



A Comparative Study of the Metaphysical Basis of Ancient Iran-China Political Approach

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Abstract: Considering the cosmology with mythological form of consciousness era as the primary base of metaphysical form and the basis of development toward an integrated cosmology, political ideas has been placed in an organic link with a metaphysical system in the ancient Persians as well as Chinese political thought. Based on considerable similarities among cosmological systems in civilizations e.g. the Chinese, Indian, Egyptian, and Persian nations a comparison of the metaphysical base of the ancient civilizations' political ideas could be an interesting subject in the field of political thought. This article has a brief comparative glance at the metaphysical basis of the political thought in the Persian as well as Chinese cosmology. The research questions include:

- 1- In the two ancient civilizations – Persia and China – how was political thought related to their metaphysical bases. And;
- 2- In comparison, how could the relation conceptualized?

This study enables us to understand the nature of political thought in the first days of human civilization.

Keywords: Cosmology; Metaphysical system; Cosmic equilibrium; Belief in resurrection; Salvation religion; Cosmological monotheism; Cosmological dualism.

Introduction

China and Persia are two ancient civilizations each of which formed a big stable culture; meanwhile each of them showed a different kind of cosmology in the formation phase of its civilization; one cosmology– the Chinese cosmology – is based on ethics, while the other (the Persian cosmology) is based on religion.

In this regard, each passed through a special direction in completing cosmology and

metaphysics. Since ancient political thought was centered around the political ruler, and the political ruler was thought to be a part cosmological system, a comparison of rulership theory in the two different (Chinese and Persian) cosmology can be an interesting subject in studying ancient political thought in general, and these two civilizations' political ideas in particular.

This paper tries to determine the relationship between the political idea in the two civ-

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ilizations and their cosmological bases, and how this relationship can be comparatively conceptualized, and how their similarities and differences can be identified and introduced. This study enables us to understand the nature of the political approach in the two civilizations at the advent, and evolution of their thinking bases.

At the beginning of human civilization, metaphysics appeared and grew up in its primitive form in cosmology; so here we primarily deal with the cosmology of these two civilizations and the relationship between political ideas and their cosmologies. Cosmologies are thinking systems, which connect various fields of ideas; both ideas related to beginning and end of the world, and social, political and ethical ideas relation to each other. Cosmologies have, in fact, theorized the practical systems of socio-political life in their ways. They are among the signs of human's self-alienation in this phase of mental evolution i.e. they have projected actual life system into cosmic system.

Since cosmologies as mental creation have constantly been evolving, a specific time and closed identity framework cannot be determined for them. Their conceptual boundaries can, however, be identified, and defined. In this article, we are speaking of the Chinese cosmology and the Persian one, in singular form, while we are aware of and will mention their evolutionary aspect and the roles various ideas and scholars have played in developing them.

We suppose that, apart from the changes in the descriptive and conceptual elements of each cosmology, a special identity can be identified in general as a system for each. Here, we focus on those general aspects of the cosmologies, which show a single identi-

ty, all together. while changing in many details.

When we say Chinese and Persian cosmology, we mean is that mental system which grew through myths, epics, and rites and eventually evolved in philosophical and theological forms at the time known as the ancient time of both civilizations. In these fields, a big source of texts was provided in the 6th-9th centuries (B.C.) in China, while such a source is not available in Iran except the myths belonging to later times; this is why we mostly focus on myths, rites, religious texts (e.g. Avesta), and their interpretations for studying the Persian cosmology, while in China, there are a lot of texts of well-developed schools of thoughts. We are not to discuss Chinese philosophical schools; instead, we will focus on cosmological traditions, and texts focusing on cosmology in some famous philosophical schools including Confucianism. Discussion of Chinese cosmology in philosophical schools is, by itself, a broad and important subject that goes far from this paper.

