

# Cultures Dialogue: The Coexistence Aesthetic Philosophy

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## Abstract

This study aimed at highlighting the public awareness of cultural coexistence, by trying to answer the fundamental questions regarding civilization and culture, as the intellectual and scientific preoccupations in this regard should not be underestimated. However, the study also aimed at emphasizing the main objective for all initiatives of dialogue among cultures and civilizations as it is in fact to initiate a new paradigm in international relations and those among human beings in our contemporary world. This necessity will be clearer when we compare it with the other paradigms which currently form the basis of international relations. It is through a fundamental and structural critique of these paradigms that the *raison d'être* for this new paradigm is identified.

**Keywords:** Culture, Coexistence, Cultures Dialogue

## 1.1 Introduction

Multiculturalism and diversity is a natural phenomenon, and this issue demands a natural reaction even if some people reject this fact; while this rejection does not change the reality, and some people accept this fact neutrally without any effective approach while others accept this fact with an effective approach.

In a world of online connections and faster transportation time is shrinking, distances are closing up, political borders are much less separating than before. Homogeneity will always unite people, but each passing day we are reserving more room for differences as we realize we cannot escape from them. Opportunities of civility, mutual learning, experiences of sampling different tastes, and positive engagement are burgeoning rapidly. Nevertheless, engagement does not always take place peacefully. Many sad incidents of the recent past have showed that violence continues to accompany us along our journey to the future. We have seen in this journey that when a calamity or violence strikes everyone is affected in one way or another, directly or indirectly; there is no absolute immunity from its tragic results. From the poorest regions to the most developed ones, all nations have grown much more interdependent, be it economically, politically, and socially, and this brings us to an awareness of the need for developing a culture of coexistence.

Increasing "globalization" in the present-day world has heightened our awareness of cultural coexistence. The presence of the "global village", where populations of all countries are able to meet frequently and all cultures to interact directly, has made vast geographical distances as well as deep feelings of estrangement disappear quickly. As countries and cultures keep interacting with one another, on a scale the world has never seen, their diversity has become too obvious to overlook, which calls for a great wisdom if they are to live side by side harmoniously. In this connection, what mankind has been working on, such as consensus building, inter-civilization dialogue and peaceful coexistence, bears on the destiny of mankind and survival of the world as a whole. We applaud the activities by the World Public Forum "Dialogue of Civilizations" and appeal to all the people on earth to work concertedly for a peaceful and harmonious world.

The 20th century left behind a large body of experience and lessons, whose aftermath and impact are still very much with us, that deserves a serious reflection on our part even today. The two world wars in the first half of the century brought untold scourge of human suffering while the "cold war" in the second half kept the world on the edge with its military confrontation and ideological stand-off. In the "post-cold-war" period, we saw either old troubles revived or new ones instigated by so-called "conflicting civilizations". We have seen heated conflicts, even wars, between different ethnic groups, different religions and different sects, and felt for ourselves the deep agony and sorrow brought by them. Particularly in the Middle East, in Syria, Egypt and other places where Asia and Africa join, the situation has gone from bad to worse, with international politics becoming more touch and go and state-to-state relations growing increasingly complex. With human coexistence out of order and society plunged into chaos, world peace and tranquillity has become more and more elusive. At the same time, peace-loving people around the world have persevered in promoting dialogue and reconciliation so as to remove the seeds of confrontation and reduce the threat of war. It is our hope that the 21st century will be a century of international cooperation and inter-civilization dialogue, because only dialogue and cooperation can give our world a chance for survival and development and make mankind a community of coexistence where tolerance and inclusion prevail.

## 1.2 Problem Statement

Even there are some shining moments as religions were the source of peaceful coexistence throughout the history, unfortunately some false interpretations misused them as a source of wars and conflicts; extremism was the main obstacle for reaching to the real goal of the religions, and it is still the main problem from the Jewish extremism (Zionism), Christian extremism (Evangelicals who were present in the previous American administration and now their presence can be felt) to the Islamic extremism (Taliban and their brothers), besides the Secular extremism, Capitalistic extremism, and Liberalistic extremism as the main role players in the most recent issues.

The act of dialogue among cultures and civilizations faces multiple theoretical and practical questions. Fundamental questions regarding civilization and culture, and the intellectual and scientific preoccupations in this regard should not be underestimated. However, to emphasize that the main objective for this initiative of dialogue among cultures and civilizations is in fact to initiate a new paradigm in international relations and those among human beings in our contemporary world. This necessity will be clearer when we compare it with the other paradigms which currently form the basis of international relations. It is through a fundamental and structural critique of these paradigms that the *raison d'être* for this new paradigm is identified.

