

## Symbolic Forms, Political Ideas and the Encounter of Civilizations.

The following reflections are a hermeneutical exercise in inter-civilizational interpretation. They are undertaken in order to clarify some important problems that arise in the course of comparative theorizing which, up to now, have not been properly attended to. In so far my paper moves beyond the immediate topic of the panel 'China and contemporary political thought' to discuss the theoretical framework in which the reflexive discourse for the understanding of the dynamics of symbolic and institutional interaction across civilizations -- past and present -- is set. I shall first briefly sketch the civilizational paradigm which make up the hermeneutical key for an understanding of the historico-political world. For, as Arnold Toynbee wrote, in the study of history, the unit "civilization" objectively constitutes the "intelligible field of study". Along with the paradigm of civilization, the attendant issues of the interconnection of civilizations and the historical modalities of trans-civilizational encounters must also be treated. In this regard we learn from Toynbee, the founding father of the comparative study of civilizations, that in this study we do not deal with self-contained entities, each a separate representative of its species, but rather we must deal with "trans-civilizational relations". These are the encounters that have to be explored "in the two dimensions of time and space, between human beings who were participants in different civilisations."<sup>1</sup> Whether, from the very beginning of the post-axial history of civilizations onward, trans-civilizational relations were a constitutive element in history, or --as authors like Huntington maintain-- they were only "intermittent or limited multidirectional encounters among civilizations" that "gave way to the sustained , overpowering unidirectional impact of the West on all other civilizations ",<sup>2</sup> it is nevertheless undoubtedly true, that a historical caesura has taken place. But the extent and specific character of the caesura, as well as the prospects for a multi -civilizational world, must be looked into more closely. This specific modern problematic will be taken up in the concluding part of my presentation and will be illustrated by a somewhat simplified case study of the acculturation of Western constitutional thought in Japan and China.

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1 A. Toynbee, *A Study of History*, vol. 12, (London: Oxford UP: 1964), 286

2 S.P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster: 1996), 50

The historical meaning and present character of civilizational configurations.

Without delving into the plethora of pertinent literature I confine myself to the essentials in so far they pertain to my particular focus on inter-civilizational acculturation processes. So don't expect a comprehensive or detailed narrative – for this I refer you to recent publications upon which this paper is based.<sup>3</sup>

Notwithstanding ongoing debates about the categorical and empirical relevance of civilizations -- and their properties -- in human history, it suffices to follow the reasoned argument that the great civilizations that emerged in the axial period still chart the global ecumene, and define the historical depth of the multifaceted symbolic forms and institutional arrangement, that constitute the structure of modernity. While scholars argue about the historical plurality of civilizational configurations they agree in the identification of the major civilizations in history and on those that impact on the modern world. Great civilizations are characterized by their historical continuity – they represent the extreme case of the 'longue duree' in the history of humankind<sup>4</sup>- even taking into account the historical metamorphoses they underwent in their time and in consequence of the global upheaval that goes under the name of modernity. Great civilizations were evoked by the formative force of a series of socio-cultural transformations in the axial era from 800 B.C. to 600 A.D. ( here I follow the conceptual approach of Voegelin and Eisenstadt.). They brought forth the grand historical symbolic configurations in the Near East, Mediterranean Europe, China, and India, that "transform[ed] the shape of human societies and history in what seems to be an irreversible manner" and ushered in a "new type of social and civilizational dynamics in the history of mankind"<sup>5</sup>. Defined in brief these spiritual outbursts manifested a fundamental spiritual change involving "the conceptualization and institutionalization of a basic tension between the transcendental and mundane orders,"<sup>6</sup> i.e.: the transcendental order embodying the universal vision of a higher moral or metaphysical realm and the mundane realm of pragmatic life worlds. The

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3 Cf. J. Gebhardt, Political Thought in an Intercivilizational Perspective: A Critical Reflection, in: *The Review of Politics* 70 (2008), 5-22; J. Gebhardt, Die Idee imperialer Ordnung, in: E. Sandschneider ed., *Empire* (Wiesbaden: Nomos: 2007) ,25 -40

