

Clash or Dialogue?

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Abstrak

Kertas ini mengkritik teori “pertempuran peradaban” yang dikemukakan oleh Samuel Huntington. Ia juga mengkritik pendirian beliau yang menolak fahaman budaya majmuk (“multiculturalism”) sebagai dasar Amerika. Penulis kertas ini menghujahkan peri pentingnya pluralisme budaya dan keuniversalan global diperjuangkan. Bagi mencapai matlamat itu, dialog adalah perlu. Seterusnya, penulis membincangkan keperluan dialog pada peringkat individu dan juga pada peringkat kelompok masyarakat sama ada yang bersifat keagamaan atau sebaliknya. Matlamat dialog pada peringkat individu adalah untuk meningkatkan pembelajaran antara budaya, pengayaan budaya dan kemajuan peribadi. Matlamat dialog pada peringkat kelompok pula adalah antara lainnya untuk mewujudkan budaya sepunya. Perbincangan tentang matlamat dialog disusuli dengan perbincangan tentang rintangan-rintangan terhadap dialog yang perlu diatasi. Di antara rintangan-rintangan yang dibincangkan ialah fahaman dan amalan agama yang bersifat kepuakan dan kepetualangan politik. Akhirnya, penulis membincangkan tentang perlunya dimajukan konsep jatidiri manusia global yang baru, iaitu manusia sebagai warganegara dunia. Dua dokumen antarabangsa yang boleh dijadikan asas perbincangan konsep ini ialah Perisytiharan Sejagat Hak-Hak Asasi Manusia yang diterima pakai oleh Pertubuhan Bangsa-Bangsa Bersatu pada tahun 1948 dan Perisytiharan Ke Arah Etika Global yang telah diluluskan oleh Parliamen Agama-Agama Sedunia.

Huntington’s clash scenario

To make the introduction into the subject a bit entertaining, let me start with a poem. Poetry may appear as a rather bizarre way to address such a serious subject as the clash of civilizations, but why not? The poem is written by Frederick S. Tipson and carries the humorous title “*Culture clash-ification: a verse to Huntington’s curse*”:

"We owe to Samuel Huntington a potent provocation,
A trenchant tract to counteract a clear exaggeration:
The notion that the West has won, its culture now supreme,
His book rejects - and then corrects - as wishful in extreme.
For, he insists, our world consists of cultural formations
Arising (and revising) out of eight great civilizations.
He sets our pulses pounding and our wisdom teeth to gnashing
With come-to-blows scenarios of different cultures clashing."¹

These are the beginning verses of what is rather a long poem. I will not comment on the literary qualities of the poem, only on the content. It obviously refers to Samuel P. Huntington, a Harvard professor of political science and US political advisor (for the Pentagon etc.). His influential and often-cited article "The Clash of Civilizations?" in *Foreign Affairs* 1993 has been the basis for his book in 1996: *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. The position he rejects in line 4 of the poem, obviously refers to the one adopted by Francis Fukuyama, who has argued that through the worldwide triumph and prevalence of the western liberal democratic model the world had reached the 'end of history' in a Hegelian sense (Fukuyama 1992). "Wishful" in that line refers to a strategic Western view.

Huntington has significantly shaped the post-Cold War discourse of international relations. The end of the cold war between the Socialist and Capitalist camps means the end of the war between ideologies and the beginning of tensions among civilizations. It is Huntington's hypothesis that the dominating source of conflict in this new world will not be ideological or political or economic but cultural.² Nation states will remain the most powerful actors in world affairs, but the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations. The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics. The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future.³

The world is now too complex for a simple bipolar division such as the cultural division into East and West or economically into North and South.⁴ Huntington divides the world into the following current civilizations⁵:

¹ Tipson, Frederick (1997). Culture Clash-ification: a verse to Huntington's curse. *Foreign Affairs*, 1997/2, 166

² Huntington, S. (1996). *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 21.

³ Huntington, S. (1993). The Clash of Civilizations? *Foreign Affairs*, 1993/3, 10.

⁴ Huntington, S. *The Clash of Civilizations*, 33. Even "the West against the rest" would be better in his view, as it avoids stereotyping the East.

⁵ Huntington, S. *The Clash of Civilizations?*, 26; also Huntington, S. *The Clash of Civilizations*, 45ff.

