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Intercultural Dialog as a Necessity in the Modern World – Conceptualization and Development Perspectives

Denys Svyrydenko

Doctor of Philosophical Sciences, Professor,
Guangdong University of Petrochemical Technology (Maoming, China)
E-mail: denis_sviridenko@ukr.net
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6126-1747

Wiktor Możgin

Jagiellonian University in Kraków (Kraków, Poland)
E-mail: wiktor.mozgin@gmail.com
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5744-8103

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The contemporary globalized world requires joint actions of representatives of different cultures and nationalities. Intercultural dialogue has become an indispensable element of technological and economic development. The prevailing paradigm of West-centrism is changing, which will manifest itself primarily in the emergence of new non-Western powers. Through the selfish imposition of its own patterns and values on the whole world, the West did not consider other players who were growing in strength, who today strive to emphasize their own presence in the international arena, relying on their uniqueness and cultural and religious distinctiveness. Therefore, the authors of this article attempt to explain the ongoing processes of changing the system of relations between various civilizations. They also seek to outline vectors according to which intercultural relations will develop. Indeed, finding effective solutions in this area is significant, and this article is a starting point for further academic and social debate.

Keywords: intercultural dialogue, West-centrism, occidentalism, international relations, socio-cultural differences.

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Introduction

In 1959, Edward Hall, in his work *The Silent Language*, presented a famous thesis that man is a cultural being, and throughout his life, whether he likes it or not, he is subject to socialization processes resulting from the norms and values characteristic for a specific cultural circle. This thought was very hard to accept, especially for the so-called "Westerners," because it directly alluded to the existence of cultural differentiation of society (Hall, 1979). The concept of cultural division is part of Shmuel N. Eisenstadt's idea of the "Axial Age" in human history. According to this theory, this epoch falls on the 1st millennium BC, when there was a significant transformation and redefinition of basic ideas about the world, man and transcendence, and on this basis, their institutional base was formed. These were irreversible changes that influenced the future shape of great civilizations and the history of all humanity (Eisenstadt, 2003). This institutionalization also initiated a dynamic process of reforming societies' internal structure and their external relations. Moreover, the principles of the coexistence of representatives of many cultures and the historical history that took place simultaneously, constituting parallels and creating the human historical process, were established. This time is also the beginning of the differences between great civilizations, which in the 6th century AD joined the Muslim civilization (Evans & Levinson, 2009).

The concept of the Great Divergence is also present in the literature thanks to Kenneth Pomeranz, who presents a different context of the existence of this concept and gives it a different semantic meaning. He focused primarily on the economic development of West and East Asia. According to Pomeranz, after 1800, in this respect, a progressive process of distancing oneself can be noticed because before that, there were no significant differences in economic development, taking into account, for comparison, the developed regions of China and Great Britain. Until the 18th century, the economic development of the world was similar. This tendency was violated by the effects of the Enlightenment modernization of the West and the scientific achievements declared on this canvas. However, Pomeranz sees this process only as a hesitation in simple convergence because the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century brought the contractual economic balance between the West and the East again (Pomeranz, 2000). The issue of the economy in this respect is undoubtedly rooted in a specific culture, or in other words – social mentality, which is an integral part of that culture.

Many other researchers, in addition to those mentioned above, have also attempted to clarify the issue of cultural differentiation. However, they all had a common denominator that determined their way of thinking. It is the question of West-centrism. In 2010, Niall Ferguson, in his work *Civilization. The West and the Rest* has emphatically described the way of thinking in which the West is at the center. He pointed out that the emphasis on the dominant position of Western countries results primarily from the development of technology, science, and the Weberian state model based on the rule of law, private property, and the Protestant work ethic (Ferguson, 2010).

