

# **Islamic Civilization in Transition: Creating a Post-Western Civilization**

**Sohail Inayatullah**

*Professor of Tamkang University Taiwan and  
Adjunct Professor at the University of Sunshine Coast Australia*

## **ABSTRACT**

*Islam bisa dilihat sebagai sebuah kontra-diskursus terhadap globalisasi, ekspansi ruang ekonomi, dan pemenuhan keinginan para Darwinis sosial. Namun, walaupun Islam mencoba memberikan opsi baru bagi globalisme, tetap muncul ancaman dalam konteks politik nasional yang mendorong Islam menjadi politik reaksioner sehingga mengurangi keberagaman dan inovasi. Kondisi ini berbahaya mengingat tahap lanjutan dari globalisasi justru menjanjikan akhir dari sejarah ide-ide seperti realitas, kebenaran, kehidupan, dan kedaulatan. Di tengah dunia yang terus berubah ini, Islam dapat, secara bersama-sama dengan kontra-diskursus lainnya, menciptakan visi baru yang bermoral mengenai komunitas dunia, visi alternatif, and realitas globalisasi.*

**Kata-Kata Kunci:** *peradaban Islam, globalisasi, modernitas, peradaban pasca-Barat.*

*Islam can be seen as a counter discourse to globalization, to the expansion of economic space and the fulfillment of the dreams of the social Darwinists. However, even as Islam attempts to create new possibilities for globalism, national politics doom it to a politics of reaction, of reducing diversity and innovation. This is especially perilous as the next phase of globalization promises to end historical notions of reality, truth, nature and sovereignty. In this dramatically changed world, Islam can join with other counter discourses to create a moral vision of a planetary society, an alternative vision and reality of globalization.*

**Keywords:** *Islamic civilization, globalization, modernity, post-western civilization.*

At one level, Islam can be seen as a counter-globalization<sup>1</sup> in that globalization – at least in its dominant economic face – is essentially about expanding the economic circle in our lives at the expense of the social, the spiritual and the cultural. It is the expansion of the world capitalist economy into every sphere of our lives. It is also the continuation of social Darwinism, that the fittest – the most entrepreneurial - should lead the world. Finally, globalism continues the ideal of progress, of creating the perfect society, the positivist/scientific world, of forever removing religion and irrationality from human history. The latest technology that promises to deliver this future is germ-line engineering, creating a world of flawless human beings. But in whose image of perfection will these individuals be created in? Certainly not Islamic notions of the good, rather, they will continue in technocratic and western definitions of health, beauty and intelligence.

In this move to hyper-globalization, the Islamic world stands both as an imagined past – feudal, low-tech – but also as a civilization based on an alternative distinction between the public and the private, between individual space and collective space and between the secular and the religious. However, globalization - if we ask not what globalization is but which globalization – along with the globalization of economy and the globalization of technology (its acceleration) also consists of: (1) the globalization of awareness of the human condition (of hope and fear); (2) the globalization of responses to market and state domination (the emergent global civil society of transnational organizations); (3) the globalization of governance (both below and above); (4) and, finally globalization is both the expansion of time (creating a discourse of the long term future) and its elimination (creating the immediacy of space).

In this more exhaustive definition of globalization, where stands Islam? Islam in these globalized worlds, defined more eclectically, is first about an alternative to the Western project, that is, a promise of a more spiritual society based on a the unity of thought, of an alternative epistemology, an alternative notion of science and political economy.

### **Islamic Paradigm**

Generally this alternative paradigm as articulated by various muslim writers consists of the following:<sup>2</sup> “There are ten such concepts, four

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<sup>1</sup> Indeed, given the fear of Islam in the West, “competing globalization” may be a far better term.

<sup>2</sup> Muslim scientists at the Stockholm Seminar in 1981 identified a set of fundamental concepts which define the Islamic paradigm.

standing alone and three opposing pairs. *Tawheed* (unity), *khalifah* (trusteeship), *ibadah* (worship), *ilm* (knowledge), *halal* (praiseworthy) and *haram* (blameworthy), *adl* (social justice) and *zulm* (tyranny) and *istislah* (public interest) and *dhiya* (waste)" (Sardar 1995a, 39; Inayatullah 2003).

