Preface

The purpose of the book is to investigate the relationship between hermeneutical theory and ethics in a global-critical, intercivilizational and postcolonial framework. East Asian philosophy, notably Confucian teaching of interpretation and the moral self, is revived and encounters Western theories of hermeneutics and morality. For conceptual clarity, I define the hermeneutical self as human existence conditioned in language, history, and life connections. Ethics of the Other, or the difference, involves how we understand moral conduct of life in connection with history, language and culture, and to what extent our moral consciousness is shaped in interaction with others. An ethical-hermeneutical mediation sharpens a hermeneutics of the 'subject' as moral 'self' in a comparative religious framework. In our world, vulnerable to fragility and the clash of civilizations, an engagement with dialogue between civilizations is indeed an urgent task to be taken on earnestly for the formation of the hermeneutical subject as ethical self.

Civilization in the Second Axial Age and Global Capitalism

Under the growing influence of the world's religious traditions, known as the second Axial Age, intercivilizational dialogue is relevant to our own time. The period from 900–200 BCE has been termed the *first Axial Age* (Karl Jaspers), an age marked as the beginning of the nourishing of humanity and ethical virtue. Most of the great world religions came into being during this time. I would extend the period of the first Axial Age to include Jesus and Mohammad. Confucianism and Daoism in China; monotheism in Israel; Christianity in the Greco-Roman world; Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism in India; a philosophical rationalism in Greece; and later Islam. The first Axial Age was one of the most seminal periods and went uneclipsed until the Great Western Transformation (Karl Polanyi) created scientific and technological modernity.[1]

All the great sages of the first Axial Age lived in times full of fear, violence, and horror. For example, the China of Kongzi and Laozi was engaged for centuries in one war after another, remaining constantly in a state of war. The ancient civilization of China became more aggressive

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1   Armstrong,*Great Transformation*, xii.

as it matured. Kongzi, lamenting deeply over the chaotic situation, tried to rebuild Chinese societies affected by conflict and war by compiling and mediating between the tradition of ethical virtues and rituals. He brought out their compassionate and altruistic potential and socio-moral relationship, re-envisioning a harmonious society. Interpretation of tradition and ethical virtue came together. Here, the *ethical* self is defined as the *interpreting* self, engaged with transmitting the wisdom of tradition. The essential dynamic of compassion is summed up in the Golden Rule, which was first enunciated by Kongzi around 500 BCE: 'Do not do to others what you would not have done to you'.[2] In the first Axial Age, a new ethical significance was introduced and morality placed at the heart of spiritual life. Understanding religion as compassion, the sages of the first Axial Age did not create their compassionate ethics in idyllic circumstances, but contextualized their teachings in the turbulence of violence and warfare.[3]

The eighth century BCE was also a terrifying and astonishing period in Greece. While it was a time of great artistic creativity, it was also a time of fragility, tragedy and much violence. The Greeks were, in many cases, beset by the political events they told in their great tragedies. The most important development of the eighth century was the creation of the *polis* (the small, independent city-state), where citizens learned the art of self-government. The *polis* was an egalitarian society where most people could become a citizen (with the exception of slaves and women). Since the entire *polis* had become an aristocratic warrior society, everybody was expected to be a participant in the battle; there was fierce egotism and aggression inherent in the *polis* which frequently led to violence and killing. Each *polis* had to compete constantly and violently with the other *poleis* for dominion, power, and wealth.[4]

Today we are amid a second Axial Age, undergoing a period of transition, spiritually and religiously similar to that of the first Axial Age. However, our age is remarkably distinguished by encounters with many forms of civilization and refined by the marvel of advanced technologies. Its roots lie in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries of the modern era, when the people of Western Europe began to propose dialectics of enlightenment and evolve a different type of rationality and society as a result of 'disenchantment of the world' (Max Weber). Capitalism as a world-wide economic system had been launched with the initial stage stamped by colonialism, violence, and genocide, in the aftermath of Columbus's 'discovery'. Theories of social contract built upon possessive individualism, self-regulating principles of market economics and subsequent industrial revolution have marked Western civilization as that which transformed the

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2   *Ibid.*, xiv.
3   *Ibid.*
4   *Ibid.*, 104.

world according to the image of capital and possessive individualism. The civilization that vibrated in the process of great transformation has, in turn, faced the reality of the 'iron cage'.