4 f. Huntington , *Clash of Civilizations*, 42

5 S.N. Eisenstadt, *The Axial Age*, in: *AES* 23, 1981, 294.314, 295, 297

6 *Ibid.*, 294

evolving breakthrough towards a novel consciousness of the human self, marked by its tensional existence in between those two orders, brought with it the obligation to attune mundane existence to the imperatives of the transcendent vision, and thus evoked new ideas of the order of human community. We may assume the appearance of a plurality of minor or major spiritual irruptions in the time under consideration. However, historically, only a certain number of symbolic ensembles that sprang from the axial experiences became effective: the Eastern variations of Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and to a degree Zoroasterism; the Western variations of Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Hellenic philosophy. They unfolded their formative cultural force in space and time because in one way or other they were welded to power structures that emerged in the axial time. The dynamics of power politics became bound up with the spiritual dynamics of the transcendental vision. However, the dialectical interplay of a universal vision of humanity defined, and the political will to translate this universality into the ordering principle of imperial rule over the human universe integrated the symbolic forms socially, and finally institutionally, into politically organized society. Since the era of the imperial formations is coeval with the emergence of the novel symbolic forms Eric Voegelin defines the axial complex as the ecumenic age “from which there emerges a new type of ecumenic humanity which, with all its complications of meaning, reaches as a millennial constant into the modern Western civilization” <sup>7</sup> – or, as I would put it: reaches into contemporary multi-civilizational global modernity.

The empires from Persia to Rome structure the social field of human agency but they themselves are not identical with the civilizational society that constitute the intelligible field of study. The terminology in modern discourses is highly volatile and very elusive: It refers either to a political unit (Rome) or to a linguistic-ethnic community (China, Hellas), or to a geographically determined space ( the West) or to a socio-spiritual culture (Christianity, Islam) - the latter being – not by incidence – the prevalent denotation of post-axial civilizations. And this terminological choice seems to have an important bearing on the understanding of the nature of civilizational societies. Toynbee defines it as “the common ground between a number of different people’s individual fields of action”, in terms of a meaningful network of relations. <sup>8</sup>This common ground, I suggest, is created by the symbolic communality that is grounded in the experiences of order of concrete persons in space and time. As a social

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7 E. Voegelin, *The Ecumenic Age*, = *Collected Works* vol.17 (UP of Missouri: Columbus 2000), 107

8 Toynbee, *Study of History* 12, 287

field of common consciousness manifesting a collective identity, a civilization transcends the field of power organization (Christian church, Islamic umma, Buddhist sangha ): however, in its turn, it may become the organizational principle of power units, be it an empire or a minor political entity. The collective identity feeds on a cultural memory that sustains the symbolic legacy . This function of the cultural memory is guaranteed by the characteristic of post-axial symbolic forms: canonized texts administered by spiritual elites.

In sum: The socio-historical form of civilization comes into being in the Ecumenic Age. Imperial societies provide the setting for the constitution of civilizational complexes of symbolic order and they in turn provide power- legitimizing, self-interpretive, symbolisms to politically organized societies that may cut across the civilizational field. The ascendancy of the world or ecumenic empires was followed by a sequence of empires and other power units, right up to the nation states, that were shaped and reshaped by the sustained formative force of civilizational symbolisms that first attained historical efficacy in the ecumenic age. Terminologically civilization thus described refers exclusively to the post-axial social fields of a symbolically mediated ecumenic consciousness. This understanding of the term ‘civilization’ should dispel the doubts expressed by Voegelin that civilisations are made-up “hypostatic ‘subjects of history.’”<sup>9</sup>

#### Trans-civilizational Relations and the Terms of Inter-civilizational Exchange.

Having presented this argument extensively the stage may now be set to discuss the question of civilizational interdependence and interrelation. Civilizations structure the historical field under different universalist horizons of humanity. But this structured whole of the historical field has always been marked by the interplay of interactions and clashes that were neither intermittent nor limited. From the diachronic point of view the sequence of civilizations is characterized by a far reaching symbol transfer to the point where symbolic orders are fully integrated into existing or nascent civilizations. The Roman civilization of the rising imperium absorbed key elements of the symbolic world of the declining polis-civilization: historiography, political thought, poetry, art and even the gods - resulting in a full fledged Hellenization. Cicero played a key role in this process of reshaping the Roman self-interpretation and we can study in detail how the political and philosophical legacy of the polis changed in the course of being incorporated into a symbolic form that was neither ancient roman nor Hellenic but a hybrid that finally became

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9 Voegelin, Ecumenic Age, 272

indigenized, along with many other elements of Hellenic or oriental origin. It suffices to say that a similar but much more fundamental transfer took place when the emperor forced Nicene Christianity -- in itself the result of a symbolic Hellenic-Judaic blend -- upon the empire that, in the long run, created the new civilizational field of Latin Christian civilization. The Roman case demonstrates the synchronic and the diachronic modality of symbol transfer. The next case is purely diachronic, involving two coexisting civilizations.