Nevertheless, the origins of the Western-centered way of thinking can be traced back to the Enlightenment, when the unique "West Project" was launched. It was then that the narrative vector was formed, according to which the West was associated with the concept of progress that was being made through scientific achievements and a rationalized vision of the formation of a new man living in better conditions and questioning everything, trying to explain rationally, primarily through science, occurring processes and specific phenomena. The famous Cartesian cogito ergo sum, which formed the basis of Enlightenment thought, also shows the depth of the changes that took place in the West in the 17th century. Simply put,

this means that the rationalization of the way of existence has won the ruling dualism existing so far, based on the existence of two truths – the revealed truth resulting from Christian thought and the secular one, which was embodied in everyday reality – subjecting the monarch's authority, paying taxes, taking care of one's own family, etc. The Enlightenment abolished the theological idea of the creation of the world and, importantly, in the context of cultural differentiation, disrupted the validity of the idea of Caesaropapism, often referred to in the literature as the theory of "two swords of power" (Bartoszewski, 2010). However, it is worth bearing in mind one crucial thing – the Enlightenment project was aimed at liberating man and making him the creator of his own fate, hence such a radical break with religion and transferring it to the private sphere of every human being.

The process of rationalization and secularization of the social space in the West did not take into account one thing because the non-European world, or rather the non-Western world (the geographical location of the United States should be taken into account), was still entangled in the relationship between the state and religion. It is also irrelevant in this context whether it was one of the great monotheistic religions or beliefs in various idols of tribes inhabiting the regions of Oceania or South America. This is mainly because in the West, in addition to the official structure, there was a centralized organization of the Church. At the same time, in countries such as Buddhist or Muslim, there was no such organized structure in charge of the religious sphere, which was related to the fact that the state took control over matters of faith, having under its control the doctrinal space and the institutional sphere (Inglehart & Norris, 2006). This process of rationalizing and secularizing the West went hand in hand with a misreading and understanding of representatives of the non-Western world. This is reflected, among other things, in the colonial period, when the Christian colonial authorities imposed the Western type of thinking and functioning on the natives from the non-Western world. The result was the unprecedented destruction of cultures and social structures, the functioning of which was often based on long-standing traditions and norms prevailing in given communities. This mainly happened in the form of reforms or revolutions based on occasional ideas. What else in this context was the construction of a secular state in Turkey by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk or the reforms carried out in India under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru. Therefore, from these Enlightenment inspirations flows the contemporary mission of spreading freedom and democracy in the world, accepted by the Western world as a specific duty or a kind of "secular religion" (Bellah, 1967).

This Western cultural expansionism, with its axiological saturation, and selfish consideration of one's own interests today, led to the need to find new vectors of the common existence of representatives of various cultures and nationalities in the world. Samuel Huntington was right when he postulated that the importance of religion in world affairs had been diminishing for nearly three hundred years. Nevertheless, in the 17th century, after more than a hundred years of bloody religious warfare, European leaders who signed the Peace of Westphalia wanted to use it to limit the influence of religion on politics, and in the next century, Enlightenment thinkers preferred reason over faith as a source of knowledge. The certainty that science would also dethrone religion grew in the nineteenth century. As was commonly held, mankind was moving toward a new stage of rationalism, pragmatism, and secularism. Modernization and modernity seemed to undermine the sense of the existence of a religion that was considered a dark relic of the past. However, in the last decades of the twentieth century, the march towards secularism was reversed. An almost global revival of religion has begun, visible in almost all regions of the world except Western Europe (Russett et al., 2000).

The emergence of a new reality in the international arena at the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century, constituted by the return of the importance of religion and culture, caused the need to find new solutions for intercultural dialogue. Therefore, the authors of this article attempt to explain some solutions of Western politics in the field of intercultural policy and international relations, as well as to present their own vectors for the development of intercultural dialogue, which is a necessary element influencing the future shape of relations between nations and cultures.