We cannot invite people and governments to the paradigm of dialogue of cultures and civilizations without learning lessons from history, without thoroughly investigating the reasons behind major world disasters in the twentieth century and their continuation in the current one, and without passing judgment on the existing dominant paradigm which is based on a dialogue of power and glorification of might.

Dialogue among civilizations, viewed from an ethical perspective, is in fact an invitation to discard what might be termed the power oriented will, in favour of a love oriented one. In this case, the result of dialogue will be empathy and compassion. And the interlocutors will primarily be thinkers, leaders, artists and all benevolent intellectuals who are the true representatives of their respective cultures and civilizations.

## 1.3 Importance of the Study

Relying on shared principles, objectives, and threats in order to find shared solutions is a major step towards changing the existing situation and isolating the extremists who, by sanctifying violence and force, have spoiled the world for all its inhabitants regardless of their culture or civilization, strategic objectives of the dialogue among Civilisations must include:

1. Promoting and facilitating the peaceful resolution of conflicts and/disputes.
2. Reconciling tensions between cultures, countries and religions.
3. Promoting and facilitating the much needed dialogue between Muslim societies and other societies around the world.
4. Contributing to academic research and enriching the wider debate around peace in the world.

Thus, and for achieving these goals, the dialogue among Civilisations will fulfil its objectives through activities like the organization of diverse cultural, artistic, and scientific events including debates, symposia and seminars designed to encourage exchange between cultures and civilisations, maintaining, and when needed, initiating regular communication with experts in the field as well as with all other foundations or associations with similar or complementary objectives.

## 1.4 Literature Review

In 1993, Huntington provoked great debate among international relations theorists with the interrogatively-titled "The Clash of Civilizations?", a controversial, oft-cited article published in *Foreign Affairs* magazine. Its description of post-Cold War geopolitics contrasted with the controversial End of History thesis advocated by Francis Fukuyama.

Huntington expanded "The Clash of Civilizations?" to book length and published it as *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* in 1996. The article and the book posit that post-Cold War conflict would most frequently and violently occur because of cultural rather than ideological differences. That, whilst in the Cold War, conflict likely occurred between the Capitalist West and the Communist Bloc East, it now was most likely to occur between the world's major civilizations — identifying seven, and a possible eighth: (i) Western, (ii) Latin American, (iii) Islamic, (iv) Sinic (Chinese), (v) Hindu, (vi) Orthodox, (vii) Japanese, and (viii) the African. This cultural organization contrasts the contemporary world with the classical notion of sovereign

states. To understand current and future conflict, cultural rifts must be understood, and culture — rather than the State — mern nations will lose predominance if they fail to recognize the irreconcilable nature of cultural tensions.

*In Eurasia the great historic fault lines between civilizations are once more aflame. This is particularly true along the boundaries of the crescent-shaped Islamic bloc of nations, from the bulge of Africa to central Asia. Violence also occurs between Muslims, on the one hand, and Orthodox Serbs in the Balkans, Jews in Israel, Hindus in India, Buddhists in Burma and Catholics in the Philippines. Islam has bloody borders. — "The Clash of Civilizations?", original 1993 "Foreign Affairs" magazine article.*

Critics call The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order the theoretical legitimization of American-led Western aggression against China and the world's Islamic cultures. Nevertheless, this post-Cold War shift in geopolitical organization and structure requires that the West internally strengthens itself culturally, by abandoning the imposition of its ideal of democratic universalism and its incessant military interventionism. Other critics argue that Huntington's taxonomy is simplistic and arbitrary, and does not take account of the internal dynamics and partisan tensions within civilizations. Huntington's influence upon U.S. policy has been likened to that of British historian A.J. Toynbee's controversial religious theories about Asian leaders in the early twentieth century.

Personal Representative of the Secretary-General for the UN Year of Dialogue among Civilizations has said: *History does not kill. Religion does not rape women, the purity of blood does not destroy buildings and institutions do not fail. Only individuals do those things.*

Mr. Picco was appointed the Personal Representative to the Secretary-General for the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations in 1999 in order to facilitate discussions on diversity, through organizing conferences, seminars and disseminating information and scholarly materials. Having served the United Nations for two decades, Mr. Picco is most recognized for participating in UN efforts to negotiate the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan and in bringing an end to the Iran-Iraq war. He believes that people should take responsibility for who they are, what they do, what they value, and what they believe in.

