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**Towards a New Idea of Humankind --  
Unity and Difference of Cultures as a Challenge  
for Education in the Globalizing Process**

邁向新人文主義的建構--  
全球化歷程文化同異對教育的挑戰

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### ***The challenge of globalization for cultural identity***

In this paper I want to give the idea of humankind a new relevance for education. In the education process the older generation takes care that the younger one is enabled to continue and develop the life form within which the generations live together.

I will not thematize educational matters in detail. On the contrary, I will address a more general and fundamental framework within which education takes place and which decides about its main goals. I will concentrate on the issue of identity. Identity building is one of the most important parts of the educational process. Education has to contribute to it in all fields in which it addresses the question of how to orient practical life in cultural patterns of understanding the human world. I would like to discuss one of these patterns: the understanding of what it means to be a human being and what role this understanding plays in the concept of cultural identity.

Cultural identity is determined by basic sense criteria shared by a group of people. They feel committed to them and understand themselves by this commitment. They think and feel that their lives are conditioned by and dedicated to a set of values and value moulded experiences. They understand themselves as an embodiment of this set of values based on fundamental criteria of interpreting the world and themselves. With this conviction they ascribe uniqueness to themselves and draw a clear line of distinction from others. Such self-understanding and distinction from others have taken place in all times and all over the world. We can call it *selfness*. Selfness is a basic element of human life. It is defined by an indivisible unit of two mental activities: relationship to oneself and discrimination from others. Both have strong normative elements with a general commitment and, at the same time, both refer to commonly shared experiences. Both together are preserved and presented in the realm of

cultural memory,<sup>1</sup> and both are, of course, a matter of education. Education gives cultural memory a sustainability across the change of generations.

In a specific meaning cultural identity refers to the widest horizon of this self-reference, discrimination, and common experience. We speak of 'world civilizations' and think of unique forms of human life, which characterize the feeling of belonging together and of being different from others and which is shared by a great number of people. The widest horizon of human identity is defined by the species of humans and their difference from animals. The next smaller distinction within this widest horizon refers to 'cultures' or 'civilizations' as the second largest unit of people in respect to their identity. I will not go deeper into the long-lasting and still vivid and controversial discussion about the conceptualization of these cultures or world civilizations. Instead, I want to pick up some common distinctions of these great units of identity and tackle some basic issues of their interrelationship in a historical, systematical, and educational perspective.

The historical perspective is related to the globalization process. By globalization I understand a historical development within which some basic elements of pursuing human life spread across most if not all differences between already established human life forms characteristic for a great number of people and vast spaces in the world. It is a process which confronts different life forms with powerful general conditions of human life forcing them to adapt to them. In respect to the present day globalization we all know these conditions: scientific rationality, market economy, global communication by the new media etc. They have brought about a world-wide civilization which unites many if not all life forms of people today. We can call this civilization 'ecumenical'.<sup>2</sup>

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1 Assmann, Jan: Collective Memory and Cultural Identity, in: New German Critique, No 65 (1995), pp. 125-133.

2 Lübke, Hermann: Die Zivilisationsökumene. Globalisierung kulturell, technisch und politisch. München: Fink 2005.

The adaptation to ecumenical civilization brings along a fundamental problem of cultural identity and therefore for education as well. Why? Why can the people not take over new life forms and remain what they have always been? The problem is not primarily the ability of civilizations to integrate new elements into their specific life form (although one should not underestimate the shock such a confrontation with new forms of life has meant for the people of substantially different, so-called 'traditional' or indigenous life forms).

The problem I would like to address is basically to be found on the fundamental cultural level of human identity formation: Since every identity is specific and peculiar, even unique, how can it come to terms with general and universal elements and concepts of life orientation? The inbuilt universal elements in the globalization process are a radical challenge for cultural identity despite an ability or non-ability of adaptation. (Education is a channel for this adaptation.) Globalizing one's own identity in a strict sense means to lose it by dissolving its peculiar, individual, and unique character.

This sounds astonishing since we are used to look at the globalization process as a struggle between cultures. There are cultures representing the globalizing power of changing traditional human life forms. There are others which are forced into this change. In modern times the former were addressed as 'the West', and the latter as the South and the East. These are geographical terms, but their distinction includes qualitative elements of domination and subjugation, aggression and defence, superiority and inferiority, - in short: this distinction includes struggle and clash.

I'm not primarily looking at politics, economy and social life in the globalizing process. Instead, I want to consider the cultural orientations, the specific concepts of sense and meaning, which are related to it and which have strong effects in forming collective identity and therefore in the educational process as well. In this realm of identity and education the universality of principles is not a problem *per se*. If the cultural features of oneself and the

difference from others - this always means a peculiarity of one's own identity - is shaped by universal elements, why should this universality be threatening?