Capitalist civilization has been a successful and seductive civilization, coercing its victims and its opponents; it is currently enjoying the autumn of existence, yet preparing for the winter frost and facing dilemmas of capital accumulation, political legitimatization, and the geocultural agenda.[5] Capitalist civilization has been built around a geocultural theme, that is, the centrality of the individual as the subject of history. The self-interest of the individual is harnessed both to the flourishing and to the maintenance of system. In the mythology of capitalist civilization, individualism becomes a source for the stimulus of energy, initiative, and imagination. But it also is the ruthless struggle for all against all, seeking to maximize efficiency and release the power of human imagination.[6] The Promethean myth in the period of great transformation has become the myth of Procrustes's bed, the iron cage of the colonized lifeworld of late modern capitalism.

For the sake of an alternative to possessive individualism and the current crisis of global civilization, people all over the world are struggling to create a new condition or vision for human dignity and ecological sustainability. They have been forced to reassess their religious traditions, challenging Western-centric models of individualism, rationality, and civilization. Like the reformers and prophets of the first Axial Age, people today are attempting to build upon the insights of the past, undertaken in a way that will move human beings forward into the new world under the banner of justice, solidarity, and recognition. In the aftermath of colonialism, postcolonial theory, which undergirds a politics of cultural hybridity and favors the rights of the subaltern, considers its intercivilizational alliance and solidarity. This ushers in a critical evaluation of globalization and articulates the importance of the plurality of civilizations.

Plurality of Civilization and Mutual Engagement

Our present Axial Age is characterized by globalization, increasing interaction among people (trade, investment, tourism, media, electronic communication, etc.) and generating a common world culture. We live in one world with many forms of civilization, and we have to learn to live with solidarity and diversity, at home and abroad. Human history is defined as the history of civilization. The idea of civilization was developed in opposition to the concept of barbarism. To be civilized was to be good and desirable, whereas to be uncivilized was inferior and bad. In the Western context, the concept of civilization has provided a standard by which to judge non-Western societies. Non-western societies have been judged according to

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5   Wallerstein, *Historical Capitalism with Capitalist Civilization*, 137, 141.

6   *Ibid.*, 151-3.

the yardstick of the Western-dominated system, rationality, and scholarship. A Eurocentric concept of representation and ideological ties is uncovered through the colonial discourse of "Orientalism" (Edward Said).

Today, people speak of civilizations in the plural, as a single standard for what is 'civilized' remains elusive because it is confined to a few privileged people or groups among humanity's elite. Genealogy of knowledge and power (Foucault) denounces one universal model of civilization as the principle of metanarrative, which reduces the Other stories into the same story by suppressing the Other's uniqueness and difference. Instead, plural forms of civilization (many civilizations) have to be recognized and valued in their own respective ways. Both civilization and culture refer to the overall way of life of a people, and a civilization as 'a culture writ large' is 'a collection of cultural characteristics and phenomena'.[7]

Civilization is the inevitable destiny of a culture, and it is important for those to challenge the myopic view of history prevailing in the West. A Ptolemaic shift takes place in history, by calling for the drama of the plurality of global cultures and civilizations. In light of the multidirectional interactions among all civilizations, a critique has to be given of the parochialism and impertinence of the West. This aspect is grounded in egocentric illusions for the sake of a universal European civilization. We need a global-critical epistemology to overcome the myopic view of history and civilization.

Civilizations are comprehensive totalities; the broadest cultural entities, they have no clear-cut boundaries and no precise beginnings and endings, changing over time through interaction and overlap among cultures. Civilizations are very long-lived (in the fashion of Braudel's *longue durée*), evolving, adapting, and enduring in the way of all capitalist cultures.[8] Its long historical continuity shows that civilization, as the longest story of all, survives political, social, economic, and even ideological upheavals.

