

ARTICLES

CIVILIZATION DIALOGUES*: CONCORD DIALECTICS BETWEEN WEST AND EAST

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The West versus the East. These two parts together make the world. The values of these two separate civilizations, which have up to now been so different, are merging together as differences and distinguishing characteristics diminish. We therefore tend to discuss civilization dialogue as if it is a category of general spiritual values. As part of globalization the process it is logical that policies are pursued which aim to preserve national, ethnical, local, national, governmental and popular identities and peculiarities. Preserving and developing national identities is one of the key preoccupations of globalization.

The history of civilization is developing. In spite of this development, however, equality has not been achieved, and the battle to decide winners and losers continues. In some areas the West is regarded as being ahead of the East, and in some cases vice versa. This is a natural phenomenon, how-

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ever it is not a process with a single outcome. It has secondary purposes. The process of globalization in which Western and Eastern civilizations intersect with and civilize one other makes them unite. This phenomenon is not necessarily detrimental but has negative consequences. Scientific research has shown that 'human equity is based on the fulfillment of two different origins – the West and the East'¹.

By referring the West and the East, as two cultural sources, scientists agree that the Western and Eastern human cultures travel in two different directions, creating two civilizations and two different ways of being² [2, 32]. In fact their different spiritual and material values together create our universal civilization.

Historically it has been shown that the West, which tends to view older technologies as obsolete and irrelevant, develops very fast, while the East, which is generally understood as having greater regard for holistic development, greater respect for nature and the natural world and harmony in life, is in less of a hurry to develop.

So what are the main differences between the West and the East? What are the main differences in their cultures and civilizations, socio-economic structures, political life, spiritual renaissance? The European West believes itself to be the creator of machinery and technology which it subsequently introduced to the East. But the actual situation is very different. The modern image of Oriental countries has radically changed this view. For instance, Japan, the Land of the Rising Sun, has become one of the most developed countries of the world with a stable economy and political structure. This country is also one of the most spiritually progressive countries in terms of the promotion of its own cultural values. China today is one of the strongest powers in the world with a huge and relatively stable market economy which rivals that of the US. China is noted both for its economic and political development. But it is distinguished by its spiritual development and philosophy of seeking harmony in life³.

¹ А. Панарин, *Глобальное политическое прогнозирование*, Moscow 2005, p. 56.

² А.Д. Тойнби, *Современный момент истории // Цивилизация перед судом истории*, Москва 1995, p. 32.

³ Т.П. Григорьева, *Дао и логос: встреча культур*, Moscow 1992, p. 29.

The differences between the East and the West are demonstrated through their psychology and mentality. European and Oriental philosophies differ immensely and especially in their attitude to and relation with the environment. Europeans consider nature as a laboratory for their experiments, while Oriental countries consider nature holistically and as being in harmony with humankind.

In spite of the fact that these two civilizations and two cultures differ from one other, there must be no attempt to define which is superior, since the two parts of the whole cannot survive without each other. Today the differences and competitiveness between Western and Eastern countries are diminishing because of the globalization process. Therefore the talented representatives of both western and eastern countries become the representatives of the civilized world as a whole.

Oriental civilization has turned out to be more adapted to life. It has experienced and survived invasion and colonization. Oriental civilization was able to find a way through these difficult times because of its viability and capability. However Oriental countries have not fallen behind developed European countries.

These two different but interwoven civilizations complement each other and make one universal culture. There will always be interdependency between the cultural values, mentalities and harmony of the West and the East.

In this modern era of globalization the world is becoming an integrated system combining different elements. As Carl Shmitt states, the universal Western and the Eastern histories are entirely based upon on dual elements: the Earth and the Water, the Continent and the Ocean.

Questions regarding future development are of great significance in the era of globalization. It is well known that Western man fears spiritual degradation. Some scientists are seeking to define the basic principles of western culture and art. Some attempt to make comparisons between modern western art and eastern spiritual heritage.

Global unification has given rise to new concepts of cross-cultural harmony and general human tolerance. Cross-cultural harmony in the globalization process is referred to as a social-cultural factor which establishes harmony amongst countries, facilitating the understanding of each other's 'us'.

All thinking is founded upon the harmony of ideas and opinions, principles and ways of perceiving the world. This harmony is considered to be the point at which dialogue intersects⁴.

The modern world is built upon interdependent economic, technological and information systems. But there is a great danger that wars and conflicts arise where these systems intersect.