In fact, most traditional concepts of cultural identity are based on universalistic elements. Basic sense criteria which play a decisive role in generating and presenting identity are always universal. This can be easily demonstrated by the fact that archaic people have ascribed the quality of being human only to their own group. Others are no humans. The widespread idea, that one's own people represent civilization and the others stand for its contrary, namely barbarism, includes a general concept of cultural normativity and evaluation. One can even say: the more universalistic features the people ascribe to their self-image the stronger the cultural identity is settled in a clear discrimination from the others.

If a different universalistic concept of human life challenges one's own concept and has the power to change or even to negate it, a '*clash of civilizations*' on the level of cultural orientation is inevitable.

This exactly characterizes the encounter of cultures in the globalizing process. It can be described as a struggle between different universalisms, e.g. the struggle between the globalizing power of scientific reason against different modes of interpreting nature and the human world, like mythical ones. For centuries, globalization has meant a dominance of Western world views over the non-Western ones. This dominance has very often been a form of suppression and negation of other cultures, but it even has had a higher potential of validity: the validity of being successful in convincing the others of this mental superiority. The opium war and the fourth of May-movement together demonstrate these two forms of superiority in the case of the Chinese civilization and its relationship to the West.

The present-day situation of this struggle between different identity forming cultural universalisms in the process of globalization is characterized by a change in the hitherto unbalanced, unequal, non equitable interrelationship of

different cultures. At least, on the level of sophisticated intellectual discourses on cultural identity the domination of the West is fading away, and the non-Western cultures and civilizations are eager to regain a new awareness of their cultural identity, which at least compensates for the loss of self-esteem in the period of Western domination.

This weakening of the Western concept of cultural universalisms is based on a double critique: an internal and an external one. The internal critique has originated in the West itself; it is directed against its traditional universalistic approaches to other cultures. In Western intellectual life the devastating consequence of spreading Western life forms to non-Western societies and countries has been realized and led to a denouncement of the universalistic elements in Western cultural identity. Postmodernism is the most speaking example for this denouncement. Universalism is replaced by self-criticism, and, in the end, the result is a universalistic relativism in respect to the validity of cultural values in all their different forms and developments. This self-criticism goes along with a radical criticism by non-Western intellectuals concerning the globalizing cultural elements originating in the West. Typical examples of this criticism are the post-colonial and subaltern discourses in the humanities.

Does this double critique end the clash of civilizations in the globalizing process? I think, that the contrary is true. As to the relativism in post-modern thinking, it is only a noble form of legitimating this clash, since it does not claim any cross-culturally valid principles and ideas, which may limit or even oppose the tensions between different collective identities. As to the non-Western critique of Western dominance, we should not overlook the fact that it is a means in the struggle for power itself and does not intend to end it. Tensions between identities are generally caused by the power of ethnocentrism. The non-Western criticism of traditional Western universalistic approaches to other cultures does not lie beyond this ethnocentric power, but is a means of it. A closer analysis of anti-Western critique shows, that it is guided by a negative ethnocentrism. This means that by criticizing the West the non-Western cultures get a higher value

and a normative superiority over the West. In my opinion the old game of domination is simply continued. Only the attitudes of the parties have changed.

This can be demonstrated by a widespread metaphor which is typical for the anti-Western culture critique. I think of the intellectually very effective slogan 'provincializing the West'.<sup>3</sup> Everybody agrees, that there is a convincing meaning in this slogan, namely that the traditional Western 'empire', which used to dominate and subjugate the non-Western 'provinces', should and even has come to an end. But if the West becomes a province, the logical consequence of this metaphor simply is, that the empire has moved into another part of the world. Where else than to one of the non-Western countries? This is not explicitly articulated, but it is the implicit meaning of this slogan. So the old power game is going on, only the role of the conflicting parties has been redistributed.

