religions, similarly, can be considered as various codifications of this cultural identity. The great strength of Chinese civilization is that in its long evolution it has evolved patterns of culture consonant with each of

these aspects of the personality (the "parent," "self" and "child" of transactional analysis from Harris, or the above-mentioned "superego," "ego" and "id" of a neo-Freudianism). Then it codified these cultural patterns in three great religions: Confucianism for the "father," Buddhism for the "self" and Taoism for the "child." It does not matter at the moment that Buddhism was transmitted to China from India, since the original Hinduism of India (as well as the Trinity concept of Catholicism in the Christian tradition) accommodates all three personality types, without, however, allowing us to analyse each in its relatively "pure" form. The Buddhism found in Thailand, on the other hand, allows us to study the "ego" or "self," while the Shintoism of Japan (related to the Taoism of China) lets us look at the "id" or the "child" in the treble identity of human personality. To complete the picture, perhaps surprisingly, the authoritarianism of both Confucianism and Islam is, perhaps, most in tune with the "superego" (the legendary "father," or the codified authoritarian "wisdom of ancestors"). How such "wisdom" is "codified" can be seen in Ruth Benedict's *Patterns of Culture,* where she gives examples of societies where one or the other of the above three personality types are dominant (the "authoritarian," the "rational," or the "artistic" or "child-like") as exemplified in some ancient tribal cultures of North America and the Pacific.

The actual stimulation for writing this paper came from some recent issues of the *Journal of the Siam Society (JSS)* discussing modern Thai thought and the role of Buddhism. In particular, the role of Buddhadasa as described by Peter Jackson,[12] the thoughts of Sulak Sivaraksa as described by David L. Gosling (*JSS*, Vol. 71, pp. 236-239) and, finally, the role of religion in the Thai marketplace as described by Richard A. O'Connor (*JSS*, Vol. 74, pp. 62-80) as well as its social-psychological aspects described by Durrenberger and Tannenbaum (*JSS* Vol. 77, Part 1, pp. 83-90), provide the background for the next few paragraphs.

We may start, however, with William J. Klausner's *Reflections on Thai Culture.*[13] In its last few pages (pp. 380-385) Klausner paints a picture of the delicate balance between individualism and group orientation in Thai society. This is even more vividly described by O'Connor, where he describes three kinds of "transactions" in what is basically individualistic Thai secular and religious behaviour when describing the daily life of a Royal Temple in Bangkok. His analysis gives a unique understanding of Thai society, where the paternal (the "father" figure of the king) elicits loyalty for protection, is linked with the "spiritual," exchanging "good deeds" for "merit" (at the temple), and the "material," exchanging money for goods or services in the "marketplace." The individual is simultaneously maximizing his expected benefits (of "protection," "merit" and "wealth") in all three of these "transactions."

Sulak Sivaraksa's thoughts, on the other hand, would reject these individualistic optimizations, and would emphasize the rationality of a tempered "middle way," "compassion" and "helping the disadvantaged." This would also, indeed, be the ideal for the "paternal," "wisdom of the ages," as personified by the royalty in Thailand, and by Confucianist traditionalism in Chinese thought. This also allows us to emphasize

the unity of the three personalities (the father, the rational individual and the child), since Gosling can also refer to Taoist influences of "non-action" in Sulak Sivaraksa's thought. In the social psychology of religion the *balance* is important: I claim that in Thai Buddhism individualism is dominant; thus a certain "adult rationality" of a high-level civilization allows also for the indulgencies of the "paternal" and "child-like" elements of the personality, in a very attractive synthesis.

