

Chapter 10

Declaration Toward a Global Ethic: Jiang Qing's Response

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The Council of the Parliament of the World's Religions, consisting of 65,000 participants from different religions, met in Chicago from 28 August to 4 September, 1993. In that meeting, a document entitled *Declaration toward a Global Ethic* drafted by Hans Küng was discussed on the floor of the Parliament, and it was endorsed with signatures by the vast majority of the delegates of the Parliament. The Declaration not only provoked vigorous discussion during the Parliament but also caused much controversy in the academic world. Jiang Qing, among others, writes to respond to the Declaration from the perspective of the Confucian (Jiang 2003, pp. 341–358). His response can be broadly divided into two aspects, namely, the practical and the conceptual. This chapter discusses Jiang's response to the Declaration, which consists of three parts. I first give an introduction to the background and the contents of the Declaration. I then present Jiang's main arguments of his response to the Declaration. In the final part, I provide a critical analysis of Jiang's arguments as well as the Declaration itself. This chapter discusses Jiang's response to the Declaration.

10.1 Global Ethics

Küng's work on the Declaration can be traced back to a colloquium taking place at UNESCO in Paris from 7 to 10 February, 1989, where he gave the keynote address entitled "Pas de paix entre les nations sans paix entre les religions" (Küng and Schmidt 1998, p. 46), responded to by distinguished professors from the six major spiritual traditions, namely, Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, Christianity, Confucianism, and Hinduism, and a professor who drew on the perspective of international law (Küng and Schmidt 1998, p. 46). On 9–10 March of the same year he gave another version of the lecture with the title "No peace among the nations without peace among the religions" at the

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universities of Toronto and Chicago. The ideas set forth in these lectures were taken up in his German work published in 1990 whose English-American edition appeared under the title *Global Responsibility: In Search of a New World Ethic* (Küng 1991) in the next year. One of the main theses advocated both in the lectures and the book is that “there will be no peace among the nations without peace among the religions” (Küng 1991, p. xv), and that “there will be no peace among the religions without dialogue among the religions” (Küng 1991, p. xv). However, if each religion fully sticks to their standard of truth in dialogue, then the dialogue from the very beginning is bound to be fruitless. Therefore, according to Küng, different spiritual traditions should keep an open mind when speaking with each other. They should formulate the spiritual basis for dialogue and peace in such a way that, while attempting to seek common ground for such a spiritual basis, they should respect the differences among them. He believes that we should be able to work out such a basis. In his view, such a spiritual basis can be worked out in terms of a universal ethical standard based on the concept of *humanum* (or humanity).

Should it not be possible to formulate, with reference to the common humanity of men and women, a universally ethical, truly ecumenical basic criterion which is based on the *humanum*, that which is truly human, and specifically on human dignity and the basic values which are subordinate to it? (Küng 1991, p. 90)

He believes that only based on such a universal ethical standard, which, in turn, rests on the notion of *humanum* (or humanity), can a real dialogue between religions be made and real peace be realized.

It should be noted that, although Küng is a Catholic theologian, he does not think that the spiritual basis in question must be based on a particular conception of God. Rather, he thinks that it should rest on a universal ethical standard founded on the aforementioned concept of humanity. Küng takes the concept of humanity to be the starting point of formulating the spiritual basis for dialogue and peace for the following reasons. The first reason is that the concept of humanity runs all through various spiritual traditions. For Küng, a true religion must rest on the premise that takes true humanity seriously. And it is this premise by means of which we are able to distinguish good religions and bad ones (Küng 1991, pp. 90–91). The second reason has something to do with Küng’s view on the logical basis of the universal ethical standard. “For ethical criteria, the basic question in logic sense is: What is good for human beings? The answer is: those that can contribute to real life. . . . The basic norms of ethic go behind” (Küng 1991, p. 90).

According to Küng, right ethical norms should be formulated in terms of what is valuable for us as humans. And what is valuable for us is that which can help us realize our true nature, i.e., true humanity. Therefore, for Küng, the right ethical norms presuppose the following: “People should not live inhumanly and by pure instinct just as a beast, but stick to human nature and in a rational manner” (Küng 1991, p. 90). Also, according to Küng, to give full play to humanity a person should do the right things.

human beings should not be inhuman, purely subject to their drives, 'bestial', but should live in a rationally human, truly human way. So that would be morally good which allows human life to succeed and prosper in the long term in its individual and social dimension: what enables the best possible development of men and women at all levels (including the levels of drives and feelings) and in all their dimensions (including their relationship to society and nature). (Küng 1991, p. 90).

