

# EPISTEMOLOGY FOR A HARMONIZED WORLD ORDER

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## ABSTRACT

Man's living attitude and behavior toward the world have been formed differently according to the various educational systems of the civilizations and ages. When we study the dominant epistemological theories of those civilizations and ages, we can know what kinds of ideas have led those educational systems, what types of men have been formed, and to what directions those societies have been driven. Today, the word "Global Village" is frequently used, reflecting the fact that the numerous civilizations, religions, and cultures are interacting closely to weave a more and more intimate relationship. In such a situation, philosophy should be able to give an answer to the question how to encounter the more and more complicated world. We can live neither the present nor the future by depending on the closed thoughts of the age of isolation. It was natural for men of an age of isolation to regard as "normal" only their own culture and religion, despising the others as "barbaric" or "savage". But, we should no longer take such a closed attitude, living in an age of open society. Our future demands that we should comprehend other cultures and religions, and harmonize with them.

**Key words:** globalism, glocalism, western civilization, Asian community, consciousness, unconsciousness

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## I. PERCEPTION AND THE INVISIBLE WORLD

In this context, we should overcome the uniform Globalism prevalent today in order to advance into a higher dimension of multilateral Glocalism where the characteristics and merits of each civilization can be exchanged and respected. This is the reason why we judge that the Western civilization which has been developed under the strong influence of Identity Philosophy cannot lead the new age of Glocalism. We have discussed this issue in the 1<sup>st</sup> international conference of the Asian Philosophical Association.<sup>1</sup>

The Western rationalism, caught in a trap of unlimited monistic reductionism, has degraded into a linear one-dimensional level, while the same kind of fault has confined the Western religion to the boundary of intolerant dogmatic orthodoxy. The cultural tendency of excluding, oppressing, and annihilating the otherness has increased with these faults of philosophy and religion.

On the contrary, the spirit of harmony and mutual encouragement of life has characterized the Asian cultural traditions. This spirit is symbolized in the ideal of unifying the heaven, earth, and man. We should recognize the significance of this Asian ideal for the future of human existence. It is astonishing that the Western epistemology, in spite of its long history of more than 2500 years, has not, until the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century, entered the real world of consciousness and thinking. We can see that its basic understanding of cognition and perception has committed serious faults.

The inseparable connection between unconsciousness, perception, bodily structure, and behavioral mode has been completely forgotten in the epistemological theories of Western rationalism. When the notion of unconsciousness appeared at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century, it was severely criticized as self-contradictory and irrational. Even now, the terms like biological theory of knowledge or genetic epistemology are in a far distance from the philosophical lectures of many universities.

A true epistemology should start with the obvious fact that perception itself is a process interacting with the world directly or indirectly. During perception, in a living organism, an immediate action is either being taken, or reserved. The failure of Western rationalism began when it erased from perception all real connections with unconsciousness and behavior. Naturally it has fallen into the artificial level of superficiality. In perceptual field, subject and

object are interwoven to form an inseparable total circuit. The perception is possible on the basis of the fact that the world interpenetrates. It is possible for us to approach the inner realities of our perception when we recognize that the invisible forces of the universe participate in our existence.

The reason why the Western traditional rationalism cannot play a role of leading a true community of mankind derives from the fact that, because of its superficiality, it has made the mistake of establishing a wrong relationship between man and world. The lack of philosophical insights has made the Western civilization unable to come out of the closed culture of excluding others.

Quite different from the Western traditional tendency of opposing object and subject, the Asian cultural traditions have respected the spirit of holistic integration. The important messages of Asian traditions for today's world are coming from this spirit. The great Asian teachers have warned against the ordinary habit of regarding the world as an aggregate of separate entities. Our society should not be understood as a gathering of atoms of selfish desires. We exist not for struggle and hegemony, but for charity and love. The Asian ideal of harmony and mutual encouragement of life is connected with their vision of the world. Through a deep meditation, they came to recognize that the universe is an integrated whole within which there exists an invisible relationship of interpenetration and interdependence between the parts and the whole.

