

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

In the Islam tradition, the concept of a 'Perfect Man' is not unique in Al-Ghazzali's work alone. In the Persian mystical treatises of Shihab al-din Suhrawardi¹, there is a handful of vivid imageries of a 'Sage' in the forms of a master-teacher (*ustad*), the beholder of the ecstasy (*sahib-i halat*), the man (*mard*), the old man (*pir*) and even an archetypal bird (*simurgh*). Besides, there are also vast imageries and terms employed by other writers on the concept of a perfect man, e.g. the leader (*pishra*), guide (*hadi*), guided (*mahdi*), learned (*dana*), the one who is mature (*baligh*), perfect (*kamil*), perfected (*mukammal*), exemplar (*imaa*), vicegerent (*khalifah*), pole (*qutb*), possessor of time (*sahib-i zaman*), world-displaying cup (*jam-i jahan-nama*), mirror showing the universe (*ayinih-i giti-namay*), great treacle (*taryaqi buzurg*), supreme elixir (*iksir-i a' zam*), Jesus (*Isa*) who gives life to the dead, the prophet Khizr who has drunk the juice of everlasting life (*ab-i hayat*), Solomon (*Sulaiman*) who knows the language of the birds (*zaban-i murghan*), and finally one person (*yik shakhs*) who is always in the world (*hamishih dar ' alam*).²

A perfect man is one who has realized in his person an idealized state of man. Such a person sets a perfect model for the others and is at times adored as a 'Sage' as his good being combines attributes of humanity as well as divinity.

¹ Shihbab al-Din abu al-Futuh Yahya ibn Habash ibn Amirak al-Suhrawardi, know as Shaikh al-Ishraq, was born around 1153AD and passed away in 1191AD.

² Morewedge, Parviz(ed.), *Islamic Philosophy and Mysticism* (New York: Caravan Books, 1981) p.199.

In the Chinese traditions, the concept of a 'Perfect Man' occurs as early in the work of Laozi.³ Generally, the ideal personality has been one of the most important concerns in the writings of the Chinese ancient thinkers. The idea appears in the Taoist treatises as the *Perfect Man* (*Zhiren*, 至人) or the *Godly-man* (*Shenren*, 神人) while it is usually termed as the *Sage* (*Shengren*, 圣人), the *Superior man* (*Junzi*, 君子) or the *Learned* (*Shi*, 士) in the Confucian writings. There are also writings by the other philosophers referring to the *Great Man* (*Dazhangfu*, 大丈夫), the *Complete Man* (*Chengren*, 成人); the *Man of Moral Determination* (*Zhishi renren*, 志士仁人) and etc.⁴ Xunzi, one of the masters in the Confucian school, teaches in various portions of his work that "a person who desires the truth and practices good becomes a 'Shi'; a person who faithfully seeks the truth and practicing it becomes a 'Junzi' while a person who has acquired a total understanding and perfected his entire being becomes a 'Shengren' ".⁵

1.1 The topic understudied

This dissertation presents a comparison between Al-Ghazzali and Mencius, two greatest philosophers of the Islam and the Chinese civilizations respectively, on the concept of a perfect man. The concept of the perfect man discussed here – whether it is achievable or not in the modern life -- becomes the highest moral goal in each provocation. The concept carries with it practical implications that man has a responsibility in the perfection of the self.

³ Laozi was the founder of the Taoist school of thoughts. There was no proper record of his life biography but it was said that Laozi used to be an official put in-charged of the historical artifact during the Chou dynasty (1111-256BC).

⁴ Liu, Peiyu(ed.), *Zhongguo Gudai Zhexue Jingshua* (Gansu: Renmin Chubanshe, 1992.) pp. 427-428.

In the respective cultural setting, the Sufis and the “*Shi*” were life examples of people who had attempted on the high moral goal of becoming perfect men. As for Al-Ghazzali, the Prophets embodied the highest moral character. The words and deeds of the Prophets had been quoted throughout Al-Ghazzali’s writings to serve as guidelines for ordinary men who desire perfection for the selves. In Mencius’ writings, the legendary King Yao and King Shun⁶ were the model of the perfect men. His writings also pictured the “*Xunzi*” as devotees whose moral character were just as good as the *Sage-kings*.

The comparison starts with the introduction to the historical background of Al-Ghazzali and Mencius. It then runs through their treatises on the nature of man, the essence of man and elaborates on the concept of perfect man suggested by the philosophers. The goal of the moral discipline in each teaching, i.e. moral perfection and happiness will be discussed and given a conclusion.

