

# Conflicts and Deconstruction: Principles and Mechanisms for Cultural Exchanges

Hui Wang

School of Liberal Arts, Xi'an Technological University, Xi'an, Shaanxi, 710021, China

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**Abstract:** Cultural differences between countries and ethnics and extreme ethnocentrism are the major reasons for the contradictions and conflicts in cultural exchanges. Each side of cultural exchanges should adhere to the principles of cultural confidence and mutual benefit, respect different cultures and establish a dialogue and cooperation mechanism to overcome cultural barriers and resolve cultural conflicts, thus achieving healthy and harmonious exchanges and safeguarding the diversity and prosperity of cultures around the world.

## 1. Introduction

The global efforts have been made to fight against the epidemic of COVID-19, climate change and terrorism, and to maintain cybersecurity. China advocates the construction of the “Belt and Road” and the construction of a community with a shared future for mankind. This has made the exchanges between countries closer and more complicated, providing a broad space and various fields for cultural exchanges between different countries. The situation of frequent collision, interweaving, and multiple symbiosis of different cultural forms has taken shape.

“Cultural exchange” refers to equal and mutually beneficial cultural exchanges between countries or nations with different cultural backgrounds. Thousands of years of history of world cultural exchanges have demonstrated that cultural exchanges have a great power to transcend geographic boundaries and cross civilization gaps, playing an irreplaceable role in political, diplomatic, and economic exchanges.

But cultural exchanges have not always been smooth sailing. In order to meet the needs of their own cultural development, different cultures compete and confront with each other, resulting in frequent conflicts and contradictions. Although cultural conflicts are not the main theme of world cultural exchanges, their destructive power should not be underestimated. Disputes and frictions in the areas of politics, economy, ideology, etc. often hide the confrontation between cultural beliefs and values. Especially in today's economic globalization and drastic changes in the world structure, the global characteristics of cultural conflicts have become increasingly prominent. Therefore, clarifying the main sources of cultural conflicts and exploring the principles and mechanisms for exchanges and cooperation between cultures are necessary to resolve contradictions, reduce conflicts, promote cultural exchanges, and achieve cultural integration.

## 2. Cultural Conflict and Its Main Causes

Cultural conflict is the product of cultural exchange. It is the phenomenon of frictions and confrontations between different cultures in the exchange process due to their significant cultural differences. Some scholars believe that cultural conflict is the friction and collision of cultural elements between two different ethnic groups who strive for economic and political benefits and advantages [1]. Some scholars also believe that cultural conflict is the state of mutual exclusion and confrontation between two or more kinds of cultural models, cultural forms or cultural beliefs in a specific period [2].

It can be seen that the significant differences between the cultural elements involved in cultural exchanges are the underlying causes of cultural conflicts. Because of their distinct natural, social, and historical backgrounds, different national cultures have different cultural forms and cultural

elements, such as cultural values, thinking patterns, ideologies, lifestyles, and religious beliefs. Cultural values are at the root of a culture and determine the uniqueness of a nation's cultural model. The way of thinking determines the way of cognition and judgment of a culture. Lifestyle and ideology are concrete manifestations of cultural values and ways of thinking. Different religions also have their own worldviews and values. Fundamentally speaking, cultural differences are the differences in cultural values, and cultural conflicts are essentially the conflicts of values. Although cultural differences are the prerequisite for cultural exchanges and provide rich content and broad space for cultural exchanges, they also add complexity and difficulty to cultural exchanges. These differences have built cultural barriers. Of course, different cultural forms will not necessarily produce fierce conflicts, but the insufficient cognition of the cultural differences between the parties or the lack of understanding or recognition of each other's culture will cause stereotypes or prejudices, which will exert negative influence on cultural exchanges. Therefore, the lack of sufficient knowledge of and due respect for each other's cultural characteristics and differences is one of the root causes of cultural conflicts.

Cultural centrism is another factor affecting cultural exchanges, and it is a more important reason than cultural differences. Cultural centrism refers to the belief in the superiority of one's own national culture, and the belief that one's own national culture not only has the supreme value for his own group, but also has the universality of promotion to other groups [3]376. Culture-centrism is universal. People who grow up in a certain culture are influenced by this culture and all have different degrees of culture-centrism. The main manifestation of cultural centrism is ethnocentrism, which means understanding and judging everything in other cultures with the cultural values, cultural beliefs, behavioural norms, communication patterns, etc. of one's own as standards. Almost all nations will advertise the values and traditions of their own culture to varying degrees. Although this natural superiority will not always be expressed by people, they will think subconsciously that everything in their own culture is reasonable and correct. The influence of ethnocentrism on cultural exchanges is two-way. A benign and moderate ethnocentrism is manifested as a cultural mentality of confidence in its own culture and tolerance to other ethnic cultures, which facilitates cultural exchanges; while narrow and extreme ethnocentrism is undesirable. It stubbornly believes that everything of its own nation is superior to other nations and uses its own cultural system to subjectively judge all other cultural systems. Even worse, it produces psychology and behaviors of discrimination, contempt, and rejection of other ethnic cultures. This mentality and behavior will inevitably lead to inequality in the status of the two parties, thus causing contradictions and conflicts.