- ☉ Western
 - ☉ American
 - ☉ European
 - ☉ Latin American
- ☉ Confucian / Sinic
- ☉ Japanese
- ☉ Islamic
- ☉ Hindu
- ☉ Slavic-Orthodox
- ☉ African

This approach presents us with a paradigmatic shift to understand the post-Cold War global politics (previously states, systems...); it primarily focuses on cultural-religious-civilizational factors.

Huntington asserts that civilizational differences, stemming from divergent cultural, religious, social and political values will be the primary causes of regional and global conflicts in the post-Cold War epoch. He considers the clash of civilizations inevitable, though not necessarily violent. I suggest first of all reversing his move from hypothesis to thesis and reviving the question mark of his initial article; in the second part of this paper I will outline my own alternative view.

Clash of values?

Huntington claims civilizations have different values

- ☉ "on the relations between God and man,
 - ☉ the individual and group,
 - ☉ the citizen and state,
 - ☉ parents and children,
 - ☉ husband and wife,
- as well as differing views of the relative importance of
- ☉ rights and responsibilities,
 - ☉ liberty and authority,
 - ☉ equality and hierarchy"⁶.

I think it would be more correct to say that we share the same human values, but put different emphasis and focus on them. In my sixteen years in Asia, I haven't encountered any value that would be completely inexistent or unacceptable in my culture. But priorities are indeed set in different ways within value systems and it makes people behave in different ways – which might lead to clashes or dialogues and positive encounters of understanding and cooperation.

⁶ Huntington, S. *The Clash of Civilizations?*, 12.

Huntington identifies Islamic and Confucian/Sinic civilizations as the two "challenger civilizations". He sees Islamic and Western civilizations likely to clash because Islam is the only civilization that claims universalistic values and poses a significant challenge to the West. He sees China culturally reasserting itself and its values due to its rapid economic growth and thinks it might become a hegemonic power, attracting also support from other countries in the region. An Islamic-Confucian connection against the Western civilization may arise. His recommendation for the West is to limit the expansion of Islamic-Confucian states' military and economic power and to exploit differences between the two civilizations. He thinks in a strategic way to stop the decline and possible downfall of Western civilization, which he sees in a monolithic view, ignoring the opportunities for cooperation and cross-fertilization.

Huntington thinks Western universalism is dangerous to the world, because it could lead to a major inter-civilizational war. I believe, however, that only the universalization of one specific civilization like the American one would be perceived as dangerous and imperialistic. Huntington's position is a valid criticism of Fukuyama etc.; however this is not the only alternative to relativism! A basic universality with input from many cultures is possible. Huntington shows concern here about other civilizations only in language, but is politically egotistical and self-serving. Looking beyond the rhetoric, it should be quite clear that, in a world without any universal standards and norms, it is the strongest one who makes the rules, leading to a survival and thriving of the fittest (which doesn't mean the most cultivated, democratic, environmentally sustainable etc.).

Huntington is also against multiculturalism: "Multiculturalism at home threatens the US and the West; universalism abroad threatens the West and the world, both deny the uniqueness of Western culture"⁷. "A multi-civilizational United States will not be the US, it will be the UN"⁸.

And the end of America, he believes, would lead to the end of the entire Western civilization (which can be seen quite differently from a European point of view). His warning that the Western civilization may decline might be inspired by Arnold J. Toynbee and Oswald Spengler. The main threat leading to this decline seems to be multiculturalism, or more specifically a multi-civilizational United States, which would lose its Western identity, and what he sees as the American identity. The anti-multiculturalist stand-point has far-reaching implications for minorities in the United States, especially the Muslims (the main "challenger civilizations") and the ever growing Hispanics.⁹

⁷ Huntington, S. *The Clash of civilizations?*, 16

⁸ *Ibid*, 18

⁹ As they are from Latin America, it is not clear whether they also belong to Western civilization; Huntington tends to see them as separate, at least separate from American civilization.

I prefer to opt for the opposite: local multiculturalism and global universality. Instead of building a Western fortress or other homogeneous or hegemonic fortresses, a non-hegemonic multiculturalism, or as I prefer to say, cultural pluralism, at the national/regional level is the best answer to the reality of globalization and the ever increasing movement of people across borders (as well as to countries which are traditionally multicultural, like Malaysia). Also it is important to reach some form of global universality. This will reduce hegemony and unilateralism; besides it may be the only way to develop a peaceful world in which conflicts can be resolved through genuine dialogue.