West's hypocrisy towards relations with other actors in the international arena

The prevailing opinion in the West that "all that is Western is the best" has had considerable importance in the field of international relations, especially after the end of the Cold War. The colonization at that time moved to another level, becoming a more complex process. In the last few decades, Western countries have been trying to impose on non-Western countries their model of functioning based on liberal democracy, free market, and the rule of law. However, this is often done by destabilizing once-prosperous countries. The above may be exemplified by the events in Somalia when in 1991, the dictatorial ruling Siad Barre was overthrown. However, this did not bring the assumed effects because the country plunged into complete chaos, leading to Somalia's fall from a thriving state structure. In this context, many other examples could be mentioned. Still, all these inherently destructive actions usually lead to in-depth reflection on the misreading of the needs of local people anchored in a completely different cultural and mental structure, as well as the creation of erroneous paradigms and visions of the meaning of Western patterns, which work well in London, Washington or Brussels, but will not necessarily be relevant and properly accepted in Kinshasa, Beirut or Baghdad.

This Western-centric way of thinking stems primarily from an intellectual and political narrative that reflects the postulate that "true civil society" exists only in Europe and the United States. It does not pay attention to the fact that in non-Western countries, there are other types of organizations that fulfill the fundamental mission – they fulfil social expectations in the field of, for example, health protection, education, and security. What else but not thriving state institutions are the "street and village communities" in Northeast Asia? Institutions based on the assumptions of Confucianism create a specific model of a civil society striving to cooperate with the authorities (Ding, 2008). The vectors of the promotion of democratic principles by Western states can be drawn similarly. Western norms and values are imposed and they are shaped and developed in completely different socio-cultural conditions from those prevailing in countries outside the Western circle. Such attempts are losing ground already at the stage of creating the concept of incorporation and merging of two completely different systems. This is mainly due to the lack of taking into account the primary factor – the culture of another country, which is a generalization of such concepts as tradition, history, values, norms, etc. The essential manifestation of Western-centrism is the assumption that "all people are the same" and strive for the same, and cultural differences then boil down to a discussion of differences in appearance, different ways of dressing, or love of different ways of expressing art.

In this context, it is also important that the imposition of the Western model of democracy on countries, e.g., African or Asian countries, is almost immediately associated with failure because in these countries the socio-cultural conditions imply situations where the state is not, as it should be, much more important in the structure of power be in a democratic system,

and the local community, clan, or ethnic or religious group (Oduro, 2021). These processes in non-Western countries can be exemplified by-elections which have a completely different meaning in Western countries and in the country where they are held. In the West, it is often erroneously euphoric that elections in African or Asian countries are a manifestation of this "great democracy," then in the country of their immediate implementation. In that case, spheres of influence are usually divided, adding to this loud election slogan falling within the scope of a democratic narrative accepted in the West. And it is similar in Western countries as well when democracy is only associated with voting in elections. Elections constitute a chessboard of the political game, sometimes even worse than in non-Western countries.

It would seem that the socio-cultural differences between the West and non-Western countries in terms of understanding democracy, civil society, and the state could be much greater, as it results from the narrative created in the West. However, it is worth taking a closer look at the processes taking place in Western democratic countries, where part of the society treats the concept of individual freedom differently. In contrast, others remain quite indifferent in this context. A nation-state governed by liberal democracy is only a certain theoretical model that can only be implemented in a few cases because the situation is completely different in reality. Thus, imposing Western patterns on other countries, without first of all considering their culture and social structure, is the wrong way to emphasize only the Western-centered point of view. It is worth looking at India, which presents itself as "the greatest democracy in the world" (Dębnicki, 2008). Such a picture is also naively perceived by Western democracies, ignoring India's caste system, which is completely different from democratic values and principles.

The few examples presented above perfectly prove the hypocrisy of the West, based on a Western-centered view of the world. Today, taking into account every other aspect of the life of an ordinary person in the West, we will not see in it a broad reference to the achievements of other cultures and nations. When studying at school, we pay attention only to Western writers because it will rarely happen that the school curriculum would include, for example, Hafez, a classic of Persian poetry, or Cao Xueqin, an outstanding Chinese poet and painter. Currently, when celebrating the New Year, we do not realize that it is celebrated only as a holiday in the Western edition because 75% of the world's societies celebrate the New Year on a different date, under a different name, and using a completely different calendar.