In the process of globalization, although frictions and collisions are likely to appear between countries and nations due to the objective cultural differences and subjective ethnocentrism, fierce cultural conflicts and competitions do not occur necessarily. In pursuing common benefits and interests, different cultures will also try their best to avoid cultural conflicts, choose appropriate compromises and concessions, and gradually move towards integration. Cultural conflicts and cultural exchanges go hand in hand. Without communication and exchange, there will be no conflict, and conflicts will also be deconstructed and weakened in cultural exchanges. This requires parties of cultural exchange to uphold correct principles of cultural exchange.

### **3. Principles of Cultural Exchange**

At the 18th meeting of the Council of Heads of Member State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Xi Jinping pointed out: "We should foster the concept of equality, mutual learning, dialogue, and inclusiveness among civilizations, and replace estrangement, clash and superiority with exchanges, mutual learning and coexistence [4]." This passage points out the direction for how to participate in world cultural exchanges.

#### **3.1 Adhere to the Principle of Cultural Self-Confidence**

In the new era of frequent collisions and deep integration of diverse cultures in the world, maintaining cultural self-confidence is the foundation for a nation to have cultural exchanges with

foreign countries. Cultural self-confidence is the sense of identification with, belonging to and pride of one's own national culture, and the admiration of and adherence to his own excellent traditional culture, which are fundamental for a country and a nation to remain vigorous and never to die out [5]. Maintaining self-confidence in one's own culture is the spiritual pillar of coping with cultural conflicts and resisting the invasions foreign cultures. First, a nation should fully understand the unique charm of its own culture, recognize the development status and goals of its own culture, and second, it should consciously maintain the nationality and independence of and safeguard the safety of its own culture. Self-confidence is the way to be calm, neither arrogant nor self-deprecating. On the one hand, a confident nation can objectively and confidently display its excellent traditional culture and the latest cultural achievements, which help to establish a new cultural image and change the stereotypes in the eyes of other countries; on the other hand, it can recognize that different cultures have their own strengths and therefore overcome inferiority complex. It will admit its own shortcomings and defects and absorb the essence of foreign cultures with an open attitude, further enhancing the advantages and status of its own culture.

In adhering to its own culture, a nation should also keep cultural conceit away, overcome the sense of extreme cultural superiority, eliminate subconscious prejudice against and resistance to other cultures, neither extolling its own culture too much nor belittling other cultures. With an attitude of inclusiveness and self-confidence, a nation should regard the characteristics and essence of different cultures as a manifestation of the diversity of human civilization.

### **3.2 Adhere to the Principle of Harmony in Diversity**

“Harmony in diversity”, which contains important Chinese philosophical thought, can provide Chinese wisdom for healthy exchanges and rational integration between different cultures. The essence of “harmony in diversity” is “inclusiveness”: recognizing diversity, respecting differences, and pursuing inner harmony and unity [6]. “Harmony” means that the cultures of different countries seek common ground while reserving differences, coexisting harmoniously and achieving mutual benefit and win-win results; “diversity” is embodied in adhering to the nationality, uniqueness and independence of one's own culture, which are the foundation of a culture. The inclusiveness of “harmony in diversity” is essential for the integration and blending of different cultures in the process of their collision. Therefore, it should become a principle that all parties consciously adhere to.

No culture is superior or inferior to other cultures. Cultures should not be measured or differentiated according to their economic, technological and material level, and one's own culture should not be used as the sole criterion to judge other ethnic cultures. Every culture has its own value and dignity, and enjoys equal status. In the face of cultural differences, the correct attitude should be to respect and tolerate them, rather than trying to transform, assimilate, and eliminate them.

The uniqueness of each culture converges into the diversity of human culture. Diversity is the basic form and characteristic of cultural development and the premise of cultural exchange and dissemination [7]. To recognize and accept cultural diversity is not only to be self-confident in and adhere to one's own culture, but also to respect and appreciate other cultures. Both history and reality show that arrogance and prejudice are the biggest obstacles to cultural exchanges. Respecting other countries' cultures in an equal and inclusive manner requires a clear stand against the views of the clash of civilizations and the supremacy of civilizations and the practices of cultural hegemonism and cultural colonialism. The uniqueness of each culture and its need for equal development should be respected. Both sides of cultural exchanges should abandon arrogance and prejudice, open their hearts, build mutual trust, reach consensus, and create conditions for dialogue and cooperation.

For different cultures which coexist in the same world, “harmony in diversity” is the best choice to face and solve common challenges and crises together. “Different cultures” need communication because of their differences; harmony is the key to good communication. Respecting and consciously maintaining the cultural diversity is the symbol of the continuous progress of human

society [8].