We see, the clash of civilizations is still going on and it is evident that it has got a new threatening and radical nature. This evidently is the case in the fundamentalist movements of today. Here a specific universalistic concept of world interpretation, mainly in a religious form, strictly contradicts other life forms with their inbuilt universalistic elements. It contradicts them in new forms of warfare. But religion is not the only place where the *clash of civilizations* takes place. Even on the much more peaceful level of intercultural communication we can find it. It is culturally rooted in the simple fact that the universalisms which constitute cultural difference on the level of collective identity exclude each other. If cultural difference is based on different universalistic value systems, the people are committed to one of them and negate

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3 Chakrabarty, Dipesh: Europa provinzialisieren. Postkolonialität und die Kritik der Geschichte, in: Conrad, Sebastian; Randeria, Shalini (Eds.): Jenseits des Eurozentrismus. Postkoloniale Perspektiven in den Geschichts- und Kulturwissenschaften. Frankfurt am Main (Campus) 2000, S. 283-312 [Chakrabarti, Dipesh: Provincializing Europe : postcolonial thought and historical difference. Princeton, N.J. : Princeton University Press 2000; Lal, Vinay: Provincialising the West: World history from the perspective of Indian history, in: Stuchtey, Benedikt; Fuchs, Eckhardt (Eds.): Writing world history 1800 – 2000. Oxford: University Press 2003, pp. 271-289.

the others. This seems to be evident in respect to religious beliefs, but even in respect to more secular value systems we can observe this mutual exclusion.

An example is the negation of Western ideas of universal Human and Civil Rights by referring to a fundamentally different Confucian ethics, as it has been the case (and maybe still is the case) in the official political philosophy of Singapore. It is exactly this powerful element of universal validity inbuilt in the peculiar features of cultural identity which charges the intercultural interaction with the power of tension and conflict. It potentially negates constitutive elements of the cultural identity of the others by the distinctive nature and peculiarity of one's own identity. Cultural identity therefore has to be seen as a battle field of fighting universalisms. This fight can be pursued in a more civil way, and then we call it intercultural communication, or in a more violent way, then we call it '*clash of civilizations*' or even a war of mentalities.

Is there any chance to end this tension, clash, struggle and even war on the mental level of forming cultural identity and communicating cultural differences? My first answer to this question is no; there is no chance to end it as long as we conceptualize culture in the traditional way of furnishing it with strong universalisms as elements of distinction. Since this distinction is the case in the cultural procedures of identity generation where the others refer to us as their others, we have to deal with two different universalisms, both claiming for general validity.

But at second sight, we should ask if we can't define culture as something that goes beyond this mutual exclusion. In order to answer this question, we should critically reflect the presuppositions, under which the present-day international and intercultural communication in the humanities as well as in other forms of communication are conceptualized.

The most widespread and powerful concepts of interrelating cultures is that of separate semantic universes, each following its own specific code. And this is essentially different from the code of other cultures. Code means the constitutive



system of sense criteria and modes of interpreting the world and understanding oneself. The most prominent representatives of this concept of culture and cultural differences are Oswald Spengler and Arnold Toynbee. Unfortunately, Spenglerianism is not an outdated concept in the humanities. We can find it on the level of an explicit theory of culture and methodology of intercultural comparison,<sup>4</sup> but it is even more effective in the practical works of historians and humanists doing intercultural comparison and thematizing aspects of intercultural communication.

In order to compare culture it is quite natural to treat them as completely separate units. But what is the parameter of comparison? In an unreflected way many historians simply use an established paradigm of interpretation such as this Western one. Today we can observe a change to non-Western ones.<sup>5</sup> It is not possible to simply step out of any semantic context and cultural code in order to do this comparison. Those who criticize the dominance of Western historical thinking follow the same logic with the only difference that they use another paradigm without systematically reflecting the presuppositions under which they thematize cultures as units of comparison.

These Spenglerian presuppositions in the work of the humanists are not convincing at all. Culture cannot be reduced to a fixed set of sense criteria being substantially different from other sets constituting other cultures. Cultures are dynamic, changing, discursive, open in their modes of interpreting the world enabling the people to understand themselves and their difference to others. Cultures interfere, they share universalistic elements of human life and human thinking. Thus we should give up any concept of cultures that claim separate universes of meaning only coexisting in an external relationship.

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4 E.g. Galtung, Johan: Six Cosmologies: an Impressionistic Presentation, in: idem: Peace by Peaceful Means. London: Sage Publications 1996, pp. 211-222.

5 An example is Huang, Chun-chieh: Salient Features of Chinese Historical Thinking, in: The Medieval Historical Journal vol. 7, no. 2 (July-December 2004), pp. 243-254; cf. Rüsen, Jörn: A Comment on Professor Huang's 'Salient Features of Chinese Historical Thinking', in: The Medieval History Journal, vol. 8, no. 2, July-December 2005, S. 267-272.