Dialogue as an alternative

What is dialogue? Dialogue is more than just a conversation. The idea of dialogue is broader and more open than Habermas' concept of discourse, which promotes the better argument. Dialogue involves an exchange of experiences and knowledge, a cooperative and constructive search of a common goal, truth, peace or a solution to a problem or a conflict. Beyond the traditional political and academic setting, it is important to pay attention to the media and to study their role in the escalation and de-escalation of conflicts. Finally, dialogue should reach a broader basis at the grass roots level. It also matters whether the setting is hegemonic or not. Dialogue within a hegemonic or even repressive atmosphere is usually marked by some form of intolerance or limited tolerance, while in dialogue among equals a deeper and more comprehensive form of tolerance leading to mutual respect can be achieved. Even in settings that are naturally hegemonic, like teacher-student relations, I have always tried to meet my students and (more difficult!) teachers also in other settings outside the class room (informal discussion groups, cultural activities...).

Tolerance is the healthy attitude in the middle of the spectrum ranging from intolerance to indifference. We can find indifference in the postmodern attitude "anything goes": making choices means shopping in the cultural supermarket and results in a patchwork identity. Such people often appear very tolerant, when, in fact, they are just indifferent. Lacking a real identity of their own, how can they understand, tolerate and respect others?

Personal goals of dialogue

What are the goals of dialogue? Strictly speaking, dialogue never happens among cultures or civilizations but among *people* of different cultures etc. That's why we have to distinguish between goals people achieve person to person and the goals they achieve for their groups (culture, religion etc.), the latter being usually reserved for cultural representatives or eminent persons. However, dialogue is not something that should happen mainly on the top of society and then trickle a bit downward; it should be broad based and even move bottom-up. For this reason, it is important to find out how ordinary

people can be involved. On the personal level, goals of dialogue are, generally speaking, intercultural learning, cultural enrichment and personal growth. As globalization today brings people from many cultures together more than ever before, there are many opportunities in our professional and private lives to engage in dialogue and pursue these goals. I have mentioned that I get together with students in informal discussion groups; of course this is also a good opportunity for intercultural dialogue on topics which can range from simple observations of cultural differences in everyday life to reflecting and discussing cultural stereotypes to deeper dialogue around values and norms. Generally, teachers can achieve a multiplication effect if students make dialogue a part of their lives.¹⁰

Social goals of dialogue: separation

Social goals of dialogue could be forms of separation or integration.¹¹ A historic example of separation is expressed in Kipling's adage of one century ago: 'East is East and West is West and never the twain shall meet'. In the colonial era, society was organized around social segregation, exclusion and subordination; "dialogue" in such a hegemonic framework was limited to serve such purposes. However, it is possible to reduce hegemony and to pursue peaceful goals in separation:

- (peaceful) co-existence as neighbours
- (self-)segregating measures
- walls, fences
- Non-violence
- Continuation of a clash with other means

Another example for the reduction of hegemony and peaceful co-existence is the edict of Nantes 1598, which is also called the edict of toleration: The French King Henry IV granted permission to minorities to practice their religion under the condition that they accept the rule of the king and the dominance of the Catholic Church. Within a hegemonic framework, such acts of toleration are acts of mercy, expressions of well-meaning paternalism or calculated in regard to the benefit for one's own culture, which might arise simply from the reduction of conflict. In regard to the latter, it could be seen as a win-win situation for all parties involved, but the hegemonic side always wins more.

¹⁰ cf. Falk, Richard & Kanach, Nancy. (2000). Globalization and study abroad: an illusion of paradox. *FRONTIERS* special issue, volume VI: perspectives on area studies and study abroad. <http://www.frontiersjournal.com/issues/vol6/> Retrieved March 2006. Falk and Kanach have discussed an approach resting on student exchange.

¹¹ Other goals could be engaging in sustained dialogue (Clifford Geertz), influencing monologue (cf. Hannah Arendt's "representative thinking") or leading to a "dialogic existence" (Martin Buber).

