COMPARISON OF
EASTERN AND WESTERN CIVILIZATION

1. Purpose and Contents of the Course

Innumerable articles and books have been written about East Asia and China since this part of the world has been catapulted into the global economic scene with its historic rise. Unfortunately, most, if not all of them, are widely off the mark in terms of the fundamentals of the Eastern civilization undergirding the rise of the East. We have yet to encounter a publication explaining this epochal change by comparing the Eastern and Western civilizations on an equal footing in a relevant way.

In their perspective, the papers produced in the West are west-centric as they tend to compare the Western ‘universality’ with the Eastern ‘specificity.’ In a similar vein, most of the papers produced in the East have been written within the framework of the Western paradigms (or, of the purely Eastern perspective, as a reaction to it).

Neither in the West nor in the East do we find a paper written with a balanced approach regarding the two civilizations. To the best of my knowledge, thus, this lecture-seminar would constitute the very first attempt comparing the two civilizations in an objective, neutral and balanced way.

The relative decline of the West appears to be inevitable as the historic rise of the East prompts the shift of the center of gravity from the Atlantic to the Pacific. “Singapore’s per-capita GDP is currently 21 per cent higher than that of the US, Hong Kong’s is about the same, Japan’s and Taiwan’s are about 25 per cent lower and South Korea’s 36 per cent lower. It would be a brave man who bet against China following the same trajectory in the decades ahead. China’s is the biggest and fastest of all the industrial revolutions…. If present rates persist, China’s economy could surpass America’s in 2014 in terms of domestic purchasing power and by 2020 in current dollar terms. Indeed, in some ways the Asian

Accordingly, we, both Westerners and Easterners, need to understand the East (and the West, for that matter), by freeing ourselves from the century-old habit of west-centricism. Understanding China, and understanding the wider East, especially the fundamentals of its culture and civilization has become imperative. Thus, for any nation or people who want to become active participants in the management of the 21st century and beyond, it is important to gain a comparative perspective between East and West.

The Western belief in the superiority of its civilization or its concept of the linear progress of civilization does not easily allow the Westerners (and the Easterners also as they are currently living under overwhelming influence of the Western paradigms) to explore Eastern civilization on an equal footing; and there are equally built-in obstacles of language and conceptual barriers in the Eastern civilization that do not easily allow credible translation of its classics and thoughts, which are written in suggestive, intuitive, synthetic and integral way as opposed to the Western assertive, intellectual, analytic and differential way.

What then is the best way to overcome these dual impediments? Comparison may be the answer, a systematic and comprehensive comparison of the Western and Eastern civilizations. Thus, in this lecture-seminar, a comparative perspective will lead us to place side by side a number of the fundamental elements of the Eastern and Western civilizations: Admiral Cheng Ho and Vasco da Gama, Taoism and Judaism, Confucianism and Christianity, Deng Xiaoping and Adam Smith, and so on.

In comparing the East and the West, we must shed the instinctual urge to find out which civilization is superior and which is inferior. Both, the East and the West, are now faced with the emergence of the unprecedented and common problems of a transnational nature. The elemental question of ‘war and peace’ is rapidly being replaced as the most urgent issue for humanity by the transnational issues. We are witnessing a historic paradigm shift from ‘raid’ to ‘trade’. This paradigm shift has almost freed us from the millennia-old fear and threat of raid, plunder, and war posed by neighboring tribes and nations.
At the same time, however, humanity is now threatened by such transnational problems as global warming, the proliferation of nuclear weapons, a rapid increase of the population in the developing countries, a depletion of natural resources, and the global financial crisis. All of these problems are man-made. They are the product of the human mental capacity, for which we have been taught to be so proud of. The rising question is indeed of an evolutionary dimension: is humanity in control of its own mental capacity or is humanity blindly led to its own destruction by the pursuit of an insatiable greed ingrained in its own mental capacity?

Most immediately related to this fundamental problem, we are faced with the question of safeguarding democracy and the free market, which constitute the most valuable and best inventions of humanity, mainly of the West. For this, we need to understand where we are now and where we are headed to in the future in terms of civilization of humanity. Our understanding of the Eastern and Western civilizations could be the very first step to this direction.

This constitutes the main theme of the lecture-seminar. This lecture-seminar is intended to prepare the students to better cope with the 21st century, which is increasingly termed as the Pacific era.
2. The Schematic Schedule of the Course

Introduction: WHAT IS THE EAST?

September: ADMIRAL CHENG HO (鄭和) vs. VASCO DA GAMA

1-1 CHRISTIAN-PAGAN vs. JUNZI (君子) -XIAOREN (小人)
1-2 UNIVERSAL ETHICS vs. MASTER ETHICS
1-3 WESTERN RELIGION vs. EASTERN EDUCATION
1-4 CULTURAL TRAITS: WESTERN YANG vs. EASTERN YIN

October: TAOISM vs. JUDAISM

2-1 WESTERN THEISM vs. EASTERN DEISM
2-2 INFALLIBLE GOD vs. INEFFABLE TAO (道)
2-3 MARITIME WEST vs. CONTINENTAL EAST
2-4 WESTERN DIALECTICS vs. EASTERN UNITY

November: DENG XIAOPING vs. ADAM SMITH

3-1 FREE MARKET: INVISIBLE HAND vs. TAO
3-2 WESTERN LAISSEZ-FAIRE vs. EASTERN WUWEI (無為)
3-3 ETHICS and GREED in POLITICAL ECONOMY
3-4 HUMAN NATURE: WESTERN SPIRIT vs. EASTERN MAN

December: Review and Examination
3. Preparations to be made by the students

Concepts to study

Of Taoism: Tao (道), Wuwei (無為)
Of Confucianism: Jen (仁), Junzi (君子)

Articles and Books to read and digest


Confucius, *Analects*


Mancer Olson, “Power and Prosperity”


Lao-tzu, *Taoteking*


Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*.


Confucius, *Doctrine of the Mean*

C D Herrera, *How are Law and Ethics Related?*, Philosophy & Religion Department, Montclair State University, N.J.


Mencius, *Mencius*


Konrad Lorenz, *Civilized Man's Eight Deadly Sins*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 2007)


Confucius, *Great Learning*