Japanese Shintoism and the "id"

Paradoxically, in Japanese Shintoism the Taoist contemplative innocence of the "child" dominates. This can be seen in the emphasis on direct experience (*chokkan* in Japanese) and a group-oriented outlook, very much like the Hopi culture described by Ruth Benedict.[3] This can lead to both irrational individual fears of "not acting like the group" (and thus becoming an outcast) and to occasional child-like megalomania and complete identification with the "power" of the group, be that the myth of the "invincibility of the race," or the faith in the superiority of the group's own cultural tradition over that of all other groups. Perfection is achieved via incessant practice of the "way of the group" and any individualist personality would forever be doomed to be an "insensitive outcast." Paradoxically, even the "economic animal" aspect of individual commerical beheavior is also adopted as a "group" norm. It is difficult to bring the tempering rationality of the Buddhist "middle way" to this; however, the Japanese managed to synthesize such a personality by keeping a separate "place" (*basho* in Japanese) for each of the three aspects of their personality, as described very ably by Ruth Benedict (in another book besides the one mentioned here, namely *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword,* written during the Second World War as an attempt for the United States military to understand their foes).

The point to be made about Japanese "group consciousness" is that the Japanese suffer acutely when outside of the group, and they feel they are *"right"* only when part of the group. It is a "shame" culture, rather than a "guilt" culture, with child-like innocence on the one hand and a mania for perfect conformity, "perfection through practise," till approval of the "group" is achieved. It is a dichotomy of the "child" and the "parent," where the role of the "parent" is played by the "group" (by the cultural, national, social or religious traditions) accepted (and loved) by the pure and innocent "children."

The "superego" and other systems of thought: Confucianism, Islam, etc.

It is obvious, we trust, from the above Japanese dialectics, that the "child" requires a "father;" thus the father figure of other religions such as, for instance, Islam and Judaism.

In Confucianism the father figure is implicitly codified as the "wisdom of the race," leading to reverent behaviour towards ancestors in a more measured way than the child-like acceptance of the "wisdom of the race" in the former two religions (through the Koran or the Bible).

In Catholicism all three exist, but the "child" is emphasized through Christ, while the rationality of Buddhism would be approached by the wisdom achieved through "grace," given by the Holy Spirit. The "father" or "superego" still looms in the background, but a child-like acceptance through the imitation of Christ could be compared to the Japanese devotion to perfection and the "group" in Shintoism. The point is that there is a balance again of all three personality traits, with different emphasis on each.

Why have I bothered to describe the social psychology of these major religions? I run the risk of being designated blasphemous by all zealots — an unenviable fate! However, there is a noble purpose in such a "new ecumenism." This is because usually it is useless for authoritarian fathers to argue with each other. It would only be a shouting match.

It would also be useless to argue about the "direct experience" of children: the group they belong to will have different "truths" held dear to their hearts, according to the traditions held by their "fathers" (or "the wisdom of the race") they love and try to emulate.

The only creative discussion possible is among adults, or the "enlightened," "rational" individualists of Buddhism, some Christians tempered to enlightened compassion by the Holy Spirit, or those of "tolerance and sympathy" among the ones revering the ways of their ancestors as the Confucianists do. The point is, however, that the ultimate nature of things encompasses all these three personalities, and in disputes over, for instance, environment versus development issues, there could be progress only through an awareness of the multitude of values and objectives held dear by the "parent," the "adult" and the "child" in each of us, religiously adhered to, but, hopefully, tempered by wisdom.

Multi-criteria decision making (MCDM) is just a method for resolving the paradigm conflicts described in the World Bank monograph. Where we intend to add to it in this treatise is in identifying the paradigm conflict of major religions as basically different dimensions of the same reality, and, thus, in principle, resolvable. Such a process may be transferable to the religions of "environmentalism" and "development economics" (as discussed at the recent MCDM Conference at the Asian Institute of Technology in Bangkok). With this hopeful thought I close, summarising the essence of the paper in four self-explanatory figures.

ENDNOTES

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2. HARRIS, T.A. : *I'm O.K., You're O.K.* Pan Books, London and Sydney, 1969.

3. BENEDICT, R. : *Patterns of Culture*, A Mentor Book, The New American Library, N.Y., 1953.

4. VON GLASENAPP, H. : *Die fünf Weltreligionen*, Eugen Diederichs Verlag, Düsseldorf-Köln, 1972.

5. COLBY; MICHAEL G. : *The Evolution of Paradigms of Environmental Management in Development* (Strategic Planning and Review, Discussion Paper No. 1) The World Bank, Washington, October, 1989.