According to Samuel Huntington, global politics has become multipolar and multicivilizational in the post-cold-war era. Contact between civilizations has become a global reality. Non-Western countries in East Asia are developing economic wealth, creating the basis for enhanced military power and political influence. They assert their own cultural values and reject concepts imposed on them from the West. Culture entails both a divisive and unifying force.

Values, social relations, and customs differ significantly among civilizations. The revitalization and resurgence of religions throughout the world reinforces the cultural differences, demonstrating opportunity, crisis, and local wars. The major differences in political and economic development among civilizations are rooted in their different cultures

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7   Huntington, *Clash of Civilizations*, 41.
8   Arrighi, *Long Twentieth Century*.

and religious ethos. East-Asian economic success has its source in East-Asian culture and a Confucian ethos at large. Cultural commonalities and differences shape the interests, antagonisms, and associations of states. Viewing the world in terms of seven or eight civilizations, Huntington argues that a civilizational paradigm aims at understanding what is going on in our globe. It is important to address differences among civilizations. Shifting from the West to non-western civilization, global politics has become multipolar and multicivilizational.[9]

However, Huntington prefers a model of Western universal civilization over and against the model of multiculturalism in American society. In contrast, Eck's model of a new religious America is built on the marbling of civilization, which is a constructive proposal in counter to the model of clash of civilizations. Amid the plurality, there is the expression of our *unum* (*E Pluribus Unum*; From Many, One).[10]

Confucian Ethics: Self-cultivation and Interpretation

For a paradigm of cultural engagement and flourishing, I take Confucian philosophy and its virtue ethics as a dialogue partner with the Western philosophy of hermeneutics and moral theory. The term 'Confucianism' can be traced back to the Jesuits of the sixteenth century. At the end of the sixteenth century, an Italian Jesuit, Matteo Ricci (1552–1610), arrived in China. Ricci transliterated the name Kongzi as Confucius and paid great attention to Confucian texts, studying Confucian classics as part of his Jesuit-mission strategy of accommodation. Introducing Confucianism to Europe, Ricci can be regarded as the father of Confucian studies in the West, initiating the dialogue of civilizations between West and East.

Confucian humanism imbued with a religious orientation includes holistic integration and fruitful interaction of the self, and a family-oriented society, country, nation, world and cosmos. Mutual responsiveness between the self and the Way of Heaven offers a sympathetic understanding and critical response to the Western theory of enlightenment. Confucianism plays a meaningful role in bridging the gap for intercivilizational connection, promoting its alliance and interreligious exchange.

Confucianism as a living tradition is not necessarily inscribed in a Sinitic mode. It should not recoil into its Sinitic or East Asian civilizational life background. A retrieval of Confucian philosophy calls for a daunting hermeneutical praxis which aims at actualizing and contextualizing insightful observations about the Confucian tradition and its modern transformation. The Confucian cardinal virtues of humanness (or humanity), righteousness, ritual propriety, wisdom and trust, deserve to become an important agenda in the cross-cultural, intercivilizational enterprise.

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9   Huntington, *Clash of Civilizations*, 29.
10 Eck, *New Religious America*, 4, 9.

For instance, 'Boston Confucianism' makes Confucian theory of ritual a portable tradition in the late-modern world. Confucian discourse is revitalized as a transcultural project of hermeneutics, politically interested, socially engaged and culturally obliged. In the enterprise of Boston Confucianism, dialogue between civilizations is an inevitable and inspirational element. Proponents of Boston Confucianism, such as Robert Neville, emphasize that the Confucian classics, the Confucian praxis of ritual propriety and the Confucian idea of selfhood have relevance to contemporary American education, and they call for education in favor of cultivating humanity. The *Four Books* (*The Great Learning, The Analects, Mencius,* and *The Doctrine of the Mean*) and Xunzi (along with Neo-Confucian writings, notably by Zhu Xi and Wang Yangming) should be incorporated into the curricula of American colleges.[11]

Sharing the pedagogical, ethical, and interpretive interest of Boston Confucianism, I am more concerned with developing a hermeneutical-ethical model by bringing Confucian insights into the study of hermeneutical theory, the moral self, and transcultural experience at the theological and philosophical level.