So much has been discussed about the background of the Declaration. Now let us turn to the Declaration. In my view, the Declaration is actually an extension of the previous work done by Küng. A main part of the Declaration is to represent the relationship between the global order and global ethic: there is no new global order without a new global ethic. The ethical requirement advocated in the Declaration is that every person be treated humanely. It points out that the world is experiencing a comprehensive and fundamental crisis in global economy, global ecology, and global politics.

Hundreds of millions of human beings on our planet increasingly suffer from unemployment, poverty, hunger, and the destruction of their families. Hope for a lasting peace among nations slips away from us. . . . More and more countries are shaken by corruption in politics and business. . . . Our planet continues to be ruthlessly plundered. A collapse of the ecosystem threatens us. . . . Religion often is misused for purely power political goals, including war. We are filled with disgust (Küng and Schmidt 1998, p. 7).

The Declaration holds that different religious doctrines provide us with a kind of ethic, which supplies the moral foundation for a better individual and global order (Küng and Schmidt 1998, p. 9). This global ethic does not represent "a global ideology, or a single unified religion beyond all existing religions or a religion dominating all other religions" (Küng and Schmidt 1998, pp. 11, 13). Instead, it rests on a common basis which is present in all existing religions, that is, "a minimal *fundamental consensus* concerning binding *values*, irrevocable *standards*, and *fundamental moral attitudes*" (Küng and Schmidt 1998, pp. 9, 13). In a more concrete term, the basic requirement of the global ethic advocated by the Declaration is that everyone should be treated humanely. Küng gives the following interpretation to this global ethic:

This means that every human being without distinction of age, sex, race, skin color, physical or mental ability, language, religion, political view, or national or social origin possesses an inalienable and untouchable dignity. . . . Humans must always be the subjects of rights, must be ends, never mere means, never objects (Küng and Schmidt 1998, p. 15).

In addition to these basic requirements, the Declaration also proposes a second supplementary basic principle – the "Golden Rule":

There is a principle which is found and has persisted in many religious and ethical traditions of humankind for thousands of years: *What you do not wish done to yourself, do not do to others*. Or in positive terms: *What you wish done to yourself, do to others!* This should be the irrevocable, unconditional norm for all areas of life, for families and communities, for races, nations, and religions. (Küng and Schmidt 1998, p. 68).²

According to the Declaration, this principle includes some very specific criteria that people must uphold. This leads to the acceptance of four broad and ancient

rules of human conduct that can be found in most religions in the world (Küng and Schmidt 1998, pp. 16–29):

1. Commitment to a culture of non-violence and respect for life;
2. Commitment to a culture of solidarity and a just economic order;
3. Commitment to a culture of tolerance and a life of truthfulness;
4. Commitment to a culture of equal rights and partnership between men and women.

In the above, I have briefly reviewed the main ideas of the Declaration. Now let us turn to the question about the nature of the Declaration. There are a few points deserving special attention. First, according to Küng's comment, the Declaration is not meant to be a repeat of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and this is what should be avoided. Otherwise, the criticism raised by various Indian religious communities that the Declaration is a typical "Western document" is unavoidable (Küng and Schmidt 1998, pp. 66–67). Nonetheless, the Declaration was drafted with a view to affirming and deepening the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Küng and Schmidt 1998, p. 11). Second, the Declaration deliberately makes a distinction between the ethical level and the purely legal or political level. Therefore, it does not appear in the form of an international legal document or political statement in the very beginning (Küng and Schmidt 1998, p. 54). Furthermore, the Declaration is not meant to be a philosophical treatise. This is because the drafters hold that the Declaration should address more than intellectuals or educated people (Küng and Schmidt 1998, p. 55). Therefore, it strongly avoids the use of professional evaluation and jargons of science. Finally, the Declaration is not meant to be a religious proclamation, although the drafters consider that it has a religious basis (Küng and Schmidt 1998, pp. 55–57).

10.2 Jiang's Response

Having discussed the background and content of the Declaration, let us turn to Jiang Qing's response to the Declaration. Jiang fully affirms the motive of the Declaration.