It is necessary to invest a good deal of theoretical reflection in order to find a plausible alternative. In the context of this argumentation I cannot go into the details of such a theoretical conceptualization. I can only indicate a possible way of approaching this new task in the humanities: Theorizing on culture means to look for anthropological universals and to conceptualize cultural differences. My proposal – methodologically I refer to Max Weber – is to create ideal types of different possibilities to realize these universals under different conditions, as they change in space and time. The result will be a complex concept of culture in a mixture of universalistic features and a typology of possible differentiations. With this mixture we can approach the variety and the change in human cultural life. In such a perspective cultural difference appears as a peculiar and specific constellation of elements, which have (potentially) been shared by all cultures.<sup>6</sup>

Such a reflection and conceptualization may enable scholars to communicate about the cultural difference of their traditions and contexts without falling into the trap of ethnocentric or Spenglerian presuppositions. Cultural difference will not disappear, but it becomes a subject matter of discourse. The rules of this discourse transcend the ethnocentric logic of forming cultural identity. Such a discourse may break the power of struggling against each other in using universalistic criteria of sense and meaning (loaded with normative validity). It may break this power in the process of individualizing one's own culture, of making it unique by distinguishing and separating it from others in an unbalanced way. It may stop the provocation or, at least, the irritation of the others who pursue the same strategies in forming their cultural identities at the cost of their others.

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6 I have concretized such a strategy of intercultural comparison in respect to historical thinking in the following article: Rüsen, Jörn: Some Theoretical Approaches to Intercultural Comparison of Historiography, in: History and Theory, Theme Issue 35: Chinese Historiography in Comparative Perspective (1996), S. 5-22 [Chinese: Kua wenhua bijiaoshixue de yixie lilun zongxiang, in: Weigelin-Schwiedrzik, Susanne; Schneider, Axel (Eds): Zhongguo shixueshi yantaohui cong bijiao guandian chufa lunwenji. Bangiao, Kreis Taipei (Taoxiang chubanshe) 1999, pp. 151-176

How can this new way of thinking about cultural difference (with all their political implications) be brought down to earth in the practical processes of identity formation as well as in their academic reflection? Is there any realistic chance of making plausible this new way of thematizing cultural difference by using a new concept of universalistic sense criteria? It is rather easy to postulate an alternative to the power of separating cultures by ethnocentric thinking. But what about the power of this mode of thinking rooted in a quasi-natural necessity of human self-esteem, which accumulates the positive elements in the image of oneself and the less positive, if not negative, elements in the image of the others? Is such a postulate not unrealistic or utopian? This seems to be even more the case if one takes systematically into account, that in the processes of identity formation not only individuals, but, in general, people tend to project the dark shadows in their self-awareness into the otherness of the others. They tie this otherness to their self-esteem and unconsciously make it dependent upon it.

How should we proceed to form cultural identity in a non-ethnocentric way? Let's start with elements of a comprehensive character bridging the difference between selfness and otherness. They consist in the universalistic principles of sense generation inbuilt in the peculiarity and individuality of one's cultural identity. Logically universal principles integrate the others. Yet the very peculiar way of working with universals in identity formation is a problem, because it radically separates us from the others and creates tension. Since identity necessarily is peculiar and individual, the elements of universalism even sharpen this division and opposition of selfness and otherness. But is this the only procedure of synthesizing peculiarity and universalism in identity formation?

My answer is: This is definitely not the case.

This answer seems to be astonishing, since haven't I argued so far that these universals have an exclusive character in relationship to the others' universals? I said that in cultural identity the universal elements in the cultural orientation of human life become particularized. But does this being different necessarily mean exclusion? When recognized as constituted by universals this particularity can be

understood as only one single manifestation of its inbuilt universality besides others. Then otherness appears in a horizon of sameness. Thus the mode of relating one's own identity to that of the others dramatically changes: Now otherness is a different manifestation of one's own universals. Therefore it can be recognized and acknowledged. It is this recognition which at least is intended by the universals of one's own culture as long as they are really universal.

This still is an abstract logical argumentation. But I think it can be used to change our view at our own traditions and at their interrelationship with different cultures. We should not exchange the universalistic elements of our own culture for a new relativism in order to give otherness a place. On the contrary, we should take our own universalism more seriously, since it potentially has already got a place for others. The others, however, they have been kept out by the particularization of our own universal elements in identity. But stressing the universalistic character of these elements we principally transgress all particularity and open up an entrance to this option of universalism.

Only those cultural universals really are universal which are presented in their individual feature as universal and not as particular and tense. This tension is the result of the inability to recognize the particularity and limits of one's own universalism. This inability follows the logic of identity formation in which everything is focussed around one's own peculiarity and self-esteem. Therefore in the global historical development of cultural universals we can observe a strong tendency of exclusion. All those life forms which are not similar or the same as those which use universalistic approaches to understand the world are excluded and discriminated or disdained. So one can say that in a universalistic perspective of cultural history the development of universals start with *a tense universalism*. Fundamentalism today is a legacy and a radicalization of this tension. It is loaded with ethnocentric elements and power. But at the same time cultural universalism reaches beyond ethnocentrism since the others are integrated into the universals of one's own sense creating interpretation of the world and of human life.