### **1.5 Peaceful Co-existence between Divine Religions**

Before the founding of the state of Israel in 1948, about a quarter of a million Jews lived in Morocco. In the 1950s and 1960s, many immigrated to the new Jewish state, leaving a diminished Jewish community behind. Hind Al-Subai Al-Idrisi takes a closer look at interreligious dialogue in Morocco, a predominantly Muslim country that is now ruled by a moderate Islamist party.

Like several countries in the Middle East, Morocco witnessed a popular movement that fell short of a revolution. But citizen demand for government reform did lead to a number of changes. These changes included a referendum on a new constitution, limiting the Moroccan monarch's authority, as well as elections, which led to a victory for the Justice and Development Party, an Islamic political party.

While many people feared an Islamic political party might not respect the faiths of non-Muslim nationals, Morocco is showing its commitment to the promotion of co-existence between Moroccans of different faiths under the Justice and Development Party.

Morocco is considered one of the most stable countries of the region, with more or less peaceful co-existence between the various religions and cultures that make up the Moroccan social fabric. As a testament to this, the city of Fez, classified by UNESCO as part of the global human heritage, held a significant event on 13 February 2013: the inauguration of the newly renovated Fez Prayer Synagogue.

The collective past of mankind was filled with stories of statecraft, including negotiations and alliances, for purposes ranging from political and economic interests, national survival, to cultural development. But as achieving agreement was often not easy, conflicts and wars sometimes became inevitable. So much so that history of human evolution has almost become another name for history of human wars and conflicts, leaving behind many dark pages. Yet, despite numerous sufferings and tribulations we have gone through, many of us remain somewhat immature, even childish. Confronted with global challenges, they appear numb, lost, not sure what to do and not sober enough. They don't seem to have any idea how to get themselves out of the current predicament. At present, the financial tsunami that once swept across the world is still in place while global economy remains sluggish. But deafening sound of gunshot is being heard in local wars and conflicts, as forces continue their fight for selfish gains and domination. What we see today are no difference from familiar rivalries, conflicts and struggles between various political, economic, social, cultural and specific interest groups of one

kind or another. However, just playing the blaming game or sinking into despair will help nothing. We must pick up our spirit and get into action to change such a negative state of affairs.

It is by coming through such crises, conflicts and wars that mankind has come to appreciate the critical importance of peace and learned how to address conflicts and secure coexistence. Indeed, history has seen inter-civilization conflicts and inter-civilization dialogues going hand in hand. Driven by desires to reduce conflicts and wars, mankind has worked energetically to increase dialogue and understanding, which reflects the progress and maturity of humanity. The coming of the modern times has enabled us to see, even more clearly than before, the need for world peace and human coexistence. The consensus we have reached is: war leaves both hurt while peace lets both prosper.

### **1.6 Continues Hope**

Despite all the disputes and conflicts, mankind has never lost its confidence, nor has it stopped its determined march toward now and an even better future. Civilizations and cultures dating back thousands of years have left us with rich and precious experience, which helps us not only to survive but live a better life. The need to survive and live on harmoniously requires us to replace confrontation with dialogue, chaos with harmony, and all-lose with all-win in a world of human coexistence. While already living intimately in a rather cosy global village, the last thing one can do is to pursue a "bagger-my-neighbour" policy. What we should do is to advocate good-neighbourliness, love, sharing and affinity. In an international community that is already globalized, we must work vigorously to resolve disputes, stop wars and give the reins to peace and tranquillity as much as possible. It is for this purpose that we are gathered here, mingling and making acquaintance with one another, learning and understanding each other, talking, interacting, sharing and building consensus among us. We believe that dialogue is a reliable vehicle whereby we can arrive at mutual understanding. It is also a high wisdom whereby we can build our close cooperation on the basis of our distinctive individuality and diversity. Conflicts of civilizations can lead to global chaos and a system collapse of international community, whereas inter-culture dialogue will usher in a peaceful and harmonious world. Therefore, opting for inter-civilization dialogue and working together to build one world for all of us should become a consensus of mankind and the mainstream trend of world development.

Should all human civilizations become one in the end or should they be kept as diverse and pluralistic as before? This has always been the central question in the debate on civilization encounters. History of human evolution tells us that cultural diversity and pluralistic existence of human communities is an irrefutable fact, which has been widely accepted and recognized as such along with inter-civilization dialogue. The dazzling display of unique but colourful cultural characters, which gives our world its very dynamism and diversity, has come to be regarded as an ideal state of not only cultures but of world affairs as well. Hence the very existence of our world may hinge on its ability to tolerate diversity and accommodate individuality. Civilizations have developed into their present forms amidst social environments vastly different in nations and countries, resulting in a rich texture of human cultures, including colourful languages, thinking's, customs, beliefs and social structures. Herein lies the very beauty of human civilizations. We should cherish it, preserve it and share it among us with appreciation. Sharing beautiful cultures, nurturing a commonality of all civilizations and identifying their universally recognized characters - this is the responsibility and mandate for all of us.