The Latin Christian medieval world was not a self contained unit: its symbolic order was deeply affected by the dual import of Hellenized traditions that came, on the one hand, from its Greek Christian sister civilization and, on the other hand, from the Islamic world of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Both imports worked together to produce the regenerated Christian vision of order in scholasticism; once again, a symbolic hybrid set for indigenization.

The Islamic civilization --the last one making its appearance in a fading ecumenic age-- derived its foundational symbolic form from the symbolic legacies of Christianity and Judaism and advanced its civilizational field by following the imperial model of the neighboring imperial units, Greek Christian Byzantium and Zoroastrian Sassanid Persia. Hodgson maintains that "The roots of the Islamic civilization are largely the same as those of the Occidental civilization". "[T]he Islamicate forms a sister civilization, like yet very different." It shares, however, the persistent aspiration to realize a universal vision in terms of an ecumenic civilization under imperial rule. This aspirational impulse came to fruition in the occident. It morphed from Christian to Western civilization. And, once the Western nation states rose to power, it **overcame** the non-Western societies, such as the Ottoman or Chinese empire, and began to remake the ecumenic world in its own image.

Last, but not least, we have to consider the similar phenomena found in East Asia: The reception of Buddhism into Confucian China under the Han. The spiritual irruption underlying the multiform symbolic manifestation of the teachings of Buddha was able to grow into a civilisational field due to its promotion of, and the tentative alliance with, the third century Maurya empire, in particular with its greatest ruler Ashoka . His short lived empire was the only major Indian imperial enterprise but an important starting point for Buddhist expansion. Buddhist monks followed the trade routes into China where they led a rather marginal existence under the Han because the Buddhist ideas of spiritual order contrasted sharply with the imperially established Confucian symbolic universe. Only in the centuries of political and spiritual crisis after the fall of the Han did a powerful Buddhist movement arise in China. It brought elites under the spell of Buddhist teachings and a first phase of cultural adaption to indigenous

Chinese intellectual currents like Taoism set in. The restoration of imperial domination and the attendant renaissance of the Confucian order under the Tang dynasty pitted the Buddhist spiritual way of life against the Confucian logic of order: Monastic life vs. family duties; withdrawal from the world vs. moral commitment to human agency; apolitical lack of interest in the public order vs. service to the community. The ensuing persecution of Buddhism shattered its monastic base but, at the same time, the social weakening of a self-assertive Buddhist movement initiated the acculturation of Buddhism to the Confucian and Taoist tradition and impacted on the grand intellectual enterprise of Confucian renovation in the time of Tang and Song. The evolving Sinicization of Buddhism generated Chinese hybrids that became indigenized to the point that they blended into the polymorph symbolic world of Chinese civilization.

Before I turn to a concluding section on the modern problematic it seems appropriate to point out the terms of inter-civilizational transaction. They differ from the terms of the generation of symbolic self-explication within a given socio-cultural context in so far as the imported symbolism separates from the engendering experiences and from the concrete human consciousnesses that are at the root of all symbolization.

Dissociated from the social-cultural fabric that determined their functional positions in the society of origin, the symbolic ensembles and symbol discourses are changed in the course of intercivilizational transfer. Such metamorphoses are determined by four interrelated factors.

The first factor is language and conceptual semantics. A specific trait of symbol transfer is the translation of key texts from the original language into the language of the recipient party. Lydia H. Lu comments critically: "The idea that languages are commensurate and [that] equivalents exist naturally between them is, of course, a common illusion."<sup>10</sup> Any translation is itself an interpretive enterprise. It transplants the meaning of words and the concomitant complexes of meaning into a different linguistic context that may confer new meanings on the original words or force the new linguistic context to create neologisms. Cases in point are: The conceptual language of scholasticism, of Islamic philosophy, or of Chinese Buddhism.

