

Politics and Religion

Introduction

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The study of the “Between the Heaven and the Human” not only applies to China, but also its East Asian Confucian neighbors, i.e., to non-indigenous monotheistic religions that made their way into the Confucian cultural sphere.

Dr. He Guanghu is not only a leading scholar of Christian theology but has also taught Muslim researchers among his students. He also led the Chinese theology movement during the 1990s. In particular, He helped demonstrate the significance of dealing with the theological issue of social reform focusing on the discourse on the between the heaven and the human. The faith structure can be briefly summarized as follows.

Throughout the history of the Chinese people, religion has been associated with rituals of ancestor worship. Assessing the delicate relationship between heaven and mankind, the ruler was expected to venerate the heavens and love the people. Thus, politics became a religious ritual. The dynamics of faith at this point was altered so that the ruler represented heaven and subjects came to represent the masses. If the ruler neglected the will of heaven and failed to love the masses, he would forfeit his role as ruler. A revolutionary and sometimes religious principle would manifest itself through the concept of the mandate of heaven. The dimension of revolutionary Confucianism could be activated in such a case. As evident from the example of the Taiping Rebellion, “non-indigenous” religious influence can insight rebellion.

Let us consider what occurred as the authority of the Chinese emperors began to increase. As the concept of the “son of heaven” developed, the head of state (Emperor) began to exert tremendous pressure on his subjects. At times even Confucian ethics, which contained a revolutionary component, could not put the power of the thrown in check. After the 1990s, a similar dynamic of corruption manifested itself. Chinese theology attempted to reverse this course of power abuse as we shall see.

A similar process can be observed among the Japanese followers of Confucian ethics. After the Meiji period, Christianity began to be accepted as a revolutionary movement that placed special emphasis on the salvation of the poor.

And there are two possibilities in the structure of Confucianism: obedience to power, or becoming reform philosophy; as the example, the left-wing tendencies of the Wang Yangming school instigated the Oshio Heihachiro insurrection. There seems to have been a serious dilemma among intellectuals and religious followers whether they should submit to the conservative ethos or whether to carry out the revolutionary principles embedded within Confucian philosophy. The Dr. He's article structurally reveals this circumstance.

I would like to posit the following question. In the case of Confucianism, was it necessary to make an explicit choice that monotheistic religions and Buddhism require? In other words, does religion exist primarily to promote righteousness and social reform? While affirming the positive, it does not seem that one would have to make exclusive claims whether one should serve God or one's ancestors as is evident in the case of European Christianity and Arab Islam.

Buddhism has managed to coexist with Confucianism outside the framework of faith. This is not because Buddhism emphasizes loving the masses. Buddhism expounds the dharma to all sentient beings including the son of heaven. As mentioned earlier, Confucianism has a peculiar dynamic which allows it to focus on a particular class, but Buddhism does not try to display subservience to authority or plot to overthrow the structure. By contrast Confucianism places special emphasis on the rituals of ancestor worship. For the most part though, Confucianism does not manifest its potential for toppling the existing political structure.

In the case of Islam, God has blessed and sanctioned human relations, so people are free to engage in ancestor worship and the rituals associated with it. Thus, ancestor worship does not interfere with the principles of monotheism. Rulers and low ranking subjects as well as wives, sons, daughters and brothers are all part of the community of believers. They must avoid sacred objects such as stones and trees and are taught to dedicate themselves to the one and only God.

Since Islam was born into a preexisting mercantile culture, one tends to equate the perspective of the individual with that of Euro-American individualism. However, Islamic society values the primacy of patrilineal descent. Euro-American conceptions of human rights developed after the industrial revolution when large groups of peoples needed to be secured for labor. In the beginning, indentured servants and impoverished

farmers were freed from their feudal roles and could move away and choose their professions. Since Islamic nations did not undergo this process, the women are perceived to be still unliberated by the existing undemocratic institutions.

Admittedly, in the case of Islam, it is difficult to make religious faith the foundation for democratic movements and social reform. If enough individuals actively propose changes, reform is possible. Dr. He's article is interesting because it focuses on the element of choice when adopting non-indigenous religions of East Asia into the Confucian framework which is evolution of ancestor worship.

Dr. Nadler's Article

We would like to shift the discussion Dr. Arie Nadler's "Psychological Features Affecting the Israeli-Palestinian Relations and Thoughts about Facilitating Peace in the Middle-East." The study searches for solutions to the Palestinian crisis and is supported by both ethnic groups. The best scenario naturally would be to make Jerusalem the Israeli and Palestinian capitals the center of their nations. The article deals with the psychological barriers that are needed to move the peace process forward. This makes it difficult to end disputes that continually arise.

Since disputes between nations entail loss of life, destruction of property and extreme suffering, one needs narrative to justify one's position and demonize the enemy. In early movements, the Jewish people were perceived as a landless people returning to their land which was still unoccupied, but this land had long been settled by Palestinians. On the other hand, Palestinians argued that Jewish people had no ties to their land which was also a fabrication since the Jewish people have historical roots that date further back than 3000 years to Israel.

The victim mentality gradually developed into an identity that reflect special characteristics. They include: 1) the obsession over the damage and destruction in the past, 2) the tendency to try to convince others to recognize the brutality that was committed against them, 3) the lack of empathy toward others, 4) the transfer of pain and suffering from the past to the present by projecting enmity toward one's enemies.

The fourth element in particular is extremely problematic. The Palestinians had long suffered under Western colonial rule, so when the Jewish people arrived, the Palestinians transferred their enmity onto them. Their lack of empathy toward the suffering of the Jewish people created the psychological framework for the violence that would erupt. The negativity and futility of their victim mentality set up an agenda that would legitimize unethical actions by violent means. It is difficult to find a simple solution to

this problem since both sides are projecting their victim mentality based on past events onto the present and future. Theoretically, all people have free will to chart their future, but their victim mentality makes them neglect this possibility. In order to resolve this conflict, both sides have to recognize that they are simultaneously victims and aggressors. By departing from a single dimensional understanding of reality, both sides can begin to seek reconciliation.

Furthermore, the Israelis seem largely unaware of the special method of conflict resolution that is embedded within the Arab Islamic tradition. There is little awareness of the nuances of key concepts that affect the interpretation of what constitutes war and peace. These include: sulf (relative concept of war that affects treaties), hudnah (negotiations that lead to the termination of war), salam (Another name for God which also includes connotation of heaven). Both Jewish and Christian tradition have a dichotomic view on the difference between war and peace. Thus, the inability to understand each other's languages exacerbates the conflict's mentioned above.

One further point that this article alludes to is the fact that Palestinian refugees cannot return to their homes. This resulted from the split in their territory. The article that some action be taken for the sake of these refugees. Of course, this does not imply that he is dwelling on the victim mentality. Quite the contrary, this cycle must be avoided at all costs. The refugees are likely to be victimized in the future since no process exists yet to compensate the loss of their land and housing.

The value of this article lies in its application to various issues beyond the scope of this discussion. For example, it reveals how the psychological barriers created during the conflicts mentioned above can become applicable to subconscious levels of enmity in other historical disputes (specifically the example of East Asian anti-Japanese sentiments and the leaders' role in instigating this rhetoric comes to mind). This theory that relies heavily on psychological analysis can also be used to explain religious confrontation.

The articles that were composed in conjunction with these two presentations are invaluable in providing the theoretical framework of this essay.