*Tawheed* articulates the larger Islamic unity of thought, action and value across humanity, persons, nature and God. *Khalifah* asserts that it is God who has ownership of the Earth. Humans function in a stewardship, trustee capacity, taking care of the Earth, not damaging it. The goal of the Islamic worldview is *adl*, social justice, and it is based on the larger needs of the people, *istislah*. To reach these goals, *ibadah*, worship or contemplation is a beginning and necessary step. From deep reflection, inner and outer observation, *ilm* or knowledge of self, other and nature will result. One's actions then are *halal*, praiseworthy and not *haram*, blameworthy. Moreover with this framework, *dhiya* (waste) of individual and collective potentials is avoided as is *zulm*, tyranny, the power of a few, or one, over many, or the power of a narrow ideology over the unity within plurality that the Islamic paradigm advocates. The science that emerges from it is not reductionist objective but synthetic and values-based, focused on an emotional commitment to understanding Allah's world.

While the above presents an alternative paradigm of Islam, it is the vision of an *ummah*; a global community of believers and non-believers that defines this alternative globalism. At heart, Islam desires to reintegrate the individual as part of the natural order. While Western civilization has come to life in the long drawn out battles against the tyranny of royalty (from the Magna Charta to the Glorious English Revolution), for muslims it has been the most recent battles against colonialism and imperialism that has unleashed a humanistic spirit. The vision of the *ummah*, said muslim leader - former Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia (1993-1998) and current leader of the Malaysian opposition- Anwar Ibrahim, "must be able to transcend cultural specificity (and) inhabit the realm of universal ideas" (Ibrahim 1996 in Inayatullah 1997).

This means that the vision of the *ummah* must draw on the cultural resources from Islamic history using them to engage with other civilizations through inclusive dialogue. However, the universal must be stated within evolutionary terms, as part of the human unfolding drama, and not as fixed givens. But behind this idealism lies the current reality of Islam, that while dramatically increasing in numbers, is decreasing in conceptual unity<sup>3</sup>, decreasing in its viability to create a new politics and

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<sup>3</sup> Not to mention the numerous failed Islamic revolutions of late. The causes are, of course, a mixed. They include the constraints placed by the Western globalist system but as well Islamic nation's location within patriarchal and feudal social systems. The rise of Al-Qaeda and its strategic failure in toppling

economics, and indeed, culture, that is, while muslims trust in Allah, they are not doing enough to tie their camel – to become culturally and technologically innovative.

Muslim scholar, Munawar Anees said that:

Perpetuation of despotic rulers, such as Mahathir in Malaysia, is achieved through a systematic corruption of the civil, judicial and the police departments. The invertebrate state-controlled media serve the self-fulfilling prophecy while anti-Semitic slander with sham retractions is not uncommon for sleazy political gains. Greedy multinationals and the Western corridors of power are clearly reprehensible for propping up these client regimes as their economic and political mercenaries.

Given the intellectual bondage and political and economic subservience of the muslim world to the West, prospects for the future, either programmed or desired, remain gloomy. There seems to be an inexplicable fatalism that continues to envelope the *ummah* - the global muslim community. It has ceased moving from opinion to knowledge and employing knowledge for social evolution. In the footsteps of the Prophetic Tradition - beside trust in the Divine mercy - are not muslims required to tie up their camel? ([www.enlightennext.org](http://www.enlightennext.org), 12 August 2010)

Can muslims, asks Zia Sardar (1953), recover the dynamic principle of *ijtihad* – sustained and reasoned struggle for innovation and adjusting to change – that has been neglected and forgotten for centuries? Can Islamic civilization avoid the future that being programmed by globalization and create an alternative modernity? Not destroying tradition but adopting it critically, challenging feudalism and patriarchy and authoritarian knowledge politics, and creating a world, modern but different from the West?

The possibilities are mixed. With the ascension of the West, muslims have internally adopted the Orientalist codes, seeing themselves not through their own historical eyes – gaze – but through the lenses of Western categories. Indeed, through Al-Qaeda and others, in recent times they have actually become the caricatures that Europe has been warning of for centuries. What results then are imitations of the West, instead of multiculturalism or anti-West rhetoric for local power politics? The strength of globalization in terms of shaping the world economy as well as world culture – the politics of idea production, how

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the West and uniting moderate Muslims as well as its descent into terror is an example of both.