The second factor is the restructuring of symbolic complexes in order to assimilate them to the existing symbolic repertoire and to create a symbolic synthesis. Cicero's adaption of the 'foreign learning' of the Greeks to the Roman self-understanding is a prime example. The blending of the foreign into one's own tradition produces hybrid symbolizations

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<sup>10</sup> L- H- Liu. *The Problem of Language in Cross-Cultural Studies*, in: H- J. Jung ed., *Comparative Political Culture* ( Lexington Books: Lanham: 2002), 305-355, 307

that have been alienated from their original forms without having become integrated into the [new] dominant symbolic form. “Hybrid” means that the one [symbol complex] can not be dealt with without [reference to] the other.

The third factor is the final indigenization, or nostrification of the symbolic import and its incorporation into the existing order to the point where the achieved synthesis implies a reinterpretation of parts or the whole of a civilization’s self-understanding. This took place after the politically initiated introduction of the Christian creed in the late Roman Empire. There is a fourth dependent factor to be mentioned. In so far as the symbolic complexes that are transferred entail institutional models or precepts, their incorporation may lead to far reaching institutional arrangements: for example, that of the church and the papacy that were institutional consequences of the Christian take over. I should add that, conversely, the attraction of a successful institutional model might instigate the desire to appropriate the institution-related concepts and ideas in order to recreate the model. This institutional mimetism always **imparts** symbolic imports. It is characteristic of modern trans-civilizational relations that, under the conditions of Western induced modernization, non-Western societies are under pressure to make such appropriations.

## The West, Modernization and the Civilizational Dispositive

All four factors play a central role when we consider the wholesale transfer of Western symbolisms, ideas and institutions. Contradicting the fundamental assumption that the Western impact upon the global world brings forth a homogenous global civilization a new perspective on ‘modernization’ has gradually evolved that recognizes the civilizational dispositive that determines the development of a plural modernity. I follow Eisenstadt’s interpretation of the modernizing process because it accords with my own understanding of the still present formative forces of the historically effective civilizations.

According to Eisenstadt “ (A) great variety of modernizing societies developed ... out of the interaction between the expanding civilization of modernity and the various Asian , African and Latin American civilizations. They share common characteristics but also evince great differences among themselves.” Common to these societies are problems that arise from urbanization, industrialization, and increased communication; but they “differ in the institutional ‘solutions’ to these problems....These differences crystallize out of the selective incorporation – hence , also transformation - of the major symbolic premises and institutional formations of the original Western civilization as well as that of traditions

and historical experiences of their own civilization.” There is not one modernity, but a plurality of modern and modernizing societies and cultures. They display variegated features of structural and symbolic differentiation that represent a blend of intercivilizational modernizing factors and their respective civilizational foundations. These “distinct patterns of modernity , different in many radical ways from the ‘original’ European ones , crystallized not only in non-Western societies [but also] in societies that developed in the framework of the various great civilizations – Muslim, Indian, Buddhist or Confucian – under the impact of European and in their ensuing confrontation with the European program of modernity.” Even within the Western , that is Christian civilization”. Eisenstadt states, “not just one , but multiple programs and institutional pattern of development emerge , for example, in North America and Latin America.”<sup>11</sup>

It is beyond the scope of this brief paper to explore in depth the tensional relationship between modernization and civilizational legacies in general, and the cross cultural symbolic and institutional transactions in particular, within the horizon of a global world . Therefore, I will confine my concluding section to the specific case of the Asian quest for constitutionalizing their political society. I will document the interplay of civilizational symbolic self-interpretation, and the Western principle-based model of order in Japan and China in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. I leave aside the question whether China and Japan share a common civilizational tradition. This is disputed by Eisenstadt . But, in my opinion, the influx of Confucianism and Buddhism permits one to speak of a shared civilizational grounding. I choose this period of time because we can observe the civilizational encounter in *statu nascendi* and can therefore reconstruct a discourse that goes direct to the heart of the matter. Moreover, the difference in outcomes is instructive. The Meiji-reform in terms of the constitution of 1889 ‘modernized’ Japan and restructured not only the institutional order but also successfully recreated an indigenous symbolic order that adapted the past to the present. The Japanese imagined a symbolic tradition that was in fact a modern product.