On September 4, 1993, the Council of the Parliament of the World's Religions signed a document entitled *Declaration toward a Global Ethic* and published an introduction to give an exposition to the document which was meant to advocate a Global Ethic or World Ethic. . . . During this chaotic period, the thoughtfulness and kindness of the initiators of the Declaration is great and their determination and courage attempting to resolve the suffering by advocating a global ethic is worth high praise, and I myself am deeply moved (Jiang 2003, p. 341).

But he holds a critical attitude toward the objective of the Declaration which aims to put forward a global ethic as the moral foundation of the global order. He believes that the solution to human plight does not rely on the scholars

“Global Ethic”, but instead on tradition-based “local ethic” (Jiang 2003, p. 341).

Jiang comments on the Declaration from both the practical and the conceptual points of view. Let me summarize his comments as follows.

10.2.1 Problems of Global Ethic in Practice

(i) Jiang thinks that at the present moment it is impossible for the global order to agree on a “Global Ethic” or “World Ethic” because both the historical and cultural conditions are far from mature for the global order to agree on a “global ethic” (Jiang 2003, p. 341). By appealing to the theory of the “three periods of the world” propounded by Confucianism, which divides the history of the world into three stages, namely, the chaotic period, the developing period, and the prosperous period, Jiang points out that the world is now at the stage of the chaotic period and is far from being in the developing period, let alone entering into the prosperous period (Jiang 2003, p. 342). In this chaotic period, the ideal of the Grand Union is not applicable (Jiang 2003, p. 342). It is because there are independent nations and states that have different cultural backgrounds. This means that conflicts of interests or values and clashes of civilizations are unavoidable. Thus, a “Global Ethic” which can exist only in the prosperous period is not applicable to the global order, at least at the present moment. For Jiang, “Global Ethic” is an ideal only for the future world (Jiang 2003, pp. 342–3).

(ii) His other argument for the inapplicability of a “Global Ethic” is concerned with the nature of ethics. He argues that each ethic has its specific historical and cultural background, and that no ethic can go beyond a specific history or culture. A Global Ethic is, however, exactly an attempt to abstract an ethic from any particular history and culture, and therefore divorce it from its inherent historical characteristics and cultural structure and to change it into a kind of “abstract ethic” or “transcendental ethic” (Jiang 2003, p. 343). He points out that “even [if] we can integrate the similar elements in various cultures, this Global Ethic cannot bind various nations in different cultures and countries in practice because this ethic is separated from any specific historical and cultural structure and does not have the characteristics of a particular affinity with a nation” (Jiang 2003, p. 343). He believes that this abstract ethic does not have the same authority as that of a certain ethic rooted in a specific history and cultural tradition:

Long-term historical accumulation and cultural identity have given its inherent ethic authority and effectiveness and makes ethic a habit, a tradition, a collective unconsciousness, a group memory, and finally an absolute law obeyed by a certain group of human beings (Jiang 2003, p. 344).

10.2.2 *Conceptual Problems of Global Ethic*

One of Jiang's main criticisms of the Declaration is that it is strongly influenced by the Western perspective, even if it is not Western-centered. He cites evidence from the "General Provisions" of the "Universal Declaration of Global Ethic"³: "We certainly support these positive human values – freedom, equality, democracy and mutual recognition and commitment to justice and human rights" (Jiang 2003, p. 348). He points out that freedom, equality, democracy, and human rights are products of Western culture, rather than "human values" *simpliciter* (Jiang 2003, p. 348). Jiang, from the Confucian point of view, argues that freedom, equality, democracy, or human rights are non-universal human values.

(i) The nature of freedom and human beings

On the value of freedom, Jiang makes this statement:

The Declaration regards freedom as the essence of life and states that as long as there is no violation of the rights of others or no disrespect of animate or inanimate objects, everyone has the freedom to exercise his right to use and develop his every ability. This is quite different from the thought of Confucianism. In the Confucian view, the essence of living a human life is not achieving a person's freedom but showing his conscience and reverting to its ontological nature (Jiang 2003, p. 352).

Jiang points out that it is an a priori truth that conscience exists in human nature. Therefore, it is not a result of our choice, and freedom can only be a means to achieve human nature. If we take freedom as the essence, ultimately morality and ethic will be cancelled out (Jiang 2003, p. 352). In addition, Jiang mentions that the understanding of "freedom" in the Declaration has problems and it is even very dangerous. This understanding of freedom implies that if persons do not infringe on the rights and property of others, they can do anything (Jiang 2003, p. 353).