6. *Culture and Environment in Thailand* (A Symposium), The Siam Society, Bangkok, 1989.

7. NAKAMURA, T. : "Bonenkai and Entropies," *The East*, Vol. XXIV, No. 3, Sept-Oct 1988.

8. ETIEMBLE: *Connaissons-nous la Chine?* Gallimard, Paris, 1964.

9. ZHANG WEIMIN: "Taoist Priests Keep Alive the Ancient Beliefs" : *The East*, Vol, XX, No. 2 Nov. 1989.

10. ISHIKAWA, T. : "The Mysteries of the Ancient Japanese Religions", *The East, ibid.*

11. *The Journal of the Siam Society*, Vols. 71 (1983), 72 (1984), 74 (1986), 76 (1988) and 77 (1989).

12. JACKSON, PETER: *Buddhadasa — A Buddhist Thinker for the Modern World.* The Siam Society, Bangkok. 1988.

13. KLAUSNER, W.J.: *Reflections on Thai Culture,* The Siam Society, Bangkok 1987.

14. TÖRÖK, S.J.: "Entropic Processes in Open Steady-State Systems and Multi-Criteria Approaches to Coping with the Environmental Effects of Energy" in Tabucanon, M.T. and V. Chamkong, *Multiple Criteria Decision Making*, AIT, Bangkok, 1989.

15. HARRIS: *op. cit.*

16. BENEDICT: *op. cit.*

17. ETIEMBLE, *op. cit.*

SUPEREGO

↑↓

EGO

↓↑

ID

ORDER
(CONSCIOUSNESS)

BALANCE
(WORLD)

CHAOS
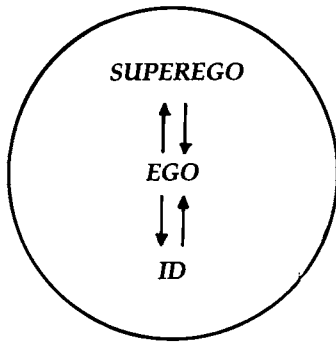
I WILL, THEREFORE I AM.
I THINK, THEREFORE I AM.
I FEEL, THEREFORE I AM.

Figure 1   PSYCHOLOGY
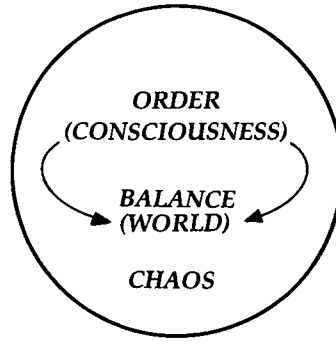
Figure 2   EPISTEMOLOGY

PARENT

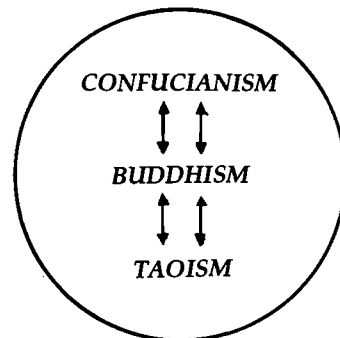↓↑

ADULT

↑↓

CHILD

CONFUCIANISM

↕↕

BUDDHISM

↕↕

TAOISM
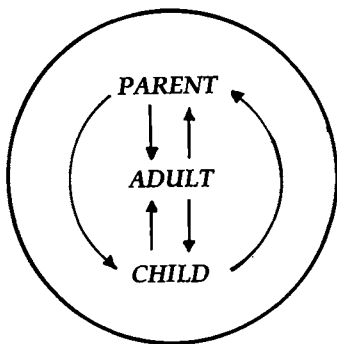
Figure 3   TRANSACTIONAL ANALYSIS

Figure 4   SOCIAL-PSYCHOLOGY OF RELIGIONS

ALLAH	—— PARENT	DOGMATIC AND "WISE" (STATESMAN)
BUDDHA	—— ADULT	RATIONAL AND "ENLIGHTENED" (SCIENTIST)
CHRIST	—— CHILD	CREATIVE AND "DESTRUCTIVE" (CHILD)