INTRODUCTION: MULTICULTURALISM AND ITS CHALLENGE

Xunwu Chen

"A SPECTER is haunting Europe", to borrow a line from Karl Marx—the specter of multiculturalism. All European societies are preoccupied with this specter. Indeed, multiculturalism is a specter not only to Europe, but also to the entire earth. From Europe to the Americas, Asia, Australia-Oceania, and Africa, the rolling thunder of globalization comes along with the gusty rain of multi-cultures. The shining sun of cosmopolitanism is shadowed by the staring ghost of multiculturalism. The rosy face of global justice radiates with the purple smile of cultural persuasions.

A world of harmony and symmetry is that we dream. A world of conflict and struggle is the one in which we live and in which truths fire at each other, values cross swords, and beauties mutually kill, while those perpetual, titanic conflicts between truth and falsity, good and evil, and beauty and ugliness continue. Isaiah Berlin said: "The world in which what we see as incompatible values are not in conflict is a world altogether beyond our ken; that principles which are harmonized in this other world are not the principles with which, in our daily lives, we are acquainted; if they are transformed, it is into conceptions not known to us on earth. But it is on earth that we live, and it is here that we must believe and act." (Berlin, 1997, 13). What Berlin said yesterday is true of the world we live in today. Ours is a world of diverse voices, colors, and rhymes. It is one of unity with plurality. No wonder, philosophical interests to the subject-matters of multiculturalism, pluralism, and inclusivism develop in an unprecedented speed today. It ought to be so. Philosophy lives if and only if it continues to inspire and lead. Philosophy ought to be the crown jewel of the timely spirit, as it ought to be the gold-engraved jade of the consciousness of a nation and a people.

The salient challenges of multiculturalism are comprehensive, multi-faced, formidable, substantial and lasting. Metaphysically, it presses one hard with the painful questions of self-identity, individual identity and the identity of society alike. It forces citizens, societies, nation-states, and peoples to re-conceptualize their self-understandings. Thus, for example, Jürgen Habermas sums up the challenge of Islam in Europe and one of the issues that arrest all European societies today in the question, "How should we understand ourselves as members of a post-secular society?" (Habermas, 2009, 65). The presence of the other creates a context of self-search. The other's alterity both affirms and challenges the self's identity. One is forced to ask such questions as what is an American, what is a German, what is a British, what is a French, what is a Chinese, what is a Russian, what is a Japanese, and so on. Furthermore, multiculturalism raises the question of what is the best world or what is the best possible world too. In what world we ought to live? That is the question! What America ought to be for Americans? What Germany ought to be for Germans? What China ought to be for Chinese people? Which one is better, "melting

pot" or "salad bowl"?[1] These questions and their alike are not ones scratching where there is no itch, but ones arresting the heart!

Cognitively, the challenges of multiculturalism are constelled in such questions as what is truth, whose truth, what is the criterion of truth, how should one relate to one's own cultural tradition, and what is the role of language in human understanding. Multiculturalism challenges one to reflect, evaluate, and adjudicate conflicts of cognitive paradigms and to map one's way out of alternatives. It forces one to step out of the slum of dogmatism, solipsism, absolutism, and the like. In front of it, the shtick of the ruling cultural tradition wears thin, and the color of the orthodox paradigm fades. An examined life is not accompanied by the comfort of conformity, but by the irritation of rapture, conflict, and dissonance.

Ethically, multiculturalism calls into question the concept of the good and happy life buttressed by traditional culture, communal history, and collective experience, and enshrined in established cultural values, standards, and norms of existence. It introduces alternative approaches. It also presses one for a re-examination of one's ethical identity, affiliation, and allegiance. It confronts xenophobia in the mainstream of communal life on the one hand, and ethical solipsism on the other hand. On the one hand, the conflicts of values, ideals, centers of gravity of happiness, and cultural feelings bring one to an unfamiliar territory. On the other hand, as Emmanuel Levinas put it, the other "comes to join me. The *thou* is posited in front of a *we*"; "the welcoming of the other by the same ... is concretely produced as the calling into question of the same by the other." (Levinas, 1969, 213/43). Equally crucial, the presence of the other and the relation with the other constitute a constraint on one's freedom (ibid., 213). This to be, or that to be, that is still the question!

Politically, multiculturalism picks away at one's concepts and senses of justice, legitimacy, popular sovereignty, separation of church and state, cultural autonomy, cultural rights, collective political identity, government, law, and so on. It calls for a redefining of affiliation and allegiance. In such a context, new cultural affiliation and allegiance has social and political consequences: it leads to a new rationality of social political power and government on the one hand and a redistribution of social-political power and resource on the other hand.