As Swidler (2003, 67) notes, "only equals can engage in full authentic dialogue; the degree of inequality will determine the degree of two-way communication". While dialogue is usually an alternative to a clash or a preventive measure, there are also cases where dialogue might overlap with a clash scenario. As Huntington said, the clash doesn't have to be violent. We can also stop viewing a clash as a zero sum game or viewing the other as an enemy and continue the clash with other means, like dialogue.¹² However, on the one hand, this might not be a clash in the sense of Huntington anymore; on the other hand, I believe that good dialogue should do even more, especially create a culture of peace and understanding in which clashes and violence will not erupt in the first place.

Separation means of course that there are some walls, either real or just in our mind, reflecting the desire to maintain and affirm difference. Maybe the walls will be reduced to fences, so that people can see each other and engage in some limited form of communication with each other.

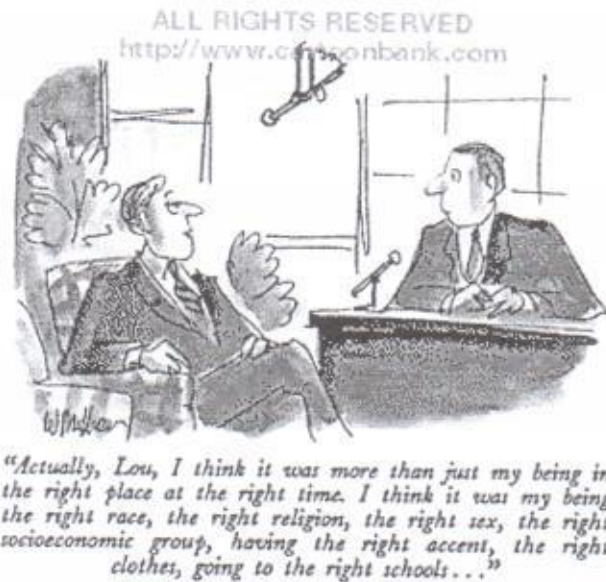
Possible goals of dialogue: integration

Integration might be realized in the development of a shared identity or in personal relationships, like friendship, partnership, inter-marriage etc. Another goal might be synergy in working together, which is becoming so important in the international business world nowadays (human resource management, intercultural teams etc). Some societies encourage the mixing / merging of cultures as expressed, for example, in the "melting pot" metaphor). Others might follow Homi Bhabha in search for a third space and develop a "hybrid collective identity". A shared human rights culture also requires an on-going dialogue (cf. Donnelly), and the same is true for the management of shared global concerns. In any case, we reach some form of universality. Global concerns have become well expressed already 20 years ago in Ulrich Beck's term "global risk society" (Beck, 1986), and they are addressed today in a growing number of NGOs and other elements of our global civil society.

¹² Similarly, politics has been called the continuation of war with other means (Foucault inverting Clausewitz's famous formulation "war is a continuation of politics by other means"). However, international politics expressed in such formulations is still seen as a zero sum game, which has to be overcome by dialogue.

Obstacles for dialogue: exclusionary thoughts and practices

Among the main obstacles for dialogue are exclusionary practices in which people are involved, like various forms of discrimination in society (especially harmful in multicultural societies!) based on: race, religion, gender, etc. Let's take a look at a cartoon, which illustrates these exclusionary practices humorously:



Another obstacle lies in the lack of freedom of expression and speech and, generally, anything that hinders people to freely choose and practice their language, culture and religion. It is another form of exclusion, as voices are being shut out.

Political obstacles are in totalitarianism (nationalism, fascism etc.) and end of history concepts, which we can find in communism, religious teleological and apocalyptic thinking and, as a rather rare example in liberal democracy, the concept of Fukuyama.¹³

¹³ In the case of Fukuyama, I would consider it only a minor obstacle; dialogue definitely is possible with members of this school of thought.

Exclusionary practices in religion

Also, in religion, we can find exclusionary practices, e.g. in their teachings about salvation. Muslim scholar Seyyed Hossein Nasr, who has carried out more than forty years dialogue with the Catholic church, expressed his frustration when he heard, after such a long time, a declaration of Cardinal Ratzinger (meanwhile Pope), whom he knew personally, that all non-Catholics go to hell: "So, obviously, if I am going to hell, he is going to go to paradise; what are we dialoguing about?" (Nasr 2001, 7). Also, there is still wide-spread Muslim preaching and teaching that non-Muslims go to hell, even in Malaysian schools. Among religions, especially religious institutions, which strive to consolidate their influence and power, it seems to be very difficult to overcome this kind of thinking about salvation and generally the conviction of being in possession of the one Truth. Of course, there is a lot of dialogue too; but we always have to look closely and see what for, or against what? Sometimes, religious leaders get into dialogue with each other in order to match some of their exclusionary practices. For example the Vatican and Muslim countries have together prevented a declaration that intended to give rights to homosexuals. But other forms of interfaith dialogue are also possible, as I will indicate towards the end of this article.