Over the years, a simple dependency has developed because attempts to impose Western orders, norms, values, concepts and methods on the whole world arouse the greater resistance and dissatisfaction, the higher the level reached by the countries to which the West tries to force these patterns. Today we have the consequences of this expansive policy of the West and the lack of understanding of the cultural diversity of other countries and nations. Interference within some other community creates resistance and then provokes retaliation. The climaxes were various types of terrorist attacks in Madrid, Paris, and London. We live in a multicultural world where relations between representatives of different cultures should be based on dialogue. Several models of such relations have been developed in the West: the assimilation model, the integration model, and the multiculturalism model. They all differ in the way of interaction between representatives of different cultures. Nevertheless, what should accompany each of the parties at every stage of such relations is the willingness to engage in a joint dialogue based on understanding the other party's needs and not the monologue that Western countries often use. If the West outlines a certain democratic framework, it should follow them and not fall into the trap of its own hypocrisy.

Passion for the West or emphasizing your own uniqueness?

Apart from the era of fundamental division, another turning point in the history of mankind was the period of modernization in the 18th and 19th centuries. At that time, technological development and the Enlightenment thought already mentioned in this article, reigning primarily in the West, became the factors that allowed the West to be placed in a dominant position over other non-Western countries. The rest of the world developed essentially autonomously, apart from the rare linkages, each forming its own ethnocentric narrative, confirming its own uniqueness. However, this economic and technological leap in the West, along with the development of means of communication and the dynamic development of mutual international relations, influenced the desire of local elites to follow Western models. Thus, the concepts of partial occidentalization were born, which in a nutshell, was tantamount to the adoption of scientific and technological as well as economical as well as political patterns of the West, while maintaining own values, norms, and traditions resulting from socio-cultural conditions (Küçük & Ozselcuk, 2019).

In China, for example, there is a formula that lets Chinese doctrines be fundamental and Western teachings be used pragmatically for the benefit of the people. It is a heuristic hybrid system combining Chinese tradition and adopted Western patterns. In the 1970s, during the period of Deng Xiaoping's reforms, the Western model of the administrative state was adopted, which constituted the relationship between individual state institutions and society. It was also the result of the cultural revolution, which emphasized a truly Chinese identity based on Chinese values and traditions (Fang et al., 2008).

The above implies a simple relationship – modernization is not the same as occidentalization. It is true that modernization allows for the leveling of technological and economic conditions. Still, it does not affect the shrinking of cultural differences, which constitute a more rooted and permanent element of national identity. It is also worth emphasizing the importance of globalization in this regard. On the one hand, it unifies patterns and norms in various spheres of human functioning, such as in significant international concerns and corporations. On the other hand, the process of contact between representatives of different cultures on a mass scale often strengthens one's own diversity based on separate cultural and religious identities.

Samuel Huntington, the American researcher of international relations mentioned earlier in this article, in his famous book *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, was one of the first scientists in the world to postulate the need for the West to come to terms with long-term existence alongside other non-Western civilization. He warned against imposing their own Western norms and values on other civilizations because after the end of the Cold War and the transition of the world to a treaty with one superpower, which was the United States, the rest of the states moved to contractual opposition, seeking to weaken the power of the West (Huntington, 2011). These postulates, however, were reduced to a scientific debate and were disregarded in the implementation of the international policy of the state. The effects were much more deplorable, as the attacks on the World Trade Center in 2001, and the subsequent escalation of tensions over cultural differences, were nothing other than what Samuel Huntington warned against.

In this context, it is also vital that Western politicians and scientists, despite their postulates for relations with other countries, have not attempted an in-depth analysis of the culture of civilizations other than Western over many years. According to Daniel A. Bell, an eminent expert in Asia, theories about other civilizations, especially Asian culture, are based on the historical experiences of the West because the internal dogmas that guide

representatives of other nations and cultures are ignored in this respect (Bell, 2006). This understanding of cultural and mental differences from within is the *clue* to understanding.

