

WORLD COMPLEXITY, VALUE CONFLICTS, HUMAN WISDOMS

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Abstract

Global humanity is facing increasingly complex problems. Foremost is the complexity of values and value conflicts. How can we effectively face these various challenges and great difficulties coming from our complex global situation? This paper contends that we should learn and borrow from many histories, traditions and cultures. There is no single way or single wisdom that can resolve the complex problems in the world we are facing now. This paper will also appeal to the insights of the Chinese tradition. It also calls for a more complex model of thinking.

บทคัดย่อ

มนุษยชาติทั่วโลกกำลังเผชิญกับปัญหาที่ซับซ้อนเพิ่มขึ้น ปัญหาอันดับแรกคือ ความซับซ้อนของคุณค่าทั่วไปและคุณค่าที่ขัดแย้งกัน ทำอย่างไร เราจะสามารถเผชิญกับความท้าทายและความยุ่งยากอันมหันต์เหล่านี้ซึ่งเกิดขึ้นมาจากสถานการณ์ของโลกใบนี้ที่ซับซ้อน บทความนี้ต้องการเสนอทางออกกว่าเราควรเรียนรู้และหยิบยืมจากประวัติศาสตร์ ประเพณี และวัฒนธรรมต่าง ๆ ไม่มีหนทางเพียงสายเดียวหรือภูมิปัญญาเพียงอย่างเดียวที่จะสามารถแก้ปัญหาที่ซับซ้อนที่เราากำลังเผชิญอยู่ในโลกนี้ได้ บทความนี้ต้องการนำเสนอภูมิปัญญาของชนบจีนอีกด้วย นอกจากนี้ยังเรียกร้องรูปแบบของการคิดที่ซับซ้อนมากกว่าอีกด้วย

How Complex Is Our World Today?

No matter if seen from the scientific angle or philosophical angle, the world is increasing in complexity. But complexity takes different forms in different parts of the world and its different developing periods. We understand from Darwin Evolutional Theory that the development of the life is a tendency towards complexity. Now our world is in the most complex situation in its history.

The complexity of the world suggests that it cannot be understood very accurately, but there is a need to try to understand its most important elements and their challenges to human life.

First, from the elemental level, our world can be considered a complex giant system constructed by virtually unlimited, infinite hierarchies and infinite concrete elements with nearly unlimited types of relations. This can be seen in the way we classify its various forms: natural, social, human; physical, mental, information, economic, political, cultural, scientific, engineering, technological; individual, national, rational, emotional, moral, aesthetic, objective, subjective, practical. These constitute an almost infinitely complex organic stereo network system. Each of these aspects, levels and elements are almost infinite properties and form almost unlimited inter-relationships. They each in their own way directly or indirectly affect the overall function of the system.

Second, human society is composed of numerous conscious persons and their activities. Each individual activity has its conscious purpose, has its value orientation, with its own purpose and value orientation. These purposes may be different, contradictory or come into conflict. The social process is an irreversible process, in the presence of the individuals, groups, class differences and conflict situation will produce even more complex situations.

Third, from the perspective of values, human life is essentially a kind of value choice, it involves cognition, but this cognition is more of an evaluation of advantages and disadvantages between choices. But in today's world this value differentiation involves many conflicts of interests. Between the global and the individual there is a very complex network of values, involving the formation of many knots. These knots involve value contradictions, conflicts, and collisions.

The contemporary world can be said to be a huge complex system of problems. The largest are global problems, including the environment, climate, resources, and energy issues. They directly affect the whole human existence on the earth. The smaller problems involve individual, including violence, drug use, crime, sex, mental confusion. They not only affect the individual survival condition, but also cause serious social problems. Between the global problems and individual problems are race problems and national issues, including various forms of racial conflicts, ethnic conflict, religion conflict and cultural conflict. The above problems range from the macroscopic to microscopic, and to their intertwining, resulting in an extremely complex problem system. For the solving of one particular problem relies on the solving of other problems. We ought to give them the highest attention and concern.

The Value Conflicts in China Today

There are many value conflicts in China today. These result from different value sources: globalization; modernization; new science and high technology, the Western world, nationalism, market economic system, etc. Here I just mention some major conflicts.