We observe that spiraling violence is the outgrowth of misunderstanding and prejudice, hatred and confrontation in the context of encounters between civilizations. It is an important task to forge connections and alliances between people of different civilizations, with an emphasis on ethical value and dignity in terms of a new interpretation of religious texts in a comparative study. To build a bridge of mutual understanding and respect among the world's different cultures and civilizations, the purpose of this book is to uphold a comparative study of ethical-hermeneutical theology and philosophy in post-western manner, as I engage with the Confucian art of interpretation and ethical virtue.

Organizational Theme

In the introduction chapter, I will map the Western tradition of hermeneutical philosophy from genesis through development, via interdisciplinary debate, toward interreligious experience of the self. I will review the hermeneutics of appreciation in an interreligious context, especially David Tracy and interpretation, and Boston Confucianist's emphasis on ritual propriety and social integration. I will outline the interdisciplinary debate about the ethical hermeneutical and neo-Kantian models. Finally, I will present the necessity to reconstruct an ethico-hermeneutical model in an intercivilizational framework, articulating the Confucian ethics of the Mean.

Part 1 deals with Western philosophical tradition and the development of hermeneutical theory, beginning with Schleiermacher, through Dilthey to Heidegger, and finally concluding with Gadamer. Our discussion is to

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11 Neville, *Boston Confucianism*, xiv.

mediate a theory of interpretation with a moral theory of virtue, following the lead of Gadamer concerning Aristotle's virtue of *phronesis*.

Part II develops the connection between the hermeneutical self and moral theory. For this relationship, I deal with Schleiermacher's mediation of hermeneutical theory with philosophical ethics. I also examine Foucault's ethical view of Greek self-care and Gadamer's reading of Aristotle. I shall recast Aristotle's notion of interpretation and moral theory, focusing on Aristotle's theory of the mean in regard to phronesis and contemplation. Taking a step further in a comparative direction, I will bring Confucian ethics of the mean into dialogue with Aristotle's concept of prudence, the mean and the Greek notion of ethos. Driven by interest in intercivilizational encounter, I will further explicate Aquinas's virtue ethics in comparison with Mengzi's political ethics. I shall examine a comparative study about Mengzi undertaken by Lee H. Yearley, Matteo Ricci, and Max Weber.

Part III begins with post-Gadamerian theory of interpretation in dealing with socio-cultural location and competition in regards to psychology, linguistics and socio-critical theory of ideology. Juxtaposing hermeneutics with communication theory, I shall investigate Habermas's discourse ethics and communication rationality. I shall further examine debates between the Neo-Aristotelian communitarian model and the Neo-Kantian communicative model. Finally, I will deal with postmodern ethics in its aesthetic dimension (Foucault) and its emphasis on the Other (Levinas).

Part IV will carry ethical-hermeneutical theory a step further, undertaking an intercivilizational quest and reconstruction concerning dialectics of Enlightenment between West and East. Chapter 14 deals with global-critical inquiry and reconstruction in the aftermath of colonialism. This epistemology in dialogue between civilizations underlines its postcolonial character, while expressing the Confucian contribution to ethical reorientation. Chapter 15 begins with the underlying metaphors of the 'Cave' (Plato) and the 'Butterfly' (Zhuangzi) in seeking an intercivilizational reconstruction. It retrieves Zhu Xi's creative development of ethical hermeneutics in comparison with Gadamer and Aristotle. This study brings us to examine Wang Yangming in comparison with Zhu Xi and also Heidegger (Chapter 16). Chapter 17 is a concluding reflection of Western dialectics of Enlightenment and East Asian Self, which has been investigated in Part IV.

The Epilogue is to present a constructive theory of interpretation and ethics in the aftermath of colonialism. It is to address an irregularity of postcolonial hermeneutics in taking issue with postcolonial theory of Foucault and Edward Said's Orientalism. It further refines a notion of postcolonial hermeneutics through archeological rewriting and social biography in seeking an ethical humanism which improves on the limitation of modernist overhumanization and postmodern jargon of anti-humanism.