Cosmology and political ideas

Although there are not considerable texts from the early days of human civilization history, including the Chinese and Persian civilization on the field called "political thought", (or it could not have been provided), it can certainly be said that political idea has been the main part of all cosmologies even at the time of dominating mythical cosmology. Nations that had taken the first steps to civilization, and some social differentiation, and to the first forms of government, faced such questions as the nature of political authority, source of political legitimacy, nature of political responsibility,

source of social institutions, law status, and the most important of them, understanding and justifying political inequalities, and so tried to find their answer the questions. At the first phases of evolution in humans' consciousness, myths tried to enable understanding and transmit answers to these questions in forms of narration, allusion, metaphor, symbolism.

Ancient cosmologies are the central core of a theoretical system reflecting issues, which ancient civilizations were facing. Cosmologies express in ideas that we express today in forms of concepts, ideas such as sources of political legitimating, social norms, forms of political governance, the relation between worldly leader and heavenly sovereign etc. Because of confusion between political matter and social matter in mythical period of consciousness in the Persian civilization, the manner of socio-political organizations have to be studied through myths, epics, rites, and religious teachings. These cultural sources, which have passed through devastating historical events, can be used to produce a kind of theoretical system in the form of cosmological categorization.

Man has always reflected the actual order of his life by means of symbolic culture in an order of ideal form. Although the ratio of the practical order of life has a dialectic, and bilateral relationship with its theoretical order; in this dialectics, actual orders has to be considered as the reference point; and theoretical order have to be considered as its reflection. Man has reflected the practical order of his life in cosmic theoretical order to give it a divine and eternal character. Cosmology has presented an order of life in an ideal form and a divine source where the earthly and heavenly existence obeys a unified order, which had been known to be based upon justice and temperance. This ideal justice has, in fact,

been the unconscious justification for the appearance of difference and discrimination, and class differentiation in the actual life system.

The Foundation Cosmological systems in China and Iran

Before discussing cosmological systems, and political thoughts in China and Iran; first, it's better note that cosmology has grown up in different bases in China and Iran. Although cosmology and metaphysic involved in it has grown up from a mythological system in Iran and China as well, their development has taken place in different beds; in China, cosmology and political thought was bred in a tradition so called sage tradition, while in Iran, religion and religious cosmology were the foundation for developing wisdom, and thought. The sage tradition in China developed a kind of cosmology known as "the ethical cosmology". As a comparison, it is safe to say that in the west (i.e. Greece, Rome, and Europe) a third kind of cosmology was developed as "the philosophical cosmology or specialized metaphysical cosmology". So, it can be said that in the way of the development of the 3 civilizations: Chinese, Persian-Islamic, and Western, there have been 3 kinds of cosmology including ethical, religious, and philosophical cosmologies, each consisting of particular aspects.

In China, political thought was mostly based on practical aspects with no special attention to the theoretical aspects. In China, practical ethics had the same position in developing theories as philosophy did in the West and theology and mysticism in Iran.

The Chinese Cosmology

Two different ideological traditions were developed in ancient China; one in the written series known as "Yang-Yin" and the oth-

er in written series known as “appendixes”. Appendix was writings and interpretations Confucius’ anonymous followers added in a book known as “Changes”. The book “Changes”, in itself, is an important writing in Chinese cosmology. Later on, in the Sumatan era, the two traditions were mixed so that in the book “Historical backgrounds”, an important reference of Chinese cosmology, it was called Yang-Yin religion (Fung Yu-Lan, 174:1380).

What we call the Chinese cosmology, is not only as school of thought consisting of theories and beliefs developed and dispersed among a group of Chinese scholars. Besides being developed in the works of Chinese scholars including Confucian ones, the Chinese cosmology has become a part of peoples’ believe. In China, religion and ethics have grown up separately so that people follow Tao in religion and Confucius in ethics. Taoism is, however, different from the general implication of religion.