Hollywood movies shape world notions of self – do not bode well for other cultures (except in exoticized or museumized forms).<sup>4</sup>

### **Technology Transforming Modernity**

But as we venture into the future, globalization is not just about expanding economy and technology as well as the dialectical responses of civil society and reflexive awareness but also about dramatic changes in the nature of reality (through digital virtualization) in truth (through challenges from postmodernism and multiculturalism) in the nature of nature (from genetics, particularly germ-line engineering, as well as from feminist/post-structural thought) as well as sovereignty (making the self and the nation-state far more porous than the legacies industrialism has given us). Within these frames can we still imagine not just a vital Islam but any Islam? Or is Islam likely to be left behind by the rest of the web (though muslims use the web, they still do not define it) and the new economy (virtualization), by genomics (the end of the natural), by the relativization of Newtonian stability and globalized economics (and international organizations and corporations spearheading the end of ideology)?

Virtualization will challenge all religions as it contests historical definitions of reality. Computer games are already a larger revenue industry than films and the trends are that this will keep on increasing ([www.economist.com](http://www.economist.com), 12 August 2010). But there are significant problems ahead. First, virtualization can lead to social isolation ([www.smh.com.au](http://www.smh.com.au), 12 August 2010), which can lead to depression, which in 1990 accounted for five of the ten leading causes of disability ([www.sciencedaily.com](http://www.sciencedaily.com), 12 August 2010). Psychiatric conditions are expected to play an even greater role in the global burden of disease in the future, becoming in 2020 the leading cause of the loss of life years ([www.who.org](http://www.who.org), 12 August 2010; *The Steering Committee on Future Health Scenarios* 1992). Virtualization is likely to further fragment the Western self, creating the desolation of postmodern anomie (Sardar 1998; Inayatullah 2000a). However, social networking is creating new forms of community, and it is crucial that the Islamic world find new ways to create community via the web. Certainly, [www.islamicfacebook.com](http://www.islamicfacebook.com) is a step in the right direction. Otherwise, virtualization will further weaken social ties and community.

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<sup>4</sup> The movie *Aladdin* is one example. Aladdin, meaning the servant of god, by the end of the movie rediscovers himself as “just al”. This, of course, represents the secularization of Islam, its defeat in shaping world epistemic space. The movie could have been an attempt at a dialogue of cultures but instead it, as expected, commodified and cannibalized.

The web and personal computer revolution may also create spaces for software that reduces the interpretive authority of mullahs and creates peer-to-peer interpretive communities. For example, by placing the Quran on-line or via CD ROM, direct access to interpretation will be possible. This expansion of knowledge democracy could be one factor in challenging the dominating feudal structures in the Islamic world. It could also help create an alternative cyber culture: modern, but differently so from the hegemonic West. This alternative culture would be one that allows group experience of virtuality, thus creating new realities, innovation without the loss of the family orientation of Islamic culture. A peer-to-peer Islamic culture that grew from the web could also challenge traditional Islamic feudalism and patriarchy. For the Islamic world, the challenge will be to – as with the adoption of all non-indigenous technologies – appropriate and use ICTs and their future developments (web-bots, the always-on wearable computers) without being used by them, that is, to use the net to unleash local innovation without succumbing to the dark side of cyber futures (Obijiofor et al. 1999; Sardar 2002).

But a greater challenge than virtuality will be the end of the natural through developments in genetics. Cloning, gene therapy and germ-line has been engineering all-contest evolutionary views of what is natural – that is, humans preselecting genetic dispositions and characteristics. The slippery slope from genetic prevention (reducing the probability of developing certain diseases) to genetic enhancement (height, ‘intelligence’) to new species creation will be quick and almost unstoppable within current globalized and technocratic science. While this will challenge all religions, religions of the book derived from stories of Adam and Eve will be especially made problematic. Buddhist and other Indian perspectives with far more liminal views of self, will find negotiating an artificial world far easier. The works of Indian philosopher P.R. Sarkar are especially instructive in developing a spiritual perspective of new technologies (Inayatullah 1999; Inayatullah 2002). The muslim view of gene therapy is generally best described by Munawar Anees and Abdulaziz Sachedina. Anees (1995) writes: “gene therapy (not to mention cloning) transgresses everything that Islam is about, about what is natural and what is wrong.”