The Chinese followed the Japanese discourse but failed in their efforts to implement their institutional program and neglected to contemplate the overhaul and reconstruction of the imperial order’s Confucian foundation. In the last analysis neither the elite nor the empress could muster enough power to implement a Meiji like reform and forestall the revolution that removed Confucianism from the public sphere and banished the ancient symbolic narratives to public unconsciousness.

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11 S. N. Eisenstadt, *Power, Trust, and Meaning* (Chicago UP: Chicago 1995), 355ff.



Japan and China saw themselves confronted with the aggressive energy of superior Western powers and the decline of their own political, moral, and spiritual fortunes. In both societies discourses about the grounds for European superiority and their own political weakness materialized, and an extensive study of Western forms of order and their socio-symbolic cultures set in. In Japan and in China a process of translating the allegedly relevant scientific, political and philosophical literature began that set off a semantic reorientation, such as I described above in general terms. As we will see, a whole new linguistic cosmos unfolded. One particular reform discourse crystallized around the notion that it was constitutional government, constitutional political theory and their religious and cultural underpinnings, that caused the strength and prosperity of Western states. This was not the only response but the one that was crucial to the self-assertion of society and its symbolic value base: at stake was collective and individual identity. The constitutional discourse is, therefore, intertwined with the identity discourse. Of course, the following rather cursory observations do not do justice to the immensely complicated problem of the Western challenge and the Eastern response in the last centuries. But these cases may be paradigmatic in as much as they seem to confirm Eisenstadt's argument for a civilizational dispositive of modernization and his conclusion that there is a plurality of modernities.

I begin in Japan because China was to follow Japan on the path of reform. Japan was caught in a domestic and external crisis ; it called forth a reform aimed at restoring the emperor to -as was claimed - his former power and to form a spiritually and morally cohesive national community that embraced the whole people. The substance of this unified whole was expressed by a recently (1825) created symbolic formula : kokutai. "Just what is essential for a land and people to be a nation (kuni)? Without four limbs, a man is not a man. Similarly, a nation possesses some essence (kokutai). This key symbol of order was to be a symbolic equivalent of what its proponents thought was the symbolic base of Western order. "Nineteenth century Japanese thinkers and leaders expressed fascination for the idea of 'national essence', perceived as the spiritual cohesion achieved in European nations due to a unity of state and church." While an ongoing constitutional discourse debated the various Western constitutional systems the conservative elite of the oligarchic Meiji regime pushed through a constitution based on the monarchical principle and inspired by the German and in particular by the Prussian constitution of 1850.

The reasoning of the chairman of the secret state council, Iro Hirobumi, brought to the fore the motives of the constitution makers and expressed their comprehension of the fact that the desired adoption of

the European political form involved the issue of a constitutional symbolism and its legitimating force to convey meaning to the people and to their order. Hirobumi seems to have understood that a straightforward institutional mimetism, combined with the transfer of political theories and ideas from abroad, and applied to the societal reality, would not work. This linking of institutional mimetism with social engineering was and still is one of the most popular mistake made by modernizers. Hirobumi was more clear sighted: After the decline of the Tokugawa regime a constitutional regime would be the best method for the promotion of national wellbeing. But“(In)Europe , constitutional government has had over a thousand years since its inception. Not only are the people thoroughly familiar with it, religion serves as a ‘linchpin’ for them. (Religion) has seeped deeply into the people’s hearts; their hearts and minds are united in faith. But in our country religions are very weak; none of them can serve as a linchpin in the state. At one time Buddhism was strong and bound the hearts of high and low together, but it is now on the wane. In sectarian Shinto, followers carry on the teaching of sect founders, but it has little of the power of religion to unify and direct the people’s wills... In our country, the only thing that can serve as the linchpin is the imperial house.”<sup>12</sup> The carriers of traditional spirituality were unable to provide the necessary spiritual and moral bond among the people, therefore, the imperial house had to function as the symbolic center of order and this function had to be reflected in the symbolism of the constitution. How could the emperorship act as the representative of the divine? The constitution makers turned to the mythical narrative of the sun goddess Amaterasu who brought forth the well ordered society and became the foremother of the imperial family whose descendents were once the guardians of kokutai. The divine descent of the emperor, the tenno, from the order-creating sun goddess was part of the tradition, but previously he had been confined to a ritual function in the public order. The constitution now made him the religio-political centerpiece of the Japanese order. According to Article I, the sacredness of the emperor derives from the legitimacy of the constitution. The tenno represents the order of the kokutai as warranted by the commandment of the Goddess. The compact concept of the kokutai comprises the spiritual unity of the body politic as well as the notion of a national essence. The fathers of the constitution made kokutai an amalgam of the German concept of the transpersonal state and the idea of national unity, and fused it with the vision of a sacred emperorship. It was to serve as a symbolic equivalent for the religiously grounded German idea of the state and is thus a genuine hybrid symbolism . This symbolic function of the constitution