Following these teachings, the Asian tradition of respecting the nature as the bosom of life has been formed. The Asian wisdom will make us get out of the Western idiocy of regarding the nature only as an object of exploitation. Naturally, at the same time, the attitude of living together, tolerating others became the merit of a great person in Asian ethics. These spiritual cultures should enlighten the desolate techno-scientific civilization menaced by the mechanistic way of thinking. Our philosophical efforts should be concentrated on illuminating the true world of the Being and Life forgotten by the superficial Western rationalism.

Our future demands that we should see the reality of the invisible world and unconscious self. About the surrounding world, representation shows us merely a minute part which can be compared to a grain of sand on the seashore. Much more invisible contents are passing our body unnoticed. Likewise, only a very small part of our memories appear in present consciousness, while most of them rest in unconsciousness. This is the condition for the life of our finite body. Then, what part of the outer world appears in representation, and what part of memories appear in consciousness? We will treat the first question in this chapter, and the

<sup>1</sup> See "The Philosophy of Asian Community", *The Vision of the Asian Community: Proceedings of the 1<sup>st</sup> International Conference of the Asian Philosophical Association* (Istanbul: Fatih University Press, 2005), 10-15.

second one will be answered in the next chapter.

To understand what representation is, we should make a paradigm shift concerning the nature of matter. Discarding the concept of spatial extension lying at the base of Cartesianism or Atomism, we are to define the matter as flux, process, or mobility itself, and to advance further to have the notion of the interpenetrating universe. Following this way of thinking, we will be able to see that, among the infinite cosmic flux, only a minute part is caught by our sense organs to become representation, most of it passing our body unnoticed. We cannot help but be astonished to find that, in ancient Buddhism, these fundamental insights began.<sup>2</sup> These verities, not attained by Western philosophy until the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century, have been taught widely in Asia from 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. considering the fact that these teachings have made the foundation of Asian cultures, we are to reevaluate the Asian tradition, and to find messages from it for the future of mankind.

From the ancient Buddhism, the fact has been well indicated that our representation and language do not show the thing in itself. When we represent a thing, we conceptualize it with language. So representation goes with language. But, language cannot express the inner essence of things. It describes only the external features of them, or their relations to other things. Thus, a thing constituted by language is not a thing in itself.

It is very meaningful for our discussion of Asian Community to find the same idea in H. Bergson's *l'Evolution creatrice*:

The same is even more obviously true of the objects cut out by our perception. The distinct outlines which we see in an object, and which give it its individuality, are only the design of a certain kind of influence that we might exert on a certain point of space: it is the plan of our eventual actions that is sent back to our eyes, as though by a mirror, when we see the surfaces and edges of things. Suppress this action, and with it consequently those main directions which by perception are traced out for it in the entanglement of the real, and the individuality of the body is re-absorbed in the universal interaction which, without doubt, is reality itself.<sup>3</sup>

2 In the following phrases of *Prajuāpāramitā hrdayasūtra* (般若波羅蜜多心經), Buddha teaches us these fundamental verities. Buddha tells us that, if we give up our vain greed and desires, we can come nearer to the truth. ....色不異空 空不異色 色即是空 空即是色 受想行識 亦復如是.....空中無色 無受想行識 無眼耳鼻舌身意 無色聲香 味觸法 無眼界 乃至 無意識界...

3 H. Bergson. *Creative Evolution*, trans. by Arthur Mitchell (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 1998), 12.

The contents appearing in sensation or representation are those minute parts of the cosmic flux which did not pass the living body, caught by the sense organs. The reason why they are caught is because they are in special interest to the life of the living body. They become raw materials of the perceptual field. We know that the mode of perceiving differs according to the species, even if we do not know the inner quality of the perception in other species.

It is the structure of the body that determines the mode of perception, so that the difference in structure makes the perceptive-behavioral mode different. That is why we think that there are many different forms of psychological lives in nature. Each form of species is the result of the long effort for adaptation to nature, being a creative expression of life.