In the Chinese cosmology, beings are seen as a unified system consisting of all mental and dynamic elements. The value of the world tends to goodness, life moves toward one super destination, and evil forces cannot keep it from dynamics, and developments (Fung, 1980:95). God, the heaven, or nature (all with almost the same meaning) provides goodness. The heaven has provided us with happiness, but to put it in uses, one needs to try. Man has to try to keep away himself from selfishness to help good life to improve. Happiness is a human phenomenon, because it is the product of his attempt. Enlightened minds accept supreme values running toward human from the high levels of beings. Human is in an orderly balance with life creating elements (Fung, 1980:95).

Hsin-Wu

One of the first ideas about the Chinese cosmology is in a text called “Hsin-Wu”. The text dated to the 4th or 3rd century (B.C.). According to it, the world is made of 9 elements, 5 of which are water, soil, fire, wood, and metal. Various powers are made by mixing these elements. The eighth element includes signs that determine the rulers’ function and guide him in performing his duties. Sunlight, heat, cold, rain, wind, and equinox are the elements that in case they happen in time, they will flourish life, and fertilize it. Each of these elements is symmetric to a feature of the ruler. Timely rain is symmetric to a feature of the ruler: it is symmetric to the ruler’s dignity, timely heat to the ruler’s wisdom, sunlight to the ruler’s discipline, timely cold to his thoughtfulness. The ruler’s right actions are symmetric to the timely appearance of the above elements, and his wrong actions are symmetric to their untimely appearance. Their timely appearance will flourish nature and increase products, and their untimely appearance will create an imbalance in nature and is considered destructive. Their untimely appearance also warns the ruler to reform his behavior and prevent the untimely appearances (Yu-Lan, 1380: 177).

As we have seen, in the Chinese cosmology, the beings and political society are connected to each other like members of a body, and obey a sample governed by the principles of equilibrium and temperance. As we will see, in the Persian cosmology, the same organism is, and organic relation of natural, social, and political forces exists.

Monthly rules

“Monthly rules” is a document dating to late 3rd century (B.C.) related to Yang-Yin reli-

gion. It is a guide for duties the ruler and people have to perform during each month. Its logic is to accord socio-political forces to natural forces and cosmic structure. The timely performance of the rules is accorded to the nature of beings and preservers discipline and prevents anarchy. For instance, in the first month of the year, the ruler should ban cutting off trees, and breaking bird nests, prevent war operations, and propagate faith samples among citizens. According to the document, the imbalance between the ruler's action and cosmic rules will lead to an imbalance between society, and the nature, and cause anarchy.

Harmony and balance

Harmony, balance and equilibrium are the most important aspects of the Chinese cosmology. The world is the permanent source of energy, and life. Movement in life is the source of eternal creation and variety. Life's spirit is reflected in love's spirit (Thome, 1980: 46). Life is an active being that shows its improvement in a creative manner. The primary essence is unique on the one sense, and numerous on the other sense. Life is the essence chain from the heaven and earth linking people to each other. The creative energy exists in the infinite variety of life manifestation leading it all to the final eternity (Book of change, II, 8).

Life essence is, in fact, one turning into numerous running in uncountable forms in uncountable beings. Lao-tzu suggests: "Tao created one, one created two, two created three, and three created everything" (Thome, 1980:48). The earth is the field of countless activities which are influenced by a single being. He says Tao is the one that includes everything. The principle of harmony and balance is the main principle that is the embodiment of Chinese spirit.

This viewpoint is seen in Chinese music and poetry as well. The principle forms the history and social rules of China. Moreover, the principle guarantees that all aspects of personal life are worth appreciating. We have to deal with kindness and love with all these forms. All sources of life deserve appreciation. Tao that is the main source of life, and spread in all beings and observes no limitations, links a chain of interdependence of all life forms to each other, and all these forms are meaningful and valuable (Book of change, II, 15).