<sup>12</sup> cited in J. Pittau, Political Thought in Early Meiji Japan (Cambridge UP: Cambridge 1980) 183-184

governed its function as an instrument of government that followed the German model: a strong and powerful monarchy assisted by a semi-parliamentary system and limited participation by the citizens. The modernity of the symbolism of the kokutai derived from its inclusiveness- It proclaimed the inclusion of all Japanese and reconstructed the nation as a community based on a shared descent, creating the image of an extended family under fatherly rule.

The constitutionally proclaimed order of the kokutai was politically translated into a program of national education – again inspired by the Western politics of nation building. The 1880 imperial edict on education made the concept of kokutai the formative principle of mass education and canonized the key elements of this symbolic complex : the sacredness of the dynasty was now ritually connected with the cult of Shinto, the Confucian moral code of the five virtues regulated the conduct of the individuals in family and state and the cultivation of patriotism . This educational program for the formation of a modern political culture transformed the social world of Japan and created an order that could claim to be the explication of an eternal Japanese national essence. The hybrid symbolic culture had become completely indigenized.<sup>13</sup>

Post war Japan gave up kokutai as the core symbol of its self-understanding. The American constitutional octroi deprived the emperor of his sacredness and westernized the instrument of government. But the emperor remained the symbolic reference point of the Japanese order that is still governed by the principles of the kokutai . Contrary to what

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13 Cf. J. Gebhardt, Verfassung und Symbolizität, in: G. Melville e., Institutionalität und Symbolisierung (Böhlau Verlag: Köln: 2001)

many observers think, the ancient Japanese tradition is in effect an outgrowth of modernity.

The Chinese charted a different path when they tried to reconcile the emperorship with the constitutional state by emulating the Japanese model of reform for their embattled empire. The starting point was the imperial reform edict of 1901 that was guided by the insight of the imperial court that it was necessary to resort to Western methods and institutions in order to regenerate the society and reestablish the waning legitimacy of the imperial house. An extensive reform program was envisioned that was to culminate in the introduction of a constitution. The ground bass of the edict maintained the eternal validity of the Confucian principles of human conduct and human order. Only the volatile realm of governmental methods and strategies is subject to change. The edict posits a momentous dichotomy of political reality: The unchanging world of the normative symbols of order is dissociated from the contingent world of governmental administration, regulation, and institutional practice. Reform in the realm of normative principles referred to a rejuvenated Confucian China in terms of a revived loyalty to the emperor and the spiritual unity of the *tianxia*, the empire under heaven. Reform in the realm of political practice aimed to reconstruct the political, military, and economic power of the empire. Basically the reform program wanted to integrate Western methods of administration into the indigenous civilizational tradition that was characterized by the Confucian legacy of the rule of the virtuous man, and by the harmony between the emperor and his people. Western ideas, knowledge, and methods only served the purpose of supplying the means for the higher end of regenerating an order preordained by the symbolic imperatives of the Confucian vision. The guiding principles of the reform edict were adopted by the commissioners Duan Fang and Dai Hongzi who had been in charge of drafting a proposal for the introduction of a constitution system of government. They had traveled extensively in Europe and were familiar with the rich European literature dealing with all pertinent questions of politics and administration. Linguistically we have a dual language: the language of government and policy consists of appropriated foreign terms, loan words, neologisms, and conventional administrative terms. In 1906 they summed up their findings in a memorandum for the empress dowager.<sup>14</sup> The first chapter outlines the reasoned arguments for the establishment of a constitutional monarchy (more correct: a constitutionally based monarchical government). It defines the functional centre of political agency analogue to the concept of the 'state' and

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14 Dai Hongzi- Duan Fang, *The Main Principles of Politics in Europe and America* (Peking : 1907),

makes it the pivot of all governmental activity. The vocabulary of the memorandum moves in an ambivalent linguistic cosmos that is not easily deciphered at a glance. Here, as in other documents, the translations obscure the semantic ambivalence.