## II. READING THE UNCONSCIOUS WORLD

Such knowledge will make us sympathize with life in general, and, if we continue this way, it will be possible for us to attain the essence, meaning, and purpose of life. Philosophy, music, arts, and religion coincide in guiding this way. Step by step, they are able to dig into the profundity of Being and Life, revealing to us that the world of Being is charity and love. Here, knowledge tells the practice of love already.

This work is to overcome the unhappy rupture caused by the Western rationalism between reason and emotion, object and subject, concept and intuition, knowledge and practice. Philosophy should grasp the reality in its concrete totality. The self-disruption deluded the Western reason into believing that only science treats the objective reality, while arts and religion pertain to the realm of subjective emotion. The Western reason was too superficial to realize the profound world of reality that arts and religions guide us to. Losing the inner connection with the essence of Being, such science falls into a one-dimensional level where nothing counts but efficiency and money. When science forgets its original meaning, it becomes simply an instrument for an end, either good or evil. That is why, in Asian tradition, humane education was emphasized before entering into technical training. We should note that, under the Asian traditions, there move calmly the great teachings coming from the revelation of Being attained through the long ascetic mortification.

It is well known that, by practicing a long meditation, descending into the remotest area of our unconsciousness, we can finally coincide with our true self. All values coming from this original self, it is acting somewhere, even if faintly, in everyday life. So, if we truly try to see,



we can see it. Moved deeply by the works of music, literature, or art delivering the messages of the great souls, anyone can have an experience of meeting an infinite divine world. Is this experience different fundamentally from that of mysticism in which man meet God?

Never different, because these experiences are the lights emitted from the same deepest world of our Being, teaching us together by strong emotion about what we are, what the meaning of life is, and what to do. The original spirit of open religion is closely related to these experiences. Here, what is the most important is the vivid religious experience and inspiration. The absolute systematization of theology has nothing to do with this original spirit of religion, as it supports the political powers which exclude others for their own interests. That is why, in Buddhism and Taoism, the ultimate metaphysical questions are left in the margin unwritten.

The way of seeking after truth begins by concentrating on ourselves to descend gradually into the profundity of unconsciousness. Through longtime effort, passing one by one the gates of the unconscious world, our consciousness approaches our true self. All our past, instead of disappearing to nothingness, is preserved in our unconsciousness. Among the past memories, only those small parts that can give aid to the present situation float to the conscious level. The other greater parts remain submerged in unconsciousness.

According to Buddhism, our happiness or unhappiness is due, not only to our own actions after birth, but to our own past doings traced back to a proximate or remote past births. Buddhism calls these actions and doings “Karma”. Under our consciousness, there is a storehouse of unconsciousness named “Alaya Consciousness” where all Karma is accumulated. The Alaya Consciousness preserves all past memories, desires, psychic impetus, and vital energy, melted and spread in our body.<sup>4</sup> We are apt to think that this Alaya Consciousness which is bound to our finite body is our true self. Buddhism teaches us to free ourselves from this illusion. It preaches us to go much further, crossing the thick strata of Alaya Consciousness, to attain the ultimate verity of our true self, ‘眞如佛性’ (*the truth is the same with the Buddha’s nature*). Our ordinary intellectual activities relying on the routine conceptions and languages cannot make us transcend the Alaya Consciousness latent in subconsciousness from time immemorial. As long as we wander in the confusion and illusion of the Alaya Consciousness, we will remain harassed by anguish and anxiety resulting from our vain desires.

Buddhism encourages us to overcome ourselves. The verity of Being, though neither

visible nor audible because of the many folded thick strata of confusions and desires, can be felt anyway, even if faintly, in our heart, through its vibration from the deepest part of ourselves. Even in our ordinary life, there are some special occasions to contact directly the world of Being. When we are deeply moved by human relations, music, literature, arts, or religion, we are actually at the entrance of the world of Being. Though we do not know the fact, we are, for a short period, in a state of Buddhahood. Such occasions can be the starting point of our seeking after truth.