(ii) The issue of equality

In terms of the value of equality, Jiang argues that

The Declaration is based on Western values. So in the development of the Global Ethic, equality is regarded as its basic principle, such as emphasizing the equality of all people, the rights of equality, the equality between men and women. . . . According to Confucian culture, formal equality refers to specific equality in front of laws. This equality is a kind of "one size fits all" and rational equality. This equality is a leveled one in the legal sense. So it is of legal significance only. However, this equality does not consider the actual differences among people, nor the reasonable value of the differences. It, instead, makes the actual inequalities even but allows some sort of legitimate real inequality. In fact, this is a kind of inequality. That is an inequality ignoring the relative differences among people. Therefore, according to Confucianism, attending to equality must pay attention to people's differences. Real equality is equality which is relative to the order of actual differences. And it is only this kind of real equality which can be actually perceived (Jiang 2003, p. 355).

(iii) Issues of democracy and human rights

On democracy, Jiang asserts that Confucianism does not support democracy, because democracy is flat and secularized. This means voting for both the good and the poor which excludes the moral, wise, and talented ones from the circle of politics (Jiang 2003, p. 348).

About human rights, Jiang proposes that:

Confucianism is not entirely sure of human rights, for human rights stem from material desires rather than moral realization. They have only negative meaning for resisting oppression but not the positive value of high purpose (Jiang 2003, p. 348).

And he adds that:

The Declaration stresses its affirmation of human rights and respect for Earth. These are two rights – human rights and earthly rights, which are far from enough. There should be divine rights. Divine rights are transcendent rights. This means that in addition to human rights and earthly rights, Heaven should also have inviolable rights (Jiang 2003, p. 350).

10.3 My Comments

I am sympathetic with Jiang's view that we should resolve the human plight via tradition-based "local ethic" rather than a "Global Ethic" as endorsed by the Declaration – in fact, by a small group of so-called representatives of all major religions. However, I have some reservation about some other points he makes with regard to the Declaration.

(i) Should "divine rights" be added?

Jiang proposes that besides human rights and earthly rights we should add divine rights. It is true that Heaven, Earth and Humans are the three basic notions in the ethical perspective of Confucianism. The notion of rights, however, cannot be found in any Confucian classics. I argue in other occasions that the idea of rights is not compatible with the ethical perspective of Confucianism. Briefly, the concept of rights has a philosophical presupposition which asserts the moral priority of individual interests (Chan, 2001, pp. 94–112).⁴ And it is exactly this philosophical presupposition which is in conflict with the ethical perspective of Confucianism because Confucianism would not endorse giving individual interests a moral priority over communal interests. What's more, the reason for adding divine rights given by Jiang is not compelling. He presents the following argument for his view:

People and properties are physical beings and have no transcendent sacred value. But "heaven" is metaphysical and has transcendent sacred value. The physical cannot share the value of the metaphysical. Human and earthly rights are short of metaphysical definiteness, so they do not possess any transcendent rationality or legitimacy. Therefore, people cannot be convinced to accept them (Jiang 2003, p. 350).

However, even if it were true that the two secular rights need a metaphysical basis, it would not be necessary to add divine rights. It is because there is a great difference between fleshing out a metaphysical basis and conferring a right to that basis. A more fundamental problem is that the definition of “divine rights” is not clear at all. In brief, rights has be understood in terms of interests. Then what are the interests of “heaven” or “sacred entities”? Interests are non-metaphysical. Then, how can rights be applied to the metaphysical?

(ii) Is Confucianism against democracy?

Jiang thinks that Confucianism disagrees with democracy. Apparently, the idea of governance in Confucianism supports Jiang’s point of view. Confucianism stresses the rule of virtue and elite politics. And these ideas seem to be incompatible with democracy. However, there are also people-oriented ideas in Confucianism. Therefore, if conditions permit, democracy can find better leaders than other forms of politics such as autocracy or oligarchy. So there is no reason to conclude that Confucianism is against democracy. This is certainly not to say that Confucianism is in favor of democracy. What we want to express is that Confucianism does not necessarily exclude democracy; instead, it accepts democracy with some conditions.

(iii) Freedom and equality

The issue of equality and freedom can be divided into three points.