1.2 The purpose of the dissertation

It is not the intention of this dissertation to treat the writings of Al-Ghazzali’s and Mencius’ as thoughts and provocations that carry no social implications. The comparison between Al-Ghazzali and Mencius on the concept of a perfect man seeks to promote civilization dialogue whereby the richness of the world’s greatest civilizations would be cherished and reclaimed.

⁵ Refer to *The Work of Xunzi* in the chapters entitled “*Xiushen*” and “*Jiebi*”.

⁶ King Yao and King Sun were legendary figures in the history of Ancient China. They are believed to live before the Shang dynasty (1751-1112BC).

Urbanization and industrialization has deprived many off the privilege to study and appreciate the classical literature. While sociologists, psychologists and educators are pooling their effort to solve social problems and societal hurts of modern living, the writer feels a strong urge to bring Al-Ghazzali's and Mencius' writings into the attention of many.

It is the hope of the writer that this dissertation will achieve three goals: firstly, that it will serve as a reading guide to the world of Al-Ghazzali and Mencius through the treated texts of their selected writings; secondly, that it will help the reader to perceive the concept of a perfect man in the light of the human ideals as well as the practical implications; and thirdly, that it will become a bridge-building attempt in which the genius of Islam and Chinese philosophers will be appreciated.

1.3 Methodology

The dissertation is an effort by means of library research. The procedure of "*read – contemplated – write*" is employed to sheave through the overwhelming data as well as organizing a meaningful comparison of two different schools of thoughts from world's greatest civilizations.

The reading materials are mainly source from two libraries, namely the *Main Library of the University of Malaya* and the *Library of Kairos Research Centre*. Besides, book loan from lecturers and friends as well as personal collections constitute the rest of the needed materials for this dissertation.

The types of materials vary from the original texts, translated work of the original texts, commentaries, PhD. thesis to compiled articles and general guide books. The writer's reading on Al-Ghazzali's original work was facilitated by the translated texts both in English and Malay languages, e.g. the writer was using the English translations of *Ihya Ulum-Id-Din* by Al-haj Maulana Fazal-UI-Karim, a publication of the Kazi Publication, Lahore, 1975.

The reading on Mencius was made possible by James Legge's indigenous five-volume translation of *The Chinese Classics* which have also incorporated the original Chinese texts coupled with compilation of commentaries by scholars as late as the Song dynasty.

The thesis by Prof. Muhammad Abul Quesem entitled *The Ethics of Al-Ghazali: A Composite Ethics in Islam* which he reserved his own rights of publication, is both a comprehensive work cum good introductory guide to Al-Ghazali's thoughts for any serious reader. As for Mencius, the writer finds Yang Zhepo's PhD. thesis, a six-year hard sweat of work, *A Study on Mencius' Theory of the Goodness of Human Nature Mind (Menzi Xingshan Lun Yanjiu)* very profound and solid.

Any attempt to read and study the masterpiece of great philosophers will usually drive the reader towards exhaustion. Both Al-Ghazzali and Mencius are evidently gifted in rhetoric and deduction of ideas. As a result, their arguments tend to leave behind too many loose ends for the readers to sort them out. Besides, parts of Al-Ghazzali's writings might appear inconsistent, ambiguous in meaning and even

conflicting with each other. This causes difficulties to a new reader of his philosophical work. Mencius' work seems less weighty for many parts of his thoughts were organized in a question-and-answer format and rather manageable for the reader. However, the reading on his masterpiece takes real effort too as his language and style was quite ancient for a modern reader.

Thus, the writer employs the method of analysis and induction to arrive at some issues, which form the framework for comparison in this dissertation. When the concepts or ideas from both schools of thoughts are paired, careful definitions of the both will be made. This is to avoid unnecessary synchronization that eventually fails to present the original thoughts.

Lastly, as the writing of dissertation gets going, the writer monitors that each sections of the dissertation ends with a paraphrased summary or conclusions. It is so in order to present thoughts clearly and that the goal of this research can be achieved. The deduction skills are employed to elaborate on where and what the findings or conclusions of the research would lead the readers to.

1.4 Past Research and intended achievement of this research

A number of good commentaries and studies have been made on Imam Al-Ghazzali as well as Mencius. Both are orthodox thinkers who are highly regarded in their respective civilizations. Their masterpiece and central ideas have been treated through centuries. The results of the past research are quite handful.

Besides the many effort to translate Al-Ghazzali's masterpiece *Ihya Ulum Al-Din* and other work into the Malay language, there are some publications that are translated and compiled according to the separate issues or concepts raised by Al-Ghazzali. The *Siri Al-Imam Al-Ghazzali* (1979) published by a publisher in Kelantan, the Syarikat Dian Sdn Bhd, is one of these helpful booklets. The writer finds the 3rd book in the series with the title of *Penyakit-penyakit Hati* very helpful for one to grapple with the idea of "Qalb" in Al-Ghazzali's theories. Another book entitled *Keajaiban Hati* (1979) by a Publisher in Singapore, *Pustaka Nasional*, offers the similar references on the "Qalb" as well as man's required steps to perfection.