Here, we should be awakened to the true meaning of love. When we love someone truly, the love reaches the entire world, embracing all the existences of the universe. Through the intermediary of a particular love, we are led into the universal love. No matter what it may be called, the transcendental God, or inner Awakening, this universal love is the essence, meaning, and purpose of Being.

Buddhism tells us that, when we attain to the ultimate awakening, our true selves and the universe are unified as one verity. The ordinary conceptual thinking which opposes me against others, subject against object will be replaced by the direct intuition of the oneness of universe. The nature of the universe being that of my mind, all of the universe is unified in the ultimate verity of ‘眞如佛性’ (*the truth is the same with Buddha’s nature*). This awakening naturally makes us go forward to practice the universal love.

### III. THE HOLISTIC INSIGHTS OF ASIAN CULTURES

About the attitude toward the world, it has been well indicated that the Asian cultural tradition differs fundamentally from that of the West. In Asia, under the ideals of coexistence and harmony, a way of living together with nature has been generally taught. We do not see, in the history of Asia, such hateful oppressions against heterogeneous others as in the West. Accepting the existence of others as being natural, the inclusion and tolerance of them were regarded as the virtue of a great man. In Asian tradition, a true leader is a man who can make more people live together peacefully encouraging others.

On the contrary, the Western civilization has treated the nature as the object of conquest and exploitation, which resulted in the danger of total collapse of mankind. It also perceived the world as an arena of rivalry and fight, obeying the rule of power and hegemony. These dominant trends made the Western civilization exclude and destroy other civilizations.

<sup>4</sup> This Buddhist theory of Alaya Consciousness is so similar to Bergsonian theory of memory that we can see how deeply Bergson was influenced by Buddhism. Based on this theory of memory, Bergson developed his philosophy of evolution creatively.

These cultural differences between Asia and West are well expressed symbolically in the myths. For example, the western myths of a dragon slayer symbolize the conquest and destruction of the agricultural civilizations by the nomadic tribes. In contrast to this, the myth of a shaman-king descending from heaven to promote the welfare of mankind characterizes the Han-Tengri civilization. Here, we can see the fundamental difference in attitude between the destruction and tolerance regarding the conquered civilization. From where originates the Asian spirit of tolerance and inclusion characterizing Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Hinduism, and Confucianism? What kind of intuition and awakening to the essence of Being have created this great attitude toward the world?

It is proven that the experiences and awakenings of mysticism which have generated the open religions are similar. In the form of ecstasy, there emerged the following awakenings that between the universe and me there is an inseparable connection, that my existence is possible only with the participation of the universe, that all the existing things of the universe interpenetrate one another, that all the living beings, in spite of their different forms, have the same value, and that the ultimate nature of Being is charity and love and itself.

Whether this meeting with the Divinity would be expressed in terms of the theology of absolute transcendental God, or explained as the coincidence with the ultimate true self unified with the universe in oneness, can vary, depending on the historical conditions and situations of the time when the religion came into being. And, sometimes, it happens that, after several hundred years, a religion takes a theological system totally different from that of its birth time. So, here, we are to indicate the fact that, what matters most is the spiritual message toward life that the vivid mystic awakening delivered, not the exterior theological system.

It is a very important work to find out from where the Asian ideal of harmony and mutual encouragement of life began, because it will provide us with the cultural, historical, and religious links needed for the formation of Asian Community. In doing this, the obstacles which have blocked the way to Asian Community by deforming, concealing, and forging historical facts will be eliminated. Up to now, the fact has not been well known that the Asian world view of harmony and mutual encouragement of life originated from the ancient Siberian shamanism of Würm glacial stage (BC 53000~BC 10000). In spite of its decisive influence on Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Japanese Shintoism, and American Indian Shamanism, the Siberian shamanism has been far from academic illumination.