Notwithstanding, multiculturalism is not merely a specter or ghost, but one threatening our metaphysical security, cognitive certainty, ethical clarity, and political rationality. It is a force and energy of uncertain character, unfamiliar nature, undefined substance, and unidentified essence. Moreover, it is not merely an unknown guest knocking at the door, but a strange partner who forces her way into inside the house. At the dawn of multiculturalism, new metaphysics and ontology is called, new cognitive theory is demanded, new ethics is needed, and new political philosophy is wanted.

Against such a backdrop, the mood of European societies today can be characterized as "a spirited rejection" of multiculturalism. So too are the moods of some other parts of the earth today. From the point of view of a dialectical

---

[1] The metaphors "melting pot" and "salad bowl" are borrowed from Craig Calhoun. See Calhoun, "Social Solidarity as a problem for cosmopolitan democracy", 285.

perspective, multiculturalism is a double-edge-sword. It liberates, but also destroys. It is akin to the Hindu God *Shiva* that brings not only colors, energies, and forces to the world, but also dangers, destructions and threats to the universe. It is akin to a volcano that enlightens, but also demolishes. Moreover, not all forms of multiculturalism are healthy and desirable. For example, the unity of language is always pivotal for any viable society. Radical multiculturalism leading to a destruction of the unity of language in a society is unsustainable.

All the same, nation-states, peoples, global human community, and humankind in general have benefited greatly, and will continue to benefit, from multiculturalism. Surely, to reject a particular form of multiculturalism is one thing. To reject multiculturalism *per se* is quite another. If it might be wrong or unwise to advocate radical multiculturalism, it might be also wrong or unwise to reject multiculturalism *per se*. As we learn from the traditional Chinese concept of *wu ji bi fan* (物极必反 when things are pushed to their limits, they always turn into their opposites), extremity produces self-destruction. When all is said and done, we still need to see the other side of multiculturalism:

1). The world of a single or hegemonic culture is not necessarily the best world. The world of a single, hegemonic culture is not necessarily better than the world of multi-cultures. By the best world is understood here as one that allows humanity to thrive and prosper to the maximum. By a better world is understood here as one that allows humanity to thrive and prosper to a greater extent. The world of a single, hegemonic culture is not necessarily the best matrix of truth, value, beauty, and ideal, at least not necessarily a better one than one of multicultures. The world of a single, hegemonic culture is not necessarily the best one or a better one for the growth and perfection of human character, substance, and capacity, at least not necessarily one better than one of multi-cultures. Here, we should draw a distinction between a world of a single, hegemonic culture and a well-ordered world with unity. The world of a single, hegemonic culture can be a well-ordered one. So can be the world of multi-cultures. The singularity and hegemony of a world is not a necessary condition or a sufficient condition for a well-ordered world.

2). The co-existence of multicultures can be accompanied by greater good. The co-existence of multicultures makes life more challenging. This need not be conceived as something bad. Even if it might be something uncomfortable, it might be accompanied by greater good. For example, the co-existence of multicultures in a society creates a more spacious room for human freedom and creativity in the society. The co-existence of multi-cultures also constitutes a driving force for individuals, societies, nations and peoples to expand their minds and horizons. Only if individuals, societies, nations, and peoples expand their mind and horizons can they see what the poet George Gordon Byron called "a wide realm of wild reality," or what the philosopher Zhuangzi called "the realm of the endless and limitless," appreciating adequately the sun above and rivers and mountains below. Multi-cultures of a society create a situation in which only the real can endure, the better can triumph, the substantial can stand, and the one with strength can move forward. This does not mean that a society governed by the Darwinian rule in which only the fit survives is

better. Instead, it means that the co-existence of multicultures can produce evils, but also can produce goods and greater goods.

3). No incompatibility exists between multiculturalism and having a traditional identity of a society. The key for us here is to see that among cultures, there should be, and there is, a leading culture that plays a leading role in defining the cultural identity of a society. It is for us to distinguish between multiculturalism and equalitarianism. To argue for multiculturalism is one thing, and to advocate equality of all cultures in defining the identity of a society is quite another. It is one thing to talk about the inclusion of cultures. It is quite another to insist that all cultures are equal in their rights and statuses to define the cultural identity of a society. Here, Mao ZeDong's view on contradiction can shed some lights. According to Mao, in a contradiction, a distinction exists between the principal aspect and the secondary aspect of a contradiction. "The principle aspect is the one playing a leading role in the tradition. The nature of a thing is determined mainly by the principal aspect of a contradiction, the aspect that has the dominant position."(Mao, 1969, 297). The traditional cultural-political identity of a society will continue when the traditional culture of that society continues to be the principal aspect of the cultural contradiction of that society. Multiculturalism resists cultural exclusion, but does not necessarily subvert the ruling cultural tradition or dethrone the ruling traditional culture. An endorsement of multiculturalism does not entail an acceptance of what Habermas dubs as "post-nation democracy", in which the demos and the ethos are separated. A multicultural constitutional democracy can be one with the shining character of a traditional or national culture.