One of the most important universals in cultural identity is the idea of humankind. With this idea the social dimension of identity is generalized so that it includes all others as long as all share the basic features of humanity. In a long historical process to be a human being has become an essential element of self awareness and self esteem. Humankind has enlarged the scope of identity empirically and deepened its normative quality. To be a human being now is loaded by widespread historical experiences and by normative elements shared by all other human beings.

Cultures can be called humanistic, if they ascribe a highly normative quality for being human. Humanism has played an important role in the Western tradition, and everybody who has ever had a look at the Lun Yü knows, that 'humanness' (ren) plays a decisive role in Confucius' attempt to develop a system of normative regulations for social and political life. In the Jewish tradition we find a proverb signifying humanism: He, who rescues one human being, rescues humankind. A similar proverb can be found in the Muslim tradition. The Koran says: "If anybody kills a man, it should be considered as if he has killed mankind in general, and if anybody preserves the life of a human being it should be considered as if he has preserved the life of mankind."<sup>7</sup> In Africa we find a proverb of a similar meaning: Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu (a human being is a human being by the otherness of other human beings).<sup>8</sup>

These universalistic elements like humankind and humanity in different cultures are manifest in different forms and expressions: They express the same idea in a different way thus signifying the very peculiarity of cultural identity. If one stresses this universal element within the cultural peculiarity of one's own belonging to those people who use the same basic sense criteria in understanding the world and themselves, one can indicate a chance of looking at the otherness of the others in a non-ethnocentric, in an equitable and balanced way. Since the others share the same normative quality of being a human being one has

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<sup>7</sup> Koran Sure 5, Vers 33.

<sup>8</sup> Shutte, A.: Philosophy for Africa. Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press 1993, p. 19.

something in common with them, which at the same time is important for one's own self-esteem.

Here lies an important chance for respect and recognition in the interrelationship between self and others. But it is only a chance. This chance will be missed if one simply synthesizes one's own peculiarity with the value of being a human being. In this case the others are not as human as oneself. And therefore one can treat them in a different and, of course, more negative way than the people to whom one belongs.

This double morality is a cultural phenomenon all over the world and in all times. But if one relates one's own peculiarity to the universalistic and general element of humanness as a fundamental sense criterion of one's own culture in a more reflected way, then the difference of the others can be realized as a different manifestation of the same humanness which is inscribed into the features of one's own identity.

This is the point of my argumentation. When characterizing the present-day-situation in a globalizing process as a new axial time we have to take up this chance of the different cultural traditions to conceptualize humanity as a chance of respect and recognition. Traditionally the normative power of humanity has very often served as an element of discriminating the others by ascribing the higher standards of humanity to one's own people and only a lower status to the otherness of the others. In extreme cases otherness could even be defined as being non-human.

An ethnocentric use of the general concept of humankind in identity formation can be called a *limited humanism* or – more critical: an inverted or inhuman humanism. In respect to this limitation the universal historical perspective, within which these universalistic concepts of humankind get their temporal dimension can be called an unfulfilled development. It is on us today, to do a decisive step forward: to conceptualize the idea of humankind in such a way that being human can be historically perceived as manifest in different

forms of human life. This difference is not an unlimited variety. The limits to this variety and the limits of recognition and respect are exactly there where the others do not share this universalistic element and do not realize it in a different, but comparable way, that is e.g. when they develop their specific mental strategies of respect and recognition.

In the light of such a historical perspective intercultural communication gets the dynamics of a new axial time. These dynamics may grant an exchange of possibilities and potentials of conceptualizing the general normative quality of a human being. This will apply to every member of the human species in a different way under different circumstances and historical presuppositions.

What does this argumentation mean for education? First of all, it should lead to a new way of thematizing the identity issue. It should definitely avoid any ethnocentric strategy in teaching and learning the tradition of one's own culture. It should help to conceptualize the difference of cultures in a framework of an inclusive universalism of values ascribed to all human beings. This is impossible without elements of self-criticism in referring to the tradition of universalistic values in one's own culture or to the lack of universalism as well. I think, that my argumentation is useful to open the minds of teachers and students to the chances of a new understanding of humankind as a n idea of commonness and difference at the same time. I would like to call this idea of humankind 'humanistic'. It should become effective as one of the basic principles of education. And here it may enrich the process of identity formation by new elements of recognition in the interrelationship between self and the others.