The vestige of the ancient shamanic ecstasy remains in the Altaic-Tungus hieroglyph

“巫”<sup>5</sup> symbolizing the unification of heaven, earth, and man.<sup>6</sup> This Altaic-Tungus letter “巫” itself implies the philosophy harmony and mutual encouragement of life. Entering into China with the Altaic-Tungus conquerors, this letter has become Chinese. Lack of thorough archaeological and historical knowledge has made this hieroglyph “巫” known as a Chinese letter.

Here, we should make clear the fact that the *inscriptions on bones and tortoise carapaces* known as the beginning of Chinese characters originated in the civilization of the *Liao-ho River* (遼河) in Manchuria.<sup>7</sup> This civilization is at least 2000 years older than that of the *Yellow River* in China. Today, the following fact is admitted even by the academic world of China that a branch of the *Dong-Yi* (東夷) people who were the masters of the civilization of the *Liao-ho River* migrated from North to south into the central China to establish the *Shang Dynasty* famous for the *inscriptions on bones and tortoise carapaces*. The *Dong-Yi* people, pertaining to the Altaic linguistic group, originally had lived, during the glacial stage, isolated by the glacier, around the *Han-Tengri*, *Altai*, and *Baikal*. With the end of the glacial stage, they moved gradually south to Manchuria, China, Korea, and Japan.

The aborigines of Siberia during the Würm glacial stage (BC 53000~BC 10000), exposed to the extremely cold climate below minus 50°C, developed a special technique of warming the body by regulating the breath. Practicing this technique, they came to experience a state of ecstasy in which man and nature are unified in oneness. The experience of communicating with the souls of nature in ecstasy made the shamans open their eyes to the true value and meaning of life.

The shaman in ancient times was a man or women who ruled the earth by the will of the heaven that he communicate to earth. In accordance with his cosmic principle of unification, the shaman had the wisdom and capacity of harmonizing nature with man, man with man. The shaman was an almighty leader, being at the same time priest, prophet, magician, medicine-man, artist, politician, etc.

Today, in most regions of Asia, shamanism has degenerated into a superstition or incantation, being confined to the outdated frame of fossilized customs and rituals. But its

5 It is useful for us to quote the following sentences of M.A. Czaplicka. “according to Banzaroff, the word shaman originated in northern Asia: saman is a Manchu word, meaning ‘one who is excited, moved, raised’; samman (pronounced shaman) and hamman in Tungus, have the same meaning.” M. A. Czaplicka, *Shamanism in Siberia*, 1914, republished 2007 by Forgotten Books, 42.

6 So, the traditional Altaic-Tungus cultures have given special religious importance to the numbers 3 and 9.

7 The inscriptions on bones and tortoise carapaces originated from the cult of divination of burning bones. The crack lines left on the burnt bones were regarded as showing the will of gods, either good or bad.

essential spirit of pursuing universal harmony and respecting lives penetrated deep into other religions, influencing their basic attitude toward the world.

The vestige of this influence upon Buddhism remains in the Pali word “samana” which means a religious mendicant seeking after spiritual awakening. In ancient India, a man or women who practiced asceticism like Buddha, renouncing the world, was called “samana”. This word, later introduced into China, was translated “沙門”.

The fact that the Siberian shamanism entered into China with the Altaic *Dong-Yi* (東夷) Conquest and developed into Taoism is well recorded with concrete names in ancient archives. It is generally admitted that the writing of the book *Yin Fu Jing* (陰符經) by the *Yellow Emperor Xuan Yuan* (黃帝軒轅) marks the beginning of the Chinese Taoism. Actually, the *Yin Fu Jing* (陰符經) is known as an interpretation of the book *Sam Huang Nae Moon Gyeong* (三皇內文經) of the great *Dong-Yi* (東夷) master *Ja Bu Sun Yin* (紫府仙人) from whom the *Yellow Emperor* learned the shamanistic philosophy.<sup>8</sup>

The fact that the traditional religion of the American Indians is a kind of Siberian shamanism makes us rethink our understanding of world history. It is the Siberians of the Würm glacial stage who had crossed the frozen Bering Sea, following the reindeers that became the ancestors of the American Indians. Naturally, the American Indians and Siberians share many old customs. Adapting themselves to nature, they lived as a part of nature. Totemism was essential to their social life, because they formed their social identity and kinship through the worship of the same totem. Hunting in excess, over necessity, was prohibited by the custom, and they performed a ritual for the repose of the animals which were sacrificed in order to provide them with food and clothing.