In the past, research on Al-Ghazzali attempts mainly on his ethics, sufism and jurisprudence. W. Montgomery was one of the authoritative Western scholars who had had a comprehensive understanding of Al-Ghazzali and his thoughts. Montgomery's writings on Al-Ghazzali are of high reference values. The writer managed to grapple with two of his books entitled *Muslim Intellectual: A Study of Al-Ghazali* (1963) which was published by the Edinburgh University Press; and *The Faith and Practice of Al-Ghazzali* (1953) which was published by George Allen and Unwin Ltd, London. Of late, there are attempts to study on Al-Ghazzali's epistemology and methodology by local researches. Mustafa Abu-sway does one of those studies. He traces on the changes of Al-Ghazzali's epistemology during the different phases of his lifetime. An Indonesian scholar, Dr Hm. Zurkari Jahja, attempts another study on the methodology of Al-Ghazzali. Al-Ghazzali's conception regarding "Kalam" and his *Sufi* background are carefully observed to explain why his methodology varies and appears to be inconsistent in different writings.

Studies on Mencius are broadly divided into two types: firstly, the study of the Confucian ethics, that usually treats the teaching of Confucius as the main object of study and Mencius' work as only the supporting arguments; secondly, a study that focuses on Mencius and his doctrines. James Legge's translation of *The Work of Mencius* that comes with a compilation of the past commentaries with his own comments, is the most authoritative text for many English readers. For the Chinese readers, single concordance that seeks to classify Mencius' original texts under various research headings, e.g. Mencius' doctrine of goodness of human nature, Mencius' political policy, Mencius' ethics, Mencius' methods of moral cultivation, etc., are really helpful. The concordance that the writer relies on is entitled *Menxue Chanwei* by the author Chen Zhouxiang – a publication of Youlian Chubanshe, Hong Kong. 1964. Besides, some modern translations of the old exegesis work of *The Work of Mencius* by the renown Qing scholar Dai Zheng, namely the *Mengzi Ziyi Shuzheng* (<< 孟子字义疏证 >>) will be very helpful for a modern reader who loses touch with the Classical Mandarin style of language. The writer is referring to the book produced by the Committee of Translation for Chinese Ancient Text Series published by the Sichuan Bashu Chubanshe. Also, a translation cum commentary work by Yang Bojun should be given heed to – for Yang and the Hong Kong publisher Zhonghua Shuju, are widely recognised for their commitment to bring the Confucian texts to the modern readers.

The writer being benefited from the past research of the respective cultural groups on Imam Al-Ghazzali and Mencius, seeks to bring the two together in this dissertation on the concept of a perfect man. So far, there is hardly books expounding on the concept of a perfect man by either Al-Ghazzali or Mencius. It is almost definite

to say that there has not been any attempt to bring the concept of a perfect man by both Al-Ghazzali's and Mencius' together for a comparison. The intended achievement of this research is thus clear that a discourse between the Islamic and Chinese Civilization on the concept of a perfect personality is sought after and the writer hopes that the results of the dissertation offer good resources to the cross-cultural study of man.

1.5 Difficulties encountered

The writer encountered several difficulties while working on this dissertation. The problems range from conflicting or ambiguity of concept, terminology, and translation problems to methods of comparison, etc.

Al-Ghazzali is a celebrated saint and theologian of the 11th AD. He is, no doubt, one of the most original thinker and philosopher that Islam has produced. Being eloquent in words and dedication, the reader will naturally be charmed by his writings. However, it is rather exhaustive and confusing at times to follow some of his elaborated but conflicting arguments. For example, Al-Ghazzali on one hand argued that a person's nature could be changed for "if nature is unchangeable, then sermon, education and learning would have been useless" .⁷ On the other hand, he has classed man into few categories of which most categories of men are inclined to the evils and at least one category of them is a total hopeless 'breed of evil' !⁸ Confusing ideas like these cause problems to the study.

⁷ Maulana, Fazal-Ul-Karim (trans.), *Imam Ghazzali's Ihya Ulum-Id-Din (The Revival of Religious Learnings) Book 3* (Lahore: Kazi Publication, n.d.) p.57

Mencius was the *Second Sage* after Confucian in Chinese philosophy and tradition. His writings deal extensively with abstract ideas, e.g. the immense passion-nature (*haoran zhi qi*), the art of preservation of mind (*cunxin*), reclaiming the lost mind (*qiu fangxin*), etc. One would have difficulties on discovering that many parts of his intended ethics are residing at the realm of metaphysics instead.

