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. At the same time, studies of the human consciousness both individually and in groups (culturally) have led to alternative phenomenological descriptions concerning what is meant by "reality." 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.

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

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

15. HARRIS: op. cit.
16. BENEDICT: op. cit.
17. ETIEMBLE, op. cit.
MULTI-CRITERIA DECISION MAKING

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

Figure 1  PSYCHOLOGY

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

Figure 2  EPISTEMOLOGY

Figure 3  TRANSACTIONAL ANALYSIS

Figure 4  SOCIAL-PSYCHOLOGY OF RELIGIONS

ALLAH ——— PARENT

BUDDHA ——— ADULT

CHRIST ——— CHILD

DOGmatic AND "Wise" (STATESMAN)

RATIONAL AND "ENLIGHTENED" (SCIENTIST)

CREATIVE AND "DESTRUCTIVE" (CHILD)