Therefore, we can realize that the base of Chinese cosmology is something based on unification and harmony. Life's stimulus is its natural creativity. What the ruler has to do is directed toward dynamics and eternity. The ruler's actions must follow a harmony, and an equilibrium that are the essence of life. Chinese writers have discussed in detail how to go through this way. As the sage son of the heaven, the ruler recognizes the way and leads the society.

The Persian cosmology

Persian cosmology has considerable similarities with Chinese cosmology in many aspects, while it has essential differences with it in some aspects. The aspects connecting the Persian cosmology to the Chinese are related to elements in which many ancient cosmologies are alike. The cosmologies of ancient Mesopotamia, ancient Egypt, ancient Persia, and ancient China are similar in aspects which include the main aspects of cosmology:

- 1- The reference of life to such generality as cosmic system.
- 2- The dominance of a eternal law over all existence including the political and ethical life.
- 3- The inherent link between divine and earthy kingdom.

4- The priority of sage and virtues king.

The aspect of animism that is among the inherent elements of cosmology at the era of mythical consciousness is seen in all mentioned cosmologies.

Man's basic questions on the source of life, and man's position in the being order are answered in form of mythical orders (Frankfort, 1961). It was assumed that all living things link to each other in an organic form. The 3 domains of being (nature, society, and human being) were not seen separate from each other. In every cosmological system, a unique eternal law is assumed for discipline which is in itself related to cosmic system. This eternal law in different cosmological systems is given different names such as "rta" (ancient India), "Aša" (ancient Persia), "Tao" (ancient China), "Ma, at" (ancient Egypt), etc. The concept is the idealized form of the need for a law and order in life.

The Persian cosmology is different with the Chinese in some aspects including:

- 1- The idea of the ultimate salvation,
- 2- The belief in resurrection,
- 3- The cosmic source of position, and function,
- 4- The substance duality, and
- 5- The resurrection and redeemer (eschatological ends)

The belief in duality is an important aspect in every cosmological system. however, it has had a trend toward substantial belief in duality in the latter ancient Persia; what is not seen in the Chinese, and Indian cosmologies. Although Zoroaster's teachings were a monotheistic reaction against ancient beliefs in polytheism, Mazdaic religion – flourished from within Zoroastrian teachings – had a trend toward the belief in duality of an essential kind. The belief in duality in Mazdaic

religion at the Sasanite era (in Persia) is known as a critical duality, because it believes in two separate essences, i.e. the good and the evil, and two such creators as Ahura Mazda and Ahriman. These two essences are in an ever-lasting quarrel with each other, which will finally lead to the inevitable victory of the good over the evil, and the victory of Ahura Mazda over Ahriman. Evil are believed to be up rooted via this victory, and the world will end up to unification, and integrity. This fight is the only way to eradicate the evil in the world (Doueches Guillemain, 1385:105).

In a most influential Chinese cosmology – the Yang-Yin religion – as said before, the two elements – Yang and Yin – are two opposite elements that create all the world, this is while Yan and Yin, contrary to what is believed about the light and darkness, and Ahura Mazda and Ahriman in Mazdaic theology, are complementary to each other rather than fighting each other. There are no controversial in Yang and Yin. Yang forms the spiritual heaven, and Yin forms the spiritual earth, and one cannot survive without the other, while Ahriman creates confusion, and disorder, and Ahura Mazda is successful after it defeats Ahriman.

Salvation and resurrection:

Iranians are the first nation who has had a theological viewpoint in the history; the viewpoint that influenced Judaism, and Christianity, both of which have also had a divine viewpoint in the history. Such a viewpoint is based on a philosophy of history that conceptualizes history as having a start, and a specified direction and destination.

In the Persian cosmology, a kind of cosmic circle is thought in which the good and

the evil, light and darkness, Sepanta mainu and Angara mainu, and Urmazd and Ahri-man are fighting each other. Mankind's destiny is influenced by this fight. Man has an important role in helping good powers to gain victory over the evil, and light over darkness.