- (1) Jiang points out that Confucianism does not take freedom to be the nature of humans. I agree with Jiang as to this point. This can be shown by referring to Mencius’s theory of goodness of human nature.
- (2) Jiang argues that from the Confucian point of view, the notion of individual freedom even though subject to the condition of not violating the rights of others or showing improper attitude toward the animate and inanimate objects is morally incomplete in itself. However, Jiang further puts forward that the Declaration should add this regulation: not only the dignity, value, or rights of other individuals, but also the dignity, value, or rights of nature and Heavenly *Dao* (*tiandao*), should not be violated (Jiang 2003, p. 352). I am afraid I cannot agree with this proposal. The first question is, what can be regarded as a violation of the rights of Heavenly *Dao*? from whence do such rights come? Are they universal?
- (3) As to the notion of equality, Jiang believes that equality in Confucianism is a relative idea, that is, it is equality of being relative to the order of actual differences (to call it “relative equality”). This equality is the equality of every person in actual situations. It is actual, real, and perceivable, while formal equality emphasized in Western countries is only equality in before the law. However, what exactly is this “relative equality”? How can this equality be perceived? Perhaps Jiang means that everyone has his or her specific identity, social role, and capacity, which should all be considered in treating him or her. This might be what Jiang calls the “equality of

actual people with differences” or “relative equality”: in the sense that people who have the same identity, social role, and ability should be given equal treatment. If this is what Jiang really means, using the word “equality” is misleading because the ideal of equality is to eliminate unequal treatment based on identity, social roles, or ability. Furthermore, the ideal of equality in Western society does not only mean equality before the law. It also requires us to respect other people’s rights. Therefore, the notion of equality emphasizes not only legal equality but also moral equality.⁵

- (iv) The feasibility problem of Global Ethic Jiang proposes two arguments against the feasibility of Global Ethic. The first argument is that Global Ethic can exist only in the prosperous period and therefore cannot be applied to the global order at the present moment. This claim is contrary to the Declaration’s view that it is exactly because of the fact that the world is now in a disordered stage that there is an urgent need to establish a global ethic. Jiang, however, nowhere argues why such an ethic can exist only in the prosperous period.

Jiang’s second argument is that the Global Ethic propounded by the Declaration is an “abstract ethic” or “transcendental ethic” and therefore does not have any moral authority over the actual people living in specific history and cultures. There is some merit in this argument. This can be seen from two lines of arguments expounded below. First, if the ethics in question is merely an ethic that the major spiritual traditions commonly affirm, then the moral force of the ethic comes from these traditions. In that case, the ethic does not have additional moral force going beyond that of those spiritual traditions. On the other hand, the major spiritual traditions are mutually exclusive with regard to their doctrines. This means that their doctrines and principles cannot all be true at the same time. Thus, the moral force of the ethic in question can only come from some but not all of these spiritual traditions. And it has moral authority only for the followers of the respective spiritual traditions. For those who have no religious belief, the moral force of the ethic in question is even more doubtful. As the Declaration adopts the so called “appeal to the consensus” approach to construe the Global Ethic, the reasonableness of the ethical values and principles of this ethic partly depends on the broadness of the basic consensus. But the evidence offered in the Declaration cannot meet the requirement that the consensus be broadly representative. The Declaration claims that there is a minimum ethical consensus among various religions in the world so that it could serve as the basis of the global ethic (Küng and Schmidt 1998, pp. 9, 13). This claim, even if true, does not have rational force for non-religious people, because the ethical consensus in question might not be shared by non-religious people.⁶

Notes

1. The document is hereinafter to be referred to as the Declaration.
2. According to Kūng, similar interpretations of the “Golden Rule” can be found in major religions. “What you yourself do not want, do not do to another person” is the one in Confucianism.
3. “The Universal Declaration of Global Ethic” quoted by Jiang is not the text signed on the Parliament of World’s Religions. It is another document compiled by Leonard Swidler, a professor at Temple University and also the chief editor of *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*. Although there are minor differences, the central idea is basically the same. Therefore, Jiang’s comments on the declaration of Leonard Swidler can also be applied to the Declaration.
4. Human rights are based on individual interests. Meanwhile, human rights set an insurmountable moral boundary (moral restrictions) to protect individual interests. These boundaries can limit a government or a community when they violate the interests of individuals in the name of traditional moral or religious boundaries or even the interests of the community as a whole.
5. For more detailed discussion of the issue of equality, see the chapter by Fan in this volume.
6. In fact, the global ethical values and principles proposed by Kūng have not yet been accepted by the United Nations, and have not been recognized as a basic consensus among ethnic groups. This shows that it is still quite doubtful whether the global ethical values and principles can become a basic human ethical consensus.

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