1) The conflict between traditional Chinese values and the modern Western values. Since the May 4 movement in Beijing in 1919, there was a very strong and long time's debate around the conflict between the Chinese values and the Western values in China. Since 1978, in the practice of open door policy and the Chinese modernization, the conflict between the traditional Chinese heritages and the new creation of modernization in the western world become obvious and sharp. Following from its meaning, modernization is to create new values. Since western world had modernized itself much earlier than China, China has much to learn from the West. There are some people who believed that the modernization is westernization, therefore there is a strong desire to westernize China. Many Chinese people undervalue traditional Chinese culture and want to give up their own history and culture. Now there is a growing awareness among Chinese people that Chinese modernization can only successfully build on the historical ground of Chinese culture. China should try to combine traditional Chinese values with Western values. There are many core elements of Western values: modernity, freedom, equality, justice, democracy, love, human rights, etc... These are all values that Chinese modernization should learn from. And there are also many traditional Chinese values that are still meaningful even today, for example, the union of Heaven and Man, Ren (benevolence), Yi (righteousness), Li (manners), Zhi (wisdom), Xin (faith), Means (zhongyong), searching the harmony of people and society, etc. These are values which have been developed through the long span of Chinese history. The Chinese socialist modernization should combine all meaningful value elements of human civilization into China no matter they come from the East or the West.

2) The conflict between Marxist and non-Marxist Values. In the past, CCP only respected Marxism and refused all kinds of non-Marxism. Since 1978, Chinese leaders and scholars tried very hard to overcome the misunderstanding of Marxism. They criticized and corrected Chairman Mao Zedong's mistakes in his later years and tried to re-understand Marxism. In the academic area, there was an academic movement named "return to Karl Marx" or "re-understand Karl Marx". They tried to learn from the former Soviet Union and develop a more tolerant attitude to

Marxism, Western Marxism and Western ideology. They also tried to continue the development of Marxism in today's China.

3) The conflict between individual values and social values. In the past, Chinese people believed that collectivism is the main value of Chinese culture and individualism is the main value of western value. Now Chinese people realize that, on the one hand, individual is the foundation of society, all individual's needs should be protected in a just society, all individual's efforts are absolutely necessary in the market society, on the another hand, individuals can only effectively live in and act in the group and society, so collective cooperation is also absolutely necessary for all individuals and whole society. In the modernization process, China needs to encourage all Chinese people to develop themselves and realize themselves.

4) The conflict between the values of social equality and the efficiency value of economic development. There was a long tradition of egalitarianism in China; it obstructed the economic development. At the beginning of social reform in 1978, to encourage all people to try their best to produce general wealth, China developed the important policy of "allowing some people to become rich earlier than others". This functioned to stimulate individual's productive enthusiasm and prompted the efficiency of economic development in a period, but it has led to many new social problems. The greatest problem is the enlarged gap between the rich and the poor. Now China is trying very hard to maintain a balance between social equality and productive efficiency. On the one hand, the country need to reform the working and distribution system in order to collect more money from the richer and to distribute them to the poorer by different ways, on the another hand, the country still needs to encourage the able man to produce more and to earn more according to their contribution to society.

5) The conflict between economic values and the moral values. In the past, there was a tradition in China to stress morality and justice, and to despise benefit and utility. Since 1978, economic development became the central task of the whole of society, but in the meantime, moral education more or less was ignored. As a result, social morality was reduced or fell to some extent. Morality becomes a new social problem in China. Many people became concerned about this situation. Now, China is trying to keep the balance of these two aspects: to keep the central position of economic development and to enhance the moral and political education. The aim of the country is to construct three kinds of civilizations in the one social progress: material civilization, spirit civilization and political civilization. My university and our colleagues are ac-

tually in charge a national research project to cultivate and enhance the national spirit. We hope to make contributions to raise the moral level and enhance national unity.

6) The conflict between universal values and the particular values. In the rapid process of modernization, people are often attracted to universal values and ignore particular values. There are many kinds of particular values which emerge from different sources, for example, the different districts, different social levels, different estates, different benefit groups and different vocations. For example, the gap between urban area and rural area, peasants and workers is still very large. Now the Chinese government pays very close attention to the weaker groups and the less developed districts.

What Can We Learn from Chinese Culture and Philosophy?

Different nations and cultures have their own wisdom to resolve their problem and to improve them. What can Chinese culture and philosophy can provide? We list some of the most important.