Adds Sachedina:

In Islamic discussions in eugenics, there is almost a consensus among muslim scholars that it "having better rather than worse genes" does not play a part in the recognition of the good qualities of human beings; it is something that is designed by God, and therefore, it should be left to God, so there is no incentive for the improvement of the genetic composition of individuals to increase the value of that individual. Rather, the value of the individual depends on faith...

...There is no encouragement of any kind to improve genetic composition through any kind of surgical or any kind of medical or choices to the marriage decisions; rather, the will of God is regarded as the one that really creates human beings the way there are, and there are potential improvements within that if faith is maintained, if moral and spiritual awareness are maintained within the life. (www.research.mednet.ucla.edu, 11 April 2000)

These new technologies pose the most dramatic problems for those who consider the natural as fixed instead of as constantly changing and in the process of recreation. Strict traditionalists (those who do not take a dynamic view of knowledge) wherein *ijtihad* (reasoned judgement) gives way to *taqlid* (blind imitation), in particular, will find the next twenty or thirty years the best and worst times. The best because the forces of tradition will flock to them; worst because the technological imperative and humanity's struggle to constantly recreate itself and thus nature will not be easily forced back. For the Islamic world to survive, it will not only need to debate these technological developments but articulate an alternative science (Sardar 2010).

For religions in general, there are three possibilities (Inayatullah 1995a). First is the return to an imagined past with strong feudal and male structures; identity defined by in-group exclusive bonding. Second is to adapt to the future by seeing the past as metaphor, as a story to ethically guide oneself. However, the latter may become far too fluid for most leaders. Over time, a new layered religious framework may develop, that is, integration at a different level. For individuals, too, a similar choice remains: return to an integrated but exclusivist self or create a liminal constantly changing self. This postmodern self, the salad bar theory of pluralism, may lead to total fragmentation or alternatively may, as Sarkar argues, create a layered, neo-humanistic self that moves beyond ego (my way is the only way), family (concern for only my future generations), geo-sentiment (my land, territory), socio-sentiment (my religion or race) as well as humanistic sentiment (humans above all), that is, a dynamic, layered inclusive self with incorporates other humans as well as plants and animals. A neo-humanistic self thus moves through the traumas of ego, territorial nationalism, exclusivist religion, racism as well as specialism entering the universalistic transcendental. Thus, Islam can provide a useful anchor in the multiplicity of alternative futures and alternatives selves.

### **Sovereignty**

Combined with virtualization and geneticization is the breakdown of sovereignty. While the passport office remains threatening, capital is now free to roam, as is pollution. Governance too has moved to world

levels with the institutionalization of world organizations around activities of health, climate, economy, refugees, to name a few. However, while capital and state have expanded, the peoples sector has challenged its domination. Non-governmental organizations have been quick to pick up the slack when transnational refuse to observe triple bottom line accounting measures (profit plus social responsibility plus environment). The internet too has challenged national sovereignty with cyber lobbying, crowd swarming, quickly becoming a new form of local/globalist politics, forcing states to be far more transparent than they would like to be. Governments that have resisted this have found themselves losing propaganda wars. Still, the revolution from the past – of feudalism, of control and command structures, as practiced by many nations claiming themselves to be Islamic – have not disappeared. Indeed, while individuals may have transcended geo- and socio-traumas, nations use these traumas to shore up identity.

### **Scenarios**

What then of the future. What futures will these transformations lead to? A number of scenarios are probable.

#### ***Artificial Society***

The first is the artificial society where the victory of liberal ideology, the science and technology revolution make states far less potent. Islam as currently constituted would not play a role in this future, nor would most nations. It would remain a fast growing religion but only in terms of population and not in terms of defining the agenda for the next century. The population of believers would be poor and angry, searching for someone to blame. Local leaders would be quite willing to play the extremist card convincing believers that by returning to the past, they would be safe from globalization. The losers would be the most vulnerable—women and minorities as well as modernist muslims. However, there will be plenty of the poor to draw on to challenge the system.