Samuel Huntington states that modern civilizations distinguish themselves from one another by their history, language, religion, culture and customs⁵ [5]. These differences are then used in the definition of 'East' and 'West'. The traditions generally assigned to Western culture are rationalism, Christianity, enlightenment, democracy, individuality; for eastern culture these are mystery, sensibility, Islam and Buddhism (and other religions), tradition, cooperation, and the extended role of the government.

It is not possible to identify any individual country as definitively Western or Eastern. The depiction here is merely a geographical one. Culturally any country may display both western and eastern traditions.

Dialogue relies upon social unity and must have meaning. The key feature of dialogue is the equity of the two parties. In controversial situations one side may monopolize relations and dialogue subsides into monologue. Therefore dialogue is perception of equity of the unity's elements. This means that only dialogue can serve as the foundations of human relations and equity.

According to philosophical discourse today's western crisis is the result of 'centrism', where monologue has prevailed over dialogue. Buber states in his 1922 publication that the reason for the western crisis was the disappearance of the 'you and 'me' relationship⁶ [6, 24-25].

In summary, it is our view that a culture which is based on 'monologue' is a 'centralized culture'. This means that one side becomes dominant while the other becomes the follower, attempting to mimic its dominant counterpart.

⁴ В.М. Махлин, *Я и Другой: истоки философии диалога XX в.*, СПб, 1995; idem, *Я и Другой: к истории диалогического принципа в философии XX в.*, Moscow 1997.

⁵ С. Хантингтон, *Столкновение цивилизаций*, "Полис" 1994, No. 1.

⁶ *Философии Мартина Бубера*, изд. П.А. Schilipp, В. Фридман, La Sal-London 1967, p. 24-25.

The dialogue of 'West-East' is certainly dynamic. For example, in the 19th century it was generally believed that the European (i.e., Western) model of civilization was the ideal to be adopted universally. Such attitudes led, for example, to the 'francophile' tendencies in Russia in the 19th century, shown in Russian literature and in the works of Turgenev, for example, who wrote in the European style. Nevertheless, Tolstoy and Dostoevsky rejected this so-called French style and created their own new styles of writing. They offered Europeans a new understanding of Russian literature. They could contemplate Europe through Russian eyes. India and Japan also retained their own philosophies. In fact, some enlightened European thinkers were influenced by the Indian philosophies of Vivekananda and Aurobindo. The educated Japanese proved to Europeans and Americans that they were fully devoted to Buddhism⁷ [7, 22].

Where there is aggression, dialogue becomes impossible, and opportunities to build dialogue relapse instead into attempts by each side to discredit the other. The diametrically opposed systems of communism and anti-communism are an example of where totally different philosophies have never intersected with one other, and dialogue would never have been possible. In this case attention focused instead on the differences and incompatible peculiarities of West and East.

Today the world is becoming one and seeking new peace. Cooperation is being pursued for the sake of international development and security. In the modern world no country is able to resist to economic and political modernization. Western countries, for example, cannot guarantee their security without resolving the problems associated with Eastern countries.

The global expansion of Western economic, political and cultural standards and the artificial 'reorientation' of eastern countries to western norms has in fact intensified the differences between West and East. The concept of 'cultural dialogue' is used to describe the 'exchange of cultural goods' which destroys cultural values, and reduces values and cultures to the status of goods. The words of Claude Levi-Strauss are very relevant here; he states, 'We are now threatened with the prospect of our being only

⁷ Э. Бернар, *Диалог культур. 50/50: Опыт словаря нового мышления*, Moscow 1989, p. 22.

consumers, able to consume anything from any point in the world and from any culture, but of losing all originality?

It is natural that many scientists, politicians, cultural, artistic and religious representatives seek to address the issues that they predict will arise in the next 10-15 years. Yet it is difficult to predict the future. Today's influential ideas may lose their influence in one stroke. On the other hand, ideas which exist as yet only nominally can turn out to be hugely influential philosophies. However, dialogue between the East and the West must always be based on peace and unity. These foundations will ensure our future. These ideals have been handed down through the generations, guide today's globalizing civilizations and the legacy which we must leave for future generations.

SUMMARY

This article analyzes how the globalization process is affecting cultural and spiritual development in western and eastern civilizations. The authors describe the psychological aspects of development in the west and the east and analyze contradictions and competition between these two civilizations. The authors conclude that the general human values of the west and the east, which define cross-cultural dialogue and tolerance, can be described as social and cultural factors.

Keywords: civilization, dialogue, the west-the east, cultural values, general human values, cross-cultural dialogues, tolerance