### **3.3 Adhere to the Principle of Mutual Learning and Mutual Benefit**

The formation of each culture is inseparable from a specific living environment, historical background, and social environment. Each culture embodies a unique way of thinking, material production, contains profound historical connotations and has its own civilization achievements and wisdom. They are all part of human civilization and are worth learning and studying. Civilizations are enriched by exchanges and mutual learning. Different cultures should adopt a rational and appreciative attitude to share their outstanding cultural achievements, wisdom and abilities through exchanges and cooperation in different forms, in different fields, and beyond national boundaries. On the one hand, sharing the excellent spiritual wealth of a national culture with the outside world will not only enhance the attractiveness and influence of its own culture but also promote the development and progress of other cultures; On the other hand, by absorbing the essence of foreign cultures, a nation can transform and innovate its own culture, constantly improve the competitiveness of its own culture, and enhance its cultural self-confidence.

Excellent ideas from different cultures collide and exchange with each other, in which new wisdom is generated to cope jointly with challenges and threats, from infectious diseases, climate warming, natural disasters to poverty and other crises, thus creating a stable, safe and open world and promoting the building of a community with a shared future for human culture.

The history of the world culture proves that cutting off a country from the outside world is not conducive to the development and progress of its culture. The isolation and exclusion of one culture from others or substitution of one culture for another can only bring about more confrontations and disputes. Therefore, only by adhering to the principle of mutual learning and mutual benefit can all parties in cultural exchanges eliminate misunderstandings and frictions, realize mutual communication and mutual trust among people, making the world more harmonious and beautiful. In the process of learning from each other, we should also learn to seek advantages and to avoid disadvantages and never copy from others indiscriminately; otherwise, we will eventually lose the uniqueness of our own culture and fundamentally endanger our own survival [9]. The purpose of cultural exchanges is to promote mutual benefit, common development and prosperity.

## **4. Mechanisms for Promoting Cultural Exchanges**

Cultural coexistence can be achieved through cultural dialogue and cultural cooperation. Based on the principles of cultural self-confidence, harmony in diversity, mutual learning and mutual benefit, a dialogue and cooperation mechanism should be established and common culture should be developed, which will help all parties in cultural exchange to expand common ground, deepen understanding, and eventually obtain common interests.

### **4.1 Build a Dialogue and Cooperation Mechanism**

Dialogue refers to the exchange of words between people. In the process of continuous dialogue and communication, both parties coordinate each other's behaviours, reconstruct themselves, and reach unity and agreement in thought, concept, and understanding. In the same way, exchanges between different cultures also require frank dialogue. The "United Nations Millennium Declaration" pointed out: Human beings have different beliefs, cultures and languages, and people must respect each other. The differences within and between societies should not be scared or suppressed, but should be cherished as a precious asset of mankind. A culture of peace and dialogue among all civilizations should be actively promoted. German philosopher Jurgen. Habermas pointed out that different cultural types should transcend the basic value limitations of their traditional life forms, and respect each other as equal dialogue partners in order to jointly discuss major issues related to the future of mankind and the world and find ways to solve them[10]. A constructive cultural dialogue and cooperation mechanism, which is built on the principles of respect, inclusiveness, equality, independence, and mutual benefit, will help eliminate frictions and conflicts. Dialogue can help to enhance mutual understanding and trust, eliminate

misunderstandings, and discard prejudices while seeking common ground and reserving differences. Through dialogue, both sides can discuss their cultural needs, promote mutual learning and sharing, and find effective ways for deeper and broader exchanges and cooperation. Only a culture which is good at dialogue can break barriers and deadlocks, and expand the space for its survival and inheritance, and gain the power to move forward [3] 383.

#### **4.2 Develop a Common Cultural Mechanism**

Common culture is necessary for the exchanges and communication between different cultures. If cultural differences are the prerequisite for cultural exchanges, then cultural commonality is the basis for cultural exchange. Although they originate from and develop in different conditions and environments, different cultures are all created by humans. Similar physiological characteristics, cognitive structures, and survival experience that human beings possess have formed cultural commonality that transcends the boundaries of time, space, region, and nation [11]. The commonalities shared by different cultures provide common topics for dialogue and cooperation between cultures. Samuel Huntington believes that in order to avoid conflicts between civilizations, peoples of all civilizations should seek and expand the values, institutions, and practices which are common to other civilizations [12]. Different cultures can find meeting points in pursuing peace, creating a happy life, constructing a good ecological environment, and promoting humanitarianism, which will provide both parties with common cultural cognition and emotional bonds for communication. Common culture can easily arouse cultural resonance and form a sense of cultural identity, which is conducive to avoiding friction and conflict resulting from cultural differences and ethnocentrism. To this end, while maintaining cultural diversity and acknowledging cultural differences, parties in cultural exchanges should build the mechanism for exploring shared common cultures with differences put aside so as to gradually expand and deepen their cultural exchanges and achieve sincere exchanges and harmonious coexistence.

#### **5. Conclusion**

Cultural exchange and blending are the inevitable development of history. Only by adhering to the principles of self-confidence, equality, tolerance, and mutual benefit, exploring common cultures, and strengthening cultural dialogue and cooperation, can we deconstruct and eliminate the negative effects of cultural conflicts, enable the common development and progress of cultures of all countries, and make the world more harmonious and friendly.

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