Lydia Krueger wrote:

While the income gap between the fifth of the world's people living in the richest countries and the fifth in the poorest was 60 to 1 in 1990, up from 30 to 1 in 1960, it has risen to 74 to 1 in 1997. The same development of global polarization can be described looking at wealth and poverty in a different way: While there are still 840 million people malnourished and 2.6 billion people have no access to basic sanitation, the world's 200 richest people more than doubled their net worth in the four years to 1998, to more than \$1 trillion - with the assets of the top

three billionaires alone surpassing the combined GNP of all Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and their 600 million people (www.eolss.net).

Is this likely to change? In 1993, only 10 countries accounted for 84 percent of global research and development expenditures and controlled 95 percent of the US patents of the past two decades. The dye is set; technocracy will further create a divided world, with the right to the net and the right to genetic therapy and modification becoming the battle cry of the next decades. Setting up walls against technology will be the easiest path for Islamic nations. Far more useful would be to develop technologies based on Islamic science – that is science and technology focused on problems in poorer areas as well as science and technology that was nature-based, what has been called nature-oriented technologies.

### ***Dialogues of Civilizations***

Instead of the artificial society, there are moves for a pluralistic dialogue of civilizations. Not a clash (as this merely transposes realistic politics on civilization theory) but a deep dialogue of ways of knowing, of understanding that we can longer export our problems to other, being they weaker nations or the environment. This holistic view of the world challenges realist notions of power and examines the future from the margins, from new models of organizational cooperation (as with Net companies that are far less patriarchal and hierarchical). An enlightened Islam that instead of projecting its own defeats on the West and instead finding compassion for all human suffering can provide a model of this alternative future.

What this means is the creation of a world community around shared ideals. In post-modernity's decentering of the world, space has been created for civilizations to articulate their own self-images. Of course, the framework remains Western and secular but the multicultural ethos now even challenges post-modernism. For the Islamic world, what in detail would such a future look like, mean?

### ***Ummah as an Interpretive Community***

First, *ummah* as an operating framework for the future challenges the three worlds thinking of first, second and third worlds (Ibrahim 1991). As a concept it means three things. First, the *ummah* is a dynamic concept, reinterpreting the past, meeting new challenges. Second, the *ummah* must meet global problems such as the environmental problem. Ibrahim (1991) said:

The *ummah* as a community is required to acknowledge moral and practical responsibility for the Earth as a Trust and its members are trustees answerable for the condition of the Earth. This makes ecological concerns a vital element in our thinking and action, a prime arena where we must actively engage in changing things.

Third, the *ummah* should be seen a critical tool, as a process of reasoning itself.

To create a future based on the *ummah* equity and justice are prerequisites. This means a commitment to eradicating poverty. It means going beyond the development debate since development theory merely frames the issue in apolitical, a critical language. This means rethinking trade, developing south-south trade as well as "new instruments of financial accounting and transacting ... and the financing of new routes and transportation infrastructure" (Ibrahim 1991). But, perhaps most significant is a commitment to literacy for all. As Ibrahim (1991) writes: "Only with access to appropriate education can *ummah* consciousness take room and make possible the *ummah* of tomorrow as a personification of the pristine morality of Islamic endowed with creative, constructive, critical thought."

Thus, what is called for is not modernism but a critical and open traditionalism that uses the historic past to create a bright future – a post-Asian and post-western dream. But, *ummah* should not become an imperialistic concept rather it requires that muslims work with other civilizations in dialogue to find agreed upon principles. We need to recover that historically the *ummah* meant models of multiracial, multicultural, multireligious, and pluralist societies. A true *ummah* respects the rights of nonmuslims as with the original Medina state. However, as possible is a future without any name, a future of Islam but no muslims, that is, a future with continued struggles between factions in the Islamic world and between sects with the West continuing its millennium struggle against its projected other. A bright future is possible but not certain.

### **What will the West do? Uncertain Alternatives**

While the idealist vision of an alternative more pluralistic softer Islam remain, one that is future-oriented, ecological, community-based, gender equal and electronically-linked, we are struck with not an attempt to imagine a new politics for the Islamic world but to offer imagined histories. Moreover, attempts to create alternatives remain mired in strategic politics as with the Iranian revolution – in fighting for survival space - or with creating a fortress to stop globalism as with the Taliban. But dramatic changes in the nature of reality, truth, nature and sovereignty bode not well for the West as well. Indeed, if we add the

dramatically ageing population to this mix, the future of the rich nations is in peril. With an entire age-cohort of youth workers not available – with the median age moving from 20 to 40 and the ratio of worker to retiree slipping from 3-1 to 1.5, what will the West do? (Inayatullah 2000b; Inayatullah 2008, 83-94) It can dramatically enhance productivity thus eliminating the need for labor and immigration or it can create new species of humans, or at least through eugenics ensure its own genetic stock through eugenics. The seeds of eugenics are not outside of Western history but squarely with Darwin.