Widengren— a great scholar— suggests that resurrection-based viewpoint in religions and western believe are based on the Persian viewpoint, and the teaching on the historical circle and the ultimate resurrection is certainly Persian (Widengren, 482:1377).

He says: “Persian religions are salvation-based in their entire aspects and forms, and everything is directed to a personal and collective salvation. The final step to man’s ultimate level of perfection is, in fact, taken in the ultimate resurrection and the final home.

As said before, the Chinese cosmology lacks a resurrection-based viewpoint similar to that of the Persian cosmology. In the Chinese cosmology, man’s perfection is gained in this world. The world is the place where creative powers enable him to move toward perfection.

In the Chinese cosmology, the world is full of infinite creative energy, change, and process new discoveries (Fang, 1980:51). The constant process of change that forms Tao’s creative movement as the rule for the creatures shows the trend to constant perfection and the development in all beings in the way to perfection.

The constant change in time, and the unity of all beings that are Tao’s signs, is the source of creation and eternal creativity. Perfection means perfect harmony with Tao.

Belief in Savior: (escathological biase)

The belief in Savior in the Persian cosmology is connected to resurrection-based viewpoint. In this cosmology, there are teachings about

cosmic circulation according which formation of the evil in a world that has essentially been good, has disturbed cosmic balance and has made confusion in the world. To solve the problem, and rebalance the world, the evil should be eradicated. The duality in the Mazdaian cosmology is also related to this viewpoint. According to the Mazdaian cosmology, Urmazd and Ahri-man, each creates their followers to win their quarrel. Following reason, human will enable Ahuraian powers to win the battle. The ultimate victory is gained with the appearance of a savior and his help to human.

Dividing the world into two distinct categories, (Ahuraian, and Ahri-manian), and the quarrel between them are among the aspects of the Persian cosmology. In the Chinese cosmology (as well as the Indian), the quarrel between divine and the evil forces also exists. When the evil entered the world, it disturbed everything, and the unification of the world will be possible with the ultimate resurrection (Kuvergie Kubahi (1383:400). In the Persian cosmology, however also, contrary to the Greek viewpoint, cosmic circulation does not lead to eternal circulation, and also contrary to the Indian Calpas, it is not based on the eternal retropection (Zeahner, 1385:181). The cosmic circulation in the Persian cosmology ends to resurrection and the ultimate salvation for be nevolents and eternal destruction of malevolents, and finally to Aša dominance and Ahura Mazda’s ultimate kingdom.

Belief in savior has an ancient root in Iranian religios, and it is not limited to Zoroastrianism. In Mehr religion – one of the most ancient religion in Iran – the savior has a high position (Boil, 1385:90). There are two interpretations on savior in Avesta. In Gathas, the oldest part of Avesta, something is mentioned about Sušiant who is known as a savior by

many interpreters. In later eras, Zoroastrians also had the same inference about the world, but Zaehner – the famous Iranologist – does not agree with the inference; he considers Sušiant equal as Zoroaster. He believes that Zoroaster hoped to perform his teachings in this world, and there is nothing about resurrection in what is called “Gathas” in Avesta old songs (Zaehner, 1975:76).

The earthy ruler and the divine ruler

In the Persian cosmology also the ruler is considered as a part of an integrated cosmic system. In Iran, also, the earthy system was seen in relation with the divine system, and depending on a general rule governing the entire world. The ruling system in the earthy system was among cosmic systems. The earthy kingdom was in fact an instance of the divine kingdom. In Egyptian, Mesopotamian, and Indian cosmology, also, the ruler was closely related to the divine kings, and had a specified function assigned by them as well. In the Egyptian cosmology, the ruler (Pharaoh) was himself among gods and their decedent, and his commands were seen as divine commands. In Mesopotamia, the ruler was a representative of the divine gods, and performed their rules on the earth (Jacobsen, 1961).

In the Persian cosmology, the ruler was seen as an agent of the divine gods, and he considered himself the accomplisher of gods' commands. How they proved their relation to gods' is in itself a broad discussion.