Entering into Japanese islands through the Korean peninsula, the Siberian shamanism has been transformed into Shintoism. When the royal family of Japan performs the Shintoist ritual, today’s Japanese people do not understand the meaning of the song invoking the spirit of the dead, because the song is written in a Korean dialect of the South-East region. As a native religion settled in Korea and Japan for a long time, the shamanism has maintained the time-honored tradition of harmonizing well with other religions introduced later.

<sup>8</sup> In the Korean history book “*Handangogi* (桓檀古記)”, this ancient story is well narrated.

## IV. PROPOSALS FOR THE ASIAN COMMUNITY

The dangers menacing mankind have resulted not so much from the lack of techniques as from the lack of mind. What is needed most for the present world is the culture of living together. That is why our Asian Philosophical Association has concentrated on the theme of the Asian Community, forecasting that the Asian Community, by virtue of its tolerant culture, will be able to build a road to the true community of all mankind. It is suggested that the messages of the time-honored Asian religions and traditional cultures can awaken the present techno-scientific civilization caught in a trap of “*die Seinsvergessenheit*”.

We have already discussed that the new paradigm of Asian Community demands the fundamental revision of philosophy and history. In many Asian countries, serious problems have been raised concerning the education of philosophy and history. If the education of philosophy in Asian countries repeats the imitation of Western philosophy like now, a devastating result will be brought about. Confined to the wrong paradigms, the philosophy in many Asian countries has ruined its *raison d’être*. In this context, the judgment of H. Bergson upon the history of Western philosophy attracts our attention. He rightly pointed out that the Western philosophy should return to its origin and recommence after correcting the fundamental faults hidden in its roots from the beginning 2500 years ago. When the Western philosophy tries to change its direction fundamentally, if the Asian universities continue the imitation of the past false Western paradigm, how can we call such stray efforts “philosophy”.

Concerning the world history, it has been noted that it suffers from the two wrong paradigms of Westcentrism and Sinocentrism. The most fundamental problem with those two historical paradigms is that they conceal, deform, or invert the past historical facts in order to maintain or expand their systems of selfish interests. They lack a true recognition or consideration of others. Such a negative situation of philosophy and history will not only hurt them but also block the road to a world community in its genuine sense. It is our sincere advice to China to cease its vain efforts to occupy eternally East Turkistan, Tibet, Inner Mongolia, and Manchuria. The world is watching China’s dishonest activity of forging, deforming, and inverting the history of these countries. China should not make itself an obstacle to forming the Asian Community. The future education of world history should serve, not for political hegemony, but for mutual recognition and peaceful coexistence.

With these considerations in mind, we propose to establish the Universities of Asian Community by joint investment of governments or foundations. These universities will teach

the students with the paradigm of Asian Community with a view to offering them a new vision of the future world, and, at the same time, promoting the great plan of the Asian Community. To coincide with the original purpose, and to create optimum synergy effects, more than half the faculty and students will be recruited from foreign countries. And we will establish a principle of exchanging every student between these universities at least for one year for the training of cultural ambassadorship. The universities should answer to the demands of the times with their ideals and pioneering roles.

A truly harmonious world order can be realized when politics and philosophy become one by the great awakening of Being. This is why we are focusing here on the old Asian teachings which are still moving alive in the substratum of Asian culture and mind. The meaning of life consists in sharing together the light of Being, that is to say, practicing the universal love. The world is waiting the age of the Asian Community.