In terms of terminology, the writer is hesitating whether the term '*Perfect Man*' should be used for the discussion for the term is not found directly in both Al-Ghazzali's and Mencius texts – though its concept has always been very clearly presented. Al-Ghazzali quoted extensively the words and deeds of the prophets as the model of all truth seekers. His description of the wise and learned, the angelic ones and the mystic, forms the various pictures of an ideal personality. Therefore, a common term i.e. the '*Perfect Man*' has to be employed to ease the discussion here.

Mencius did term his ideal man according to what Confucian has introduced the '*sage (shengren)*'. Besides, various portions of his writings elaborated on the idea of '*superior man (junzi)*' and '*great men (dazhangfu)*'. Here again, the writer feels that a common term, i.e. the '*Perfect Man*' should be introduced in order to incorporate all related terms and ideas that form the concept of a perfect man in Mencius' teachings.

Therefore, the term '*Perfect Man*' is finally chosen to bring both Al-Ghazzali and Mencius to a platform whereby their concept of ideal man can be discussed together. The intention of comparison here is not to synchronize both

⁸ Ibid., p.59.

theories but to serve as a basis for a dialogue between the two. It has always been the hope of the writer that similarities between the two would be enhanced while differences be accepted with understanding.

While the original manuscripts are in Arabic and Chinese respectively, the effort to bring both together relies on good translation work. The writer is relying on the English and Malay translations to grasp on Al-Ghazzali's writings. As for Mencius' work, the writer has the advantage of studying them in Mandarin (the original text) and English texts. The hurdle to understanding the texts has mostly been overcome but teething problems arise when the writer ponders on whether to keep to the translated in this dissertation. There is no particular authoritative English translation for Al-Ghazzali's work but James Legge's English translation of the work of Mencius has become the none other academic reference. Should the texts and terms in Legge's translations be fully observed?

The writer, after weighing on the matter, decided to take the freedom to rephrase Legge's translation or even employing the writer's own version of translation as Legge's language style is difficult to follow. Moreover, some portions of his translation work was proven wrongly interpreted.⁹ Besides, with the said amended translation, the writer attempts to clarify the ambiguity of meaning and connotation of words and language style that has changed through time.

⁹ Arthur Waley, an American scholar, has compiled an eight-page corrective pretext to the third edition of the five-volume *Chinese Classics* by James Legge. Waley has no intention to belittle Legge's contribution to sinology but to reveal that Legge's following Zhu Xi (died in 1200AD) resulted in some wrong interpretations. Zhu Xi lived at an immense distance of time from Mencius at a period when linguistic (as opposed to philosophic) studies were at their lowest ebb. A better reference would

In this dissertation, the Malay translated terms stand for their Arabic equivalence. It is not so much of difficulty as the Malay language almost perfectly represents the original Arabic terms in Roman alphabets. On the contrary, it is not the case with the graphical Chinese characters. The Chinese terms, if they are to be turned into Roman alphabets, involves a total replacement of words and sometimes at the expense of meaning. The writer tries to keep most of the Chinese terms together with their Chinese Phonetic Alphabets (the “*Hanyu Pinyin*”) beside their English translations. This is to avoid confusion of them as the phonetic alphabets captures the pronunciation but not the meaning. For example, “*xin*” is for “ 心 (heart/mind)” as well as “ 信 (trustworthiness)” ; “*ren*” stands for “ 仁 (benevolence)” as well as “ 人 (man)” ; “*li*” is for “ 礼 (propriety)” as well as “ 利 (profit-calculative attitude)” ! A glossary is thus attached at the front portion of the dissertation to function a explanatory note to the readers when necessary.

Last but not least, the comparison between the two selected philosophers of the dissertation, Al-Ghazzali and Mencius, would be of difficulty for some readers. Questions as to whether such pair can be compared on par are expected. On this thought, the writer would insist that the comparison is viable. The time laps between the two is of no problem as the focus is to compare on the original thoughts on the concept of a perfect man and not issues within a certain period of human history. Therefore, the writer would not attempt to compare Al-Ghazzali with a neo-Confucianist. A comparison between the selected pair should be fruitful. The writer will try to offer such findings with this dissertation.

come from Chao Qi (died in 201AD). Kindly refer to Legge, James, “*The Works of Mencius*” in the *The Chinese Classics, Vol. 2, 3rd Edition* (Taipei: SMC Publishing Inc., 1994) pp.vii-xiv.