Generally, people should refrain from any imposition of what one considers the ultimate truth solution etc., not even in the name of divine or scientific authorities. In such views, the other would be degraded. Also, one should not believe to be in the full possession of truth or knowledge. When people believe themselves the sole guardians of the truth it makes them incapable of communication and dialogue, and we often see the eruption of hatred and violence. The theologian Leonard Swidler is not exaggerating when he calls deabsolutization of truth the major modern epistemological paradigm shift (2003, 8-17). The Clash of civilizations is mainly a clash of fundamentalisms (cf. Kevenhörster).

The Politics of identity

On the one hand, it is good and healthy to have a positive self image and that applies also to collective identities, like cultures and religions; after all, how can we have dialogue, if we don't know who we are? On the other hand, it is also necessary to be critical about oneself or one's collective identity:

- ☛ in order to improve or to transform oneself
- ☛ In order to develop healthy relationships with others.

¹¹ Khondker, Habibul Haque (2003). *Clashing States, Hidden Civilizations: Beyond Huntington*. Kuala Lumpur: Centre for Civilizational Dialogue, University of Malaya, 14.

Unfortunately, instead of critically looking at oneself, it is a common practice, especially in politics, to blame internal problems on others and to cultivate a fear of the other. Nations "cheat", as Khondker writes¹⁴, juggling identities and interests. Cultural issues are often instrumentalized for political gains. For example, in Europe, many times the Jews were the scapegoats. Currently, the US and the Muslim world use each other as scapegoats. In the Muslim world, public opinion is often distracted from the real problems by pointing to outside interference, conspiracies, crusades etc. against them; for the US, the scapegoating use of terrorism has been brought to light by Michael Moore's film "Fahrenheit 9/11" to mention just a very prominent example.

Huntington himself seems to feel the need to construct new enemies. His approach is, of course, more fundamental and longer term, but both approaches work hand in hand. While scapegoating operates shorter term and case to case, there is a need to justify long term military planning and spending where a more fundamental construction of an enemy comes in handy.¹⁵

Global civilization

We currently witness the rise of a global civilization based on capitalism and the modern scientific worldview.¹⁶ However, this does not replace traditional civilizations and cultures and it does not mean the end of history. What is needed here is some form of integration: while rooted in our traditional cultures, we are also sharing values and institutions and dynamics globally. We should strive for a unity-in-difference and establish a climate for dialogue and critique. Opposition against global civilization and even against specific forms of integration into global civilization also exists and should be addressed in dialogue as well.

¹⁵ Cf. Köchler, Hans (1997). Philosophical foundations of civilizational dialogue: the hermeneutics of cultural self-comprehension versus the paradigm of civilizational conflict. *I.P.O. Research Papers*. Retrieved December 15, 2006 from <http://hanskoechler.com/civ-dial.htm>, 2: "Huntington derives from this analysis the justification for the West's (or more precisely: the United States') striving for economic and military supremacy with the aim of countering the supposed threats from other civilizations "whose values and interests differ significantly from those of the West." It is no surprise that, in this context, a new arms-buildup is being advocated by the Western establishment. This strategy apparently serves to fill the gap left by the *détente* of the earlier era. Vested interests seem to play a central role in the ideological rearming of the West serving the purpose of military hegemony that had been abandoned shortly before and after the end of the East-West confrontation."

¹⁶ Other aspects could be mentioned, like the communications revolution; however such phenomena are also based on scientific development and are integrated with the capitalist economy.

Human identity, cosmopolitanism and human rights

It would be desirable to develop a form of human identity or cosmopolitanism: an identity as humans and as citizens of the world; a global consciousness in which all humans, and not merely compatriots, come under the same moral standards. Such cosmopolitanism is compatible with local identities but also fosters a sense of commonality reaching beyond, even to political enemies. It helps us to overcome such separations and find reasoned solutions to our common problems (cf. Anderson-Gold, 10). Human rights and duties can be anchored in such an identity and put to reality more than we have done so far.