1) The Unity between Sky and Earth (天人合一)

The idea of the unity of Humanity and Heaven (the Nature) is one of the key points of Chinese culture. Now our entire world is facing sharp contradictions between the human being and Nature. Various challenges, such as environment pollution, weather problems, and different natural disasters and so on, are increasingly threatening the safety of our world and gradually damaging the existence of Human beings. Superficially, it seems that they are created and induced by nature itself. However, in fact many of them are man-made disasters, or at least the side effects of human behavior. From the guiding idea, this results from absolute rationalism. Concerning these emergencies, the basic topic of Chinese philosophy is to find out the possible ways to achieve the unity between human beings and nature, to harmonize Sky and Earth. Chinese philosophers always stressed that nature is not the slave of human beings but an equal companion with human life. Man should stay with the nature on good terms. Human beings should respect and protect nature. To protect nature is to protect the necessary environment of human life. To protect nature is to protect and care about human beings themselves. This is not just for the benefit of a single individual, single country or single nationality, but for the planet and for human civilization as a whole. This is not

just for one generation, but for generation after generation into the future. In this sense, we might say that Chinese thought with its thousands of years history, has a special insight into this respect for a sustainable relationship with nature and respect for future generations.

2) **The Mean or the Golden Rule** (中庸之道)

The Mean (Zhong Yong, also called as Golden Rule) is one of the most important perspectives and approaches in Chinese Philosophy. In the daily life, people always un-consciously tend to be involved in a model of thinking featuring of binary opposition, such as good or bad, good or evil, true or false, friend or enemy, and so on. However, in fact the real world is extremely complex, which requires a more comprehensive worldview and a wiser way of thinking. The Mean or the Golden Rule is one of the wisest principles of thinking embodied in Chinese philosophy. The Mean, as well as “the Impartiality”, “the golden mean” or “the doctrine of the mean”, indicates the need to give up the two extremes, but to hold to the middle. From the epistemological angle, it never means to master an object in a comprehensive and perfect viewpoint, but to avoid any kind of extreme, excessiveness or partiality. In the social life, it insists that people should cultivate their right judgments and maintain balanced positions, no matter what others are saying or doing. The Mean is also an important methodology for people to handle complex matters more wisely.

3) **Collectivist Spirit and Family Values** (集体精神和家庭价值)

No matter in which society, how to deal well with the relationship between individuals and collective is one of the most serious of problems. There is such a long and strange tradition of individualism in the West. It tends to give attention only to the needs, positions and functions of individuals, as well as passionately encouraging individual development and freedom. It has played an important role in the development of Western civilization, while also causing so many serious problems and difficulties. Now we should learn more from the Collectivism in Chinese philosophy and culture. In Chinese philosophy, an individual is one cell of the whole society. In this sense, every cell can realize its nature and function when becoming an organized part of certain organization. Society is composed and organized by Individuals but has more functions and common needs than every single individual. In the society, such an organized organism, all individuals inseparably rely on each other. So they should learn to respect each other, understand each other, help each other, cooperate

with each other, and even more. The society as a whole should be a united integration featuring of Co-laboring, co-living, co-existing and co-sharing.

4) Social Harmony (社会和谐)

Building and maintaining a harmonious society constitutes the historical aspirations of Chinese people. Chinese philosophers emphasize that people should stay on friendly terms, as well as avoid irrational conflicts and unjust wars. It insists that people should respect and help each other. The harmonious relationship is based on the common understanding of virtues. The rulers should treat their people kindly and considerately as they would treat their own children. To show the respect to the old and to protect youth have been regarded as the basic virtues for Chinese extending back to ancient China. Traditional Chinese virtues, such as diligence and filial piety, still have meaning for the contemporary era, and should become an intrinsic content of Marxist ethics.

Complexity and Complex Thinking

The complex and serious global problems, which involve diverse value conflicts, suggest that any particular kind of wisdom is not enough to solve the problem; we must learn to cultivate complexity thinking. Complexity thinking involves multiple perspectives and ideas, and functions different from simple thinking.

First, we should be aware of the complexity factors, in the global world and apply this to our comprehensive system thinking.

Second, we should be attentive to random variables, dynamic reversible process, and the use of diachronic thinking.

Third, we should perceive the diverse conflict of values, and the use of selective thinking.

Fourth, we should try to develop interdisciplinary and multi-level cooperation, and apply this to our subjective and integrated thinking.

Fifth, we should think of the harmony of society with the help of modern science, technology and networks.

Sixth, we should be conscious of both original creation and practical application, and integrate them into our thinking.