We civilized men to our utmost to check the process of elimination; we build asylums for the imbecile, the maimed and sick; we institute poor laws; and our medical men exert their utmost skills to save the life of everyone to the last moment. Thus the weak members of civilized societies propagate their kind. No-one ... will doubt that this must be highly injurious to the race of man. The relaxation of natural selection was leading to genetic deterioration, to a large number of children of the "scum". (Darwin in Lynn 1996, 5).

Alternatively it can allow the other into its shores and create multicultural societies. But authentic multiculturalism challenges the sovereignty of the nation-state at its roots, so does globalization. Once in, there is no way back. Globalization thus shows its seeds for a planetary society, or a return to brutal tribalism. At heart then the issue is not merely the future of the Islamic world, but the future of the entire world. Can we move to a Gaia of civilization, an interpenetrating dialogue of traditions where the damage of five hundred years of the victory of the West is undone and the ways of knowing suppressed to achieve hypermodernity are tamed?

Can we create a post-Western view of the future? At the very least to do so, we will need to imagine a future that integrates ideational and sensate civilizations; integrates linear notions of progress with cyclical notions of time; integrates economic growth with distribution; imagines identity not only in the postmodern sense of fluid selves but in a layered neo-humanistic sense where identity moves from the most concrete to the most expansive and subtle. Does humanity have the wherewithal to do so? The signs are mixed. Just as the expansion of human rights continues, the battle of local and national leaders to hold on to privilege strengthens. Nationalism becomes a method of reducing some of the excesses of globalization but it does so at an incredible cost, creating a politics of identity that is generally culturally violent.

The dream of a good society, a postnational world, has not gone away, however. Globalism pushes back moral space but it does not vanquish it. The hope of Islam –in dialogue with other civilizations - its offering to the future, is essentially about that, asking what is the right future for us,

how can we make sure to include the ethical in all our decisions, in our magical ride to the stars, to cloning, to creating a global governance structure. In this sense the hope of Islam is the creation of a global acumen that transcends any particular religious framework; that opens up the possibility of a more just society.

From a realist view, this is impossible. The interests of the powerful will always overwhelm those of the weak. Battles within religions, between strong and soft, are far more important than a dialogue of civilizations, than moving from reality to possibility (Marti 1995). Even if a new world system develops, it is likely to be Western-based, technocratic, and based on notions that only will only appear sensible to the West. The rich will take flight in their genetically created fool proof bodies; the rest will die tortuous deaths on a planet in environmental crisis. Still, without a vision of the future, we decline – we do not battle slavery, we acquiesce to injustice. The vision pulls us forward, ennobles and enables us. It calls out the best of us. Muslims have had glorious periods in human history; these can be recovered and used to move onward. That means using history but not being used by history. It means creating new visions that acknowledge the anchor of Islam but the multiplicity of identity.

In a workshop with leading Islamic scholars, activists and technocrats, muslims called for a vision of the future with five key attributes (Inayatullah 1996; Inayatullah 1995b); (1) self-reliant ecological communities, (2) electronically linked *khalifa*, politically linked – a new global governance system, (3) gender cooperation and partnership – full participation of females, (4) an alternative non-capitalist economics that takes into account the environment and the poor – the “bottom” billion, (5) the *ummah* as world community as guiding principle based on tolerance, and (6) leadership that embodies both technical and moral knowledge. These points may or may not come about. The structures of oppression, the weight of history pulls us away from our desired futures. But our desires give us agency. The future can be door into an alternative world. If we take this door, then the policy and implementation question comes back but framed as: how can we make the ethical the rational, the easier path? What systems of support are required? What is the new narrative?

If we don't, we should take heed from this warning: “Isn't it here that you take a half step wrong and wake up a thousand miles astray.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The words of Yang Chu, said, while weeping at the crossroads. From the Confucian *Hsun-tzu*

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