The meeting, communication, dialogue and understanding between cultures require one not only to self-consciously respect, appreciate and preserve the culture of his own, but also to learn and appreciate other cultures which may very well have peculiar and equally proud advantages. Recognizing, respecting and appreciating the diversity and individuality of cultures is the necessary precondition and the natural state of our coexistence which no one can possibly transcend or has any need to do so. We advocate mutual respect and peaceful coexistence of all cultures, all values, all religions and all social systems. The eventual integration of all cultures can only come about when they communicate fully and enjoy a harmonious coexistence. While living in a world of great pluralism, we must take full recognition of diversity as the prerequisite and realization of harmonious coexistence as the ultimate aim. The integration of civilizations should be based on our consensus and synergy, and the diversity of civilizations requires that we oppose hegemony of either one particular country or one particular religion. Only in this way can we ensure equality of all countries and coexistence of all religions. Looking at the history of interaction among countries and cultures, we can find that inter-civilization dialogue, though not easy, is entirely possible as it has been encouraged all along and pursued by the majority with great enthusiasm. In this era of globalization and the Internet, cultural exchanges are frequently conducted with inter-civilization dialogue being looked at as the first or even the best choice. Though countries and peoples may have crossed sword in the past, the maturity of mankind is now measured by the commitment to dialogue and exchanges between civilizations or cultures. Human coexistence and common development can only be achieved through dialogue, understanding and reconciliation. We must bring ourselves out of the shadows of war and do our best to avoid confrontation. In this sense, dialogue provides us with a useful path to coexistence based

on preservation of diversity of civilizations. We must strive to build a peaceful and harmonious world through cultural inclusion. Herein lays the wisdom for cultures to live side by side harmoniously and the art for them to achieve mutual understanding and coexistence. In this connection, there is a role for politics, culture, ethnicity and religion to play as they all shoulder an unshakable responsibility. It could be said that without dialogues between and among the world's civilizations there can be no coexistence of all human cultures. Even more crucial is the commitment to harmony by conflicting political pursuits or differing religious persuasions. Without a conscious awareness of cultural coexistence and its eventual realization, building an international community based on coexistence will just be empty talk, and bringing about a harmonious world a fond but elusive dream. If we really want to make the dream come true, we must act, and act together.

### **1.7 Human Cultures**

Human cultures of various kinds may converge to become a community of common cultural identity. In fact, mankind has already learned to live amicably together by putting aside their differences. Such communities of common identity may take the form, in political area, of the United Nations, the European Union, ASEAN and AU, in economic area, of the World Trade Organization, IMF and World Bank, and in legal area, of the World Organization of IPR Protection and the International Court of Justice in the Hague, etc. Consciously cultivating a sense of community of common identity in our pluralistic world will help both solidify the existing communities of human existence and pave the way for future communities of human development. These communities of common identity deserve our great respect and our renewed commitment to making them work more effectively. By the same token and perhaps in a deeper sense, communication, dialogue, cooperation and collaboration between religious or spiritual values may also be pursued in keeping with the model of community of common cultural identity. As the world becomes a lot more integrated politically and economically and as globalization has taken roots in practically all areas of human endeavours, exploring for the establishment of a community-based civilization through cultural dialogue and cooperation is certainly worth trying. This is why we are pushing for greater progress in inter-civilization dialogue.

Cultural or civilization communities of common identity may be, for the time being or forever, a mission impossible if they are to take the form of large and all-embracing international organizations. They, however, can serve as a topical theme for us to discuss on this inter-civilization dialogue forum or other multicultural gatherings. In a sense, without inter-civilization dialogue, there can be no cultural coexistence. And without cultural coexistence, there can be no international coexistence and global harmony. That is why we must keep working for inter-civilization dialogue and for closer and lasting friendship and cooperation among all of us. Civilization equality, culture complementarily, mutual respect, mutual understanding, confidence building and cooperation by all - this is the right way for world development and the ideal state of human harmony and coexistence. Inter-culture dialogue requires deeper exploration and greater promotion of all cultural resources. In large numbers of cultures, we can find a treasure house of profound cultural and civilization sediments, which can provide us with endless sources of inspiration and reference for our endeavour to build a harmonious world. I hereby call upon all of you to work together to tap and use this cultural treasure house.