Manuel Castells also contributed to the development of intercultural dialogue. Paradoxically, his concept of "network society" or "network state" is extremely topical in terms of building intercultural relations. This results from the very idea contained in Castells' work, as he indicates that in today's globalized world, network connections are the basis for the functioning of the state (Castells, 2021). An interesting fact is that Western civilization has been getting used to the social and state network structure for several decades, while, as in East Asia, relational and network systems have been dominant for a long time. The countries there defined their identity based on the values and norms of a specific group that did not necessarily live in the designated territory. This was the basis for creating these network connections. Back then, Western civilization was strongly attached to a specific state entity. This idea of a network society is accompanied by the process of changing the "Washington model" based on the principles of the free market, the rule of law, and liberal democracy, to the "Chinese model of development", which is a response to the contemporary challenges of a globalized world. Thus, it is apparent in the above considerations that the concept of Western domination is wearing out, and the world is entering a decidedly new stage of socio-economic development.

Conclusions

Westocentrism was based on the belief that Western civilization was universal. However, from the second half of the twentieth century, the dominance of the West began to weaken along with the progressive decolonization and gaining independence by more and more Asian and African countries. At that time, the difference between other civilizations from the Western ones was emphasized, mainly by awakening their national pride based on the uniqueness of culture, traditions, and values prevailing inside the local societies. The West, trying to maintain its dominant position, sought more and more radical measures. As mentioned above, Somalia is a perfect example of the West's hidden struggle for its own domination in this region.

Moreover, along with the economic development of Asian countries, especially China, the United States was losing its position as a world leader. Interesting in this context is the fact that the desire to emphasize the uniqueness of Asian countries was formally reflected in the so-called 1993 Bangkok Declaration. It was then established that Asian countries have a culture different from Western ones, which also deserves to be respected and treated equally with others.

In 1998, the United Nations adopted the principle of dialogue between cultures as the basis for their peaceful cooperation. It was a turning point when people began to talk about the need to learn to communicate with representatives of other cultures and nationalities. Certainly, the West felt that, without a peaceful dialogue, both technological and economic development would not be possible. Therefore, another principle of cooperation based on sustainable development was adopted because the modern world has become a multipolar and multicultural structure, where there will be no forward movement without mutual communication. This sustainable development is reflected primarily in investments by Asian countries, especially China, in the development of science and technology. This allows us to catch up with the West and overtake it in many areas.

Due to this state of affairs, Westerners face the need to cooperate with the new non-Western powers. Westerners will have to accept and take into account different cultural norms and

values. This also applies to religion because, referring again to Samuel Huntington, religion in the 21st century will play an important role in the division into "own" and "others", and in order not to make further mistakes that led to the terrorist attacks in Madrid and Paris, or Brussels, Westerners will have to adopt a specific model of dialogue with representatives of other religions. Dialogue between people of different cultures will be a necessity, and the West will have to change the tone of its narrative and talk to others equally without imposing its role models as the best. In this context, integration is understood as an intermediate between assimilation and multiculturalism. This paradigm emphasizes the balance between the cohesion of society as a whole and its internal differentiation: between what we share with others and what distinguishes us from others. It is assumed that integration with society and particular identities do not have to be mutually opposing. It is a kind of mosaic where a whole is made of different elements.

Nevertheless, intercultural dialogue is burdened with a yoke of failure if one side does not treat the other as equal. Therefore, this equality in relations with others should constitute a fundamental principle of intercultural relations. Moreover, the dialogue will only be possible when the parties establish a common narrative line encompassing the social, political, historical, and, above all, cultural context. Perhaps the most important point is that the dialogue is to take place without imposing patterns and ideals on another party because it should be conducted in a decidedly objective manner. Finally, learning to dialogue should involve changing one's attitudes and beliefs that lead to profound change and reflection in relation to one's culture.

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