4).We cannot eliminate the co-existing multi-cultures of a society without committing some greater evils, oppression and repression of various kinds, in particular, institutional oppression and repression. For example, one cannot eliminate Islam or other minority cultures in many European societies today without institutional oppression and repression. Noteworthy, modern enlightenment's attempt to eradicate traditions and cultures taints its triumph with disaster. The modern communist struggle to oppress cultural diversity extinguishes the fire of its promise of emancipation. Historically, religious oppressions of the so-called heresy in the various parts of the earth, in Thomas Jefferson's words, "make half the world fools, and another half hypocrites." (Jefferson, 1979, 510).

While they do not take multiculturalism itself as the direct, dispositive subject-matter, papers in this volume are concerned with multiculturalism from different angles. In terms of themes, they can be grouped into three categories.

In the first category, papers are devoted to exploring various issues of multiculturalism. In this category, V. Colapietro's paper leads the discussion. It provides a pragmatic defense of philosophical pluralism and criticizes the alleged "the tyranny of method". It calls for philosophers and enquirers to free themselves from the imprisonment of the propensity to institute a philosophical method as *the scientific method* and, therefore, to engage freely and creatively various philosophical traditions as they are. It invites us to return to philosophies and traditions as contingent, contextual, and particular. By contrast, R. Groves' paper defends the possibility and value of grand-narrative as necessary for human understanding. Meanwhile, it

attempts also to do justice to the plurality of human history by limiting the claim and purpose of grand-narrative and walking a fine line between unity and diversity in understanding. X. W. Chen's paper explores the concept of the religious other, indicating the metaphysical, cognitive, ethical, and political challenges of the religious other. It calls for a distinction between the religious other that is a legitimate object of religious toleration and the religious other that is not a proper object of religious toleration. B. Entl's review essay on Habermas' *Europe: The Faltering Project* informs us also Habermas' intellectual struggle with multiculturalism in Europe.

In the second category, K. L. Shun's, C. Y. Li' and W. Y. Xie's paper, as well as the two discussion papers, exemplify the kind of cognitive challenge that multiculturalism presents as mentioned above. Shun's paper examines how better to appreciate Chinese philosophy as a form of philosophy and which way of studying Chinese philosophy is the most fruitful. Li's paper explores the five challenges to Confucianism today. It hammers home the idea that a tradition lives if and only if it continues to inspire. Meanwhile, Xie's paper explores the Confucian concept of religiosity. Noteworthy, the three papers raise a twofold question here. On the one hand, for those who read Chinese philosophy as outsiders, at issue is how to map out Chinese philosophy and way of thinking that is alien. On the other hand, for the community of Chinese philosophical and intellectual enquiry, the question is how best to self-understand and self-conceptualize. For example, how best to conceptualize Chinese metaphysics as a form of metaphysics. How best to conceptualize Chinese religions as forms of religions. Relevant to this two-fold question, Liu's discussion paper, which attempts to translate the traditional Chinese cosmology in the language of modern physics, is a reconstructing enterprise.

In the third category, tracing the footsteps of how *Metropolitan Platon preached at the Court of Empress Catherine the Great (ruled 1762-96)*in a and sought to *reconcile Christian faith and Enlightenment ideas,* E.K. Wirtschafter's paper sheds light on what Habermas would call "the learning process" on the matter of religious toleration today. It sheds some new light to what Habermas would call the "learning process" of religious toleration today. From different angles, the paper also reveals a kind of cognitive challenge that multiculturalism will present.

I would like to conclude this introduction with this observation by Victor Hugo: "The earth hasn't always been occupied by a single kind of civilization ... The human race as a whole has grown, developed, matured as each one of us does individually."(Hugo, 2004, 17).

Reference

1. Berlin, Isaiah. 1997. *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
2. Calhoun, Craig. 2007. "Social Solidarity as a problem for cosmopolitan democracy," in Seyla Benhabib, Ian Shapiro, and Danilo Petranovic (ed), *Identities, Affiliations, and Allegiances*. Cambridge, UK:: Cambridge University Press.

3. Hugo, Victor. 2004. *The Essential of Victor Hugo*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
4. Jefferson, Thomas. 1979. "Notes on the State of Virginia: Query XVII," in R.Gottesman, F.Murphy, L.B.LLand, H.Parker, D.Kalstone, and W.H. Pritchard (ed.), *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*. New York: W.W.Norton & Company.
5. Jürgen Habermas. 2009. *Europe, The Faltering Project*. Cambridge, UK:: Polity Press.
6. Levinas, Emmanuel. 1969. *Totality and Infinity*, trans.Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University press.
7. Mao, ZeDong. 1969. *The Selected Works of Mao ZeDong*. Bejing, China:: People's Publishing House