No one can deny that in either inter-civilization conflicts or inter-civilization dialogues of the past, religion played a crucial role, particularly in decisions bearing on war and peace. Religion, as the spiritual resource and mental articulation of mankind, is often regarded as a symbol of peoples' cultural or civilization identity and continuity and occupies a pivotal place in many countries' social life as their most representative characters. Given this, it is imperative for us to help religion play a more positive role for world peace by turning it into key force in preventing wars and stopping conflicts. Improved communication and increased understanding among different religions can help countries, ethnicities and other social groupings to turn sword into ploughshare and achieve reconciliation and peace. But we must also be vigilant enough to keep religious misunderstanding or strife from escalating into ethnic conflict, political crisis or even war. Therefore, we must bring religion into inter-civilization dialogue, giving it a greater role to play in promoting ethnic reconciliation and international cooperation, and encouraging it to expand the constructive dialogues it has involved in with a view to nurturing a better atmosphere of friendship and peace in the world. Here in China, religion has played a positive role in the development of the country's new culture. The history of China's reform and opening up coincides with the golden period of harmony and expansion of China's many religions. China's social harmony and ethnic unity are inseparable from the participation of all religious communities in the country. Religious dialogues and forums held in China contribute positively to peaceful religious relations in the world. In the future, China's religious communities will play a greater role and exert a more positive influence in China's society. We will attach great importance to the role played by religion in advancing China's social value, ethics and cultural dialogue, vigorously guide religion to better adapt to China's social development and cultural renewal and help the Chinese culture to contribute more to a peaceful and harmonious world.

From a global point of view, inter-civilization dialogue and building of a harmonious world requires the participation of the world's major countries. The major countries, thanks to their outstanding political, economic, military, diplomatic and cultural weight, occupy an irreplaceable position in determining or altering global balance of power. These countries should be asked to act responsibly in maintaining world peace and justice. They should be fair, equitable, just, and abide by the UN Charter and international norms. They should be asked not to go after selfish interests, behave in a biased way or commit injustice, which should find full expression in their handling of current international political, economic, cultural and other affairs. We must stand opposed to all political practices that violate the UN Charter, international law and WTO rules, all ideological prejudices and trade protectionism, and all acts of gross interference in the internal affairs of other countries in violation of international law under the pretext of protecting human rights, humanitarianism and religious freedom. The major countries, therefore, must be held to higher standards when it comes to their role in maintaining international order and upholding world peace.

Whether in international affairs or inter-civilization dialogue, China is playing an increasing role. We should thank the people of various countries for the understanding and support they have given to China's reform and opening up and cherish the true friendship we have forged with the various countries in the course of international exchanges. Against the backdrop of globalization, China ought to look more closely at the relationship between the Chinese civilization and the world civilization. What is more, China is duty bound to offer ideas and proposals for the creation of a globalized civilization. The Chinese civilization has lasted over five thousand years, boasting such advocacies as the Middle Way, Harmony and Peace. The Chinese culture focuses on the unity of the diverse, emphasizing overall, element-specific and co-construction development and creating a unique culture of harmony and integration. Though influenced by the "great unification" pattern, China's multi-ethnic culture has managed to retain a rich texture of diversity and individuality which underpins a overall structure of stability and harmony. The ideal state of Chinese culture sees the whole mankind as one single family and the world a united community. It treats alien cultures with tolerance and inclusion and pursues development by following the dictates of nature and man's greatest virtues. In the long course of development, the Chinese culture has come to the realization that unity (identity) is an aspired state of things, one that could be seen only in dream, whereas harmony is real, physical and present that mankind can achieve for coexistence. The Chinese invented the culture of harmony and recommended it to the rest of the world in a hope that it could be adopted to make the world a harmonious place. In its dealing with the outside world, particularly in its cooperation with the Rhodes Forum under the World Public Forum "Dialogue of Civilizations", China's Soong Ching Ling Foundation has worked actively to promote the late Honorary President's belief in "universal harmony and cooperation of mankind" while highlighting its interest and participation in the cause for world peace and its desire to tell China's true stories to the world in the faithful service of truth. The foundation has organized prominent Chinese personalities and scholars to study and participate in the Rhode Forum and to prepare an open Round Table at the forum entitled facing the Future: China and the World from Multiple Perspectives. Here, I would like to call on scholars from around the world to participate in this Round Table for sincere exchanges and increased understanding and friendship.

## 1.8 Conclusion

All cultures, in their contacts and interactions with one another, have tried to understand, emulate and adapt to one another in order to achieve harmony. Their values will find ample expression in the public forum of inter-civilization dialogues and other platforms.

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