Another question is concerned with the limits of tolerance. When tolerance has become merely an acquiescent indifference, it is no more a virtue. It is better to recognize limits to tolerance and to follow Karl Popper: In the name of tolerance, we should claim the right not to tolerate intolerance. Agreements on human rights standards wouldn't make sense, if we would end up tolerating abuse, just like absolute pacifism would allow violence and genocide.

The human rights corpus should reflect (and already does to a large extent) the diversity of all cultures (overlapping consensus). The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted on December 10, 1948 by the UN by a vote 48-0 with 8 abstentions. As the principal drafters were French and Canadian, the Western role was central; however other contributors were from Russia, China, Lebanon and Chile.

A genuine universality through a consensual process and dialogue with input from multiple cultures can be reached; still the corpus can be viewed as work in progress.¹⁷ It should however be defended against critics like Huntington or against advocates of (politicized) "Asian values"¹⁸ because it should not be seen as a path to Westernization as at least the core of human rights can be derived from the Golden Rule, which has roots in all cultures and religions: "People should treat others as they would themselves wish to be treated." That's why despite the absence of religious references it should not be seen as anti-religious or antithetical to religious world views, rather as a neutral framework which also guarantees full freedom of religion. Human rights do not represent an all-encompassing philosophy or way of life, nor do they provide a yardstick by which to evaluate cultures and religions in general (cf. Bielefeldt, 588).

¹⁷ It plays a central role in the realization of modernity, which, according to Habermas, is itself an unfinished project. The question is, will it remain unfinished? It might have to move from a hegemonic Western modernity to a multicultural modernity with a global civil society.

¹⁸ Such concepts are often used to instrumentalize culture for political purposes, often against human rights. As a counter example, in Taiwan leading politicians have said that they know of no Chinese values that clash with human rights.

A global ethic

Still there are religious groups which do not like a secular framework like the Human Rights, and which feel that rights should be supplemented by responsibilities. These groups can turn to the religiously grounded Global Ethic,¹⁹ a project connected with theologian Hans Küng, who is also president of the Global Ethic Foundation and an adviser to the United Nations. Küng agrees with Huntington in the importance of religions in international relations, but disagrees with the clash (hypo)thesis: There are also commonalities among religions on which we can build strategies to avoid clashes. He is convinced that what unites the religions is greater than what divides them. Unfortunately, such aspects are widely ignored in Huntington's work as it is dominated by a strategic and military perspective.

Based on discussions in the Parliament of the World's Religions, a *Declaration towards a Global Ethic* has been put forward, which has the Golden Rule as the main basic principle²⁰ and includes the following:

- ☉ every human being must be treated humanely
- ☉ commitment to a culture of non-violence
- ☉ commitment to a culture of solidarity and a just economic order
- ☉ commitment to a culture of toleration and a life of truthfulness
- ☉ commitment to a culture of equal rights and partnership between men and women

Around these core values responsibilities and rights can be identified and a global ethic can emerge.

Conclusion

Clashes, even violent ones, are bound to happen if people don't make use of the opportunities for dialogue. "We owe to Samuel Huntington a potent provocation..." was the beginning of Tipson's poem. In fact a provocation so potent that the "clash of civilizations" became very much part of our language, an expression used everywhere by people who haven't even read anything from Huntington. Here lies a danger that people begin to speak and to think in terms of the clash. As a result, it might become a self-fulfilling prophecy, a realization of "Huntington's Curse". But I don't see it as a curse or as something inevitable. And I know there are many people around the world who see it rather as a warning and who feel provoked to do something to defuse potentials for culture-based conflict or clash. As a result, many

¹⁹ Global Ethic (not 'ethics') represents the English counterpart to the German 'Weltethos' and conveys the idea of universal norms of conduct in a global society.

²⁰ Küng traced it back to the sources in the main world religions.

initiatives for dialogue and peace have been undertaken; one of the most notable is, of course, the Centre for Civilisational Dialogue at the University of Malaya founded in 1995. I am happy to contribute to the Center's activities with this article in which I tried to point out that, through dialogue, cosmopolitanism, and basic elements of universality, especially human rights and a global ethic, it is possible to reach understanding and cross-fertilization among cultures and civilizations.

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