In Chinese cosmology, as said before, the ruler had a special position among the beings. He was a sage ruler, and this wisdom connected him to the cosmic system in a special way. The difference between the Persian ruler, and the Chinese, apart from the unity

thought, is related to the ruler's special position in the wisdom order that has an organized condition in Chinese tradition. In China, there are numerous complete documents from mayor writers and philosophers in which the wisdom has been fully defined.

Moreover, in China, there are complete detail in these writing on the ruler's practical responsibilities because of two reasons: one reason is the general trend of Chinese thought toward the practical ethics, and the practical aspects, and the other is the survival of a big heritage of the writings by the scholars that makes many details on political issues available for us.

The divine source of socio-political Class

The description of the ruler's legitimacy and personal and social function is a part of every cosmology. In this regard, the Persian cosmology has some similar features as well as some different aspects with the Chinese cosmology. Human communities in primitive cultures believed in supreme aspects of their rulers, and also thought they had special abilities. These graces and abilities sometimes compared with super-natural capacities. Emil Durkheim – the famous French sociologist, has analyzed the nature and features of these thoughts in detail, and presented them in sociological terms. As he suggests, primitive tribes believed in the supremacy of their rulers based in a special force called “Mana”.

In ancient Persian believe, had long been concepts like Farran (abundance) which became an important element in the Persian cosmology, and in its new forms save place in philosophical, religious, and even Gnostic schools, and appeared in new manifestation. Although connected with the ruler's grace at the first instance, Farrah was not just for the

rulers. What specially belongs to the rulers is the kingly Farrah, that people are deprived of it. This is while everybody has, Farrah according to their own social class, and is responsible for doing his specified function because of it. Rulers, heroes, leaders, social classes, all, have their own abundance. Rulers have a special Farran referred to as Kingship Farran. Possessing the kingly abundance is connected to following justice.

(Farrah) got new presentations in form of symbols, figures and objects. These symbols were reformed versions of that invented in the Egyptian civilization. Egyptians had used lily as the symbol of procreation to show achievement of super-natural graces. Achaemenians got the symbol from Mesopotamian kings, and reformed it as their symbol of abundance (Soodavar, 1985:100). Later on, other such symbols as crown, rampart, and head band appeared as symbols of Farrar, and besides rulers, other social classes used them to show their splendor.

The concept of abundance in Persian cosmology had a more clear reflection than in the Chinese, and other cosmologies. In ancient times, there were also religions that worshiped symbols of abundance (Korerjie Kobajie, 1992:351). Iranian also believed in a special abundance for their race called the Arian Farrah.

In ancient cosmologies, there also was Class categorization as an essential element of cosmology. In both Iranian, and Chinese cosmologies, there were explanations on class categorize a class. In the explanations, categorization had a super-natural aspect, and its source was related to super-natural forces. In the Iranian thoughts, between special categorizations and work division between classes and cosmic hierarchy and work division between gods, there was an interesting ideology. Dumezil – A well-known Iranologist–,

who has studied Arian myths and religions, has identified 3 categories of gods in Indian and Persian cosmologies, each as a symbol of a special function and class. He suggests that Mitra and Vrona were the symbols of cleric (Moubads – The clergies), Indra was the symbol of warriors, and Nastia was the symbol of the producing class (farmers and husbandpersons) (Widengen, 1999:142). Zeaner– the above mentioned scholars– suggest that as its relative society, the Iranian society was clearly divided into three classes including: Cleric, Warriors and farmers each of which had its own god in the divine system.

In ancient Chinese mythology, social categorization also had a kind of divine aspect. One ancient Chinese myth suggests that human was made by a goddess named Gera from processed pottery clay. In this myth, people made of yellow clay became the ruling class or nobles and those made from dark clay became ordinary people (Bidel, 2006:15). People made from yellow clay and known as the ruling class or nobles had their own god i.e. Huvangvi – the god which turned later into an arch god.

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