A layman's brief reflection on the semantics of 'state' might be instructive. The object of a Confucian project of reform can not be the 'empire' in the sense of the *tianxia* (All Under the Heaven). The empire is not within its purview because, under the present unpleasant conditions, it has to be discussed as a 'state' among other 'states'. The commissioners describe the present situation by resorting to a well established ancient analytical concept. The present world is run by powerful 'states' expanding their power at the expense of the weaker 'states'. The West explains this in terms of a theory of imperial 'states'. The commissioners translate this into Chinese terms: it is the age of the hegemonic 'states'. And they interpret the present as an age of "warring states" This diagnosis means, first that China is understood as a hegemonic 'state' that must prevail in the struggle with other 'states'. Second, that the strength of a hegemonic 'state' derives from its domestic governmental make up. And, third, that China has to be turned into a powerful nation 'state' in order to assert itself in the international situation of 'warring states'. Thus, first of all, the reform has to create a strong and well ordered 'state'. For the designation of this 'state' they use the neologism *baguo*. It emphasizes the power aspect and refers to the traditional understanding of the *guojia* that once denoted the political units below the realm of the *tianxia*, now applied to the territorially closed, independent and nationally united Chinese nation state. Thus defined, the crisis of the empire in a time of 'warring states' called for the building of a strong state. At its best, this state would be a well ordered, prosperous, and powerful entity. But, by definition, it could not be identified with the socio-symbolic cosmos of the *tianxia*. This might explain why neither the diverse reform memoranda nor the imperial draft for a constitutional state of 1908<sup>15</sup> speak of the *tianxia*. Moreover it explains why the envisioned constitutional state was constructed exclusively along the lines of political and institutional efficiency, albeit based on Confucian principles and precepts of order.

The memorandum discussed the various constitutional regimes. It dismissed all regimes that resulted from violent revolutionary action and delineated a regime that comes into being on account of the reverence and love that the monarch enjoys among his people. Under this condition the transition to constitutional government would open the hearts of men

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15 Principles of the Constitution (United States Foreign Relation, Washington: 1908), 194 - 196

and lead to a grand harmony in the state as it had in many European states.

The reformers portrayed a Confucian model state that crystallized around the idea of 'harmony'. It fused constitutional form and Confucian social ethics and intended to create a magisterial state in terms of an efficient administrative state based on the rule of law. The monarch was the political, symbolic, and emotional centre of this order, supported by a Confucian meritocracy of public servants and a deliberative parliament that carried on the communication between the rulers and the ruled. From the ethical nucleus of the family emanates a morality that embraces the whole society. The mutual solidarity of *shangxia* extends from the family to society and binds government and people into a community of common trust.

This Confucian state is cleansed from any mythological ideas that might provide the

monarch with anything like the Japanese symbolism of the *kukutai* and the *kokutai*. Reformers like Kang Yuouwei failed in their attempt to follow the Japanese example and establish a Confucian state-religion, and to create a religiously rooted national identity. It was a very worldly Confucianism that relied on the ethical and social virtues of the family and the efficacy of government to sustain order.

The Japanese and the Chinese cases exemplify different modes of modern hybrid orders that emerged from the encounter with the modern West. In the Japanese case the hybrid was successfully indigenized and an indigenous paradigm of

Modernization developed. China's Confucians failed and the nation took to other models and experimented with the European model of revolutionary socialism. The world wide breakdown of the revolutionary orders might once again put the question of a Confucian state on the political agenda of China.

The story of inter-civilizational transaction will not end, nor will the formative power of the great civilizations come to an end, for they are the concerted expression of a humanity that transcends space and time.

