

Dialogue among Civilizations: Implications for International Relations

By SHEN Qurong, Former President and Research Professor, China Institute of Contemporary International Relations

Xandai Guoji Guangxi^{1*} (Contemporary International Relations)

September 2001

The year 2001 was designated by the United Nations as “the Year of Dialogue among Civilizations” at the dawn of the new millennium. It was a major move based on relevant resolutions adopted by three successive UN General Assemblies and promoted vigorously by the United Nations. Persistent progress of dialogues among civilizations or cultures will not only benefit the healthy development of human civilization, but also be conducive to the healthy evolution of international relations. This article intends to offer some views about the significance of such dialogue in the international relations dimension. Given the importance of this issue, the author cites a great deal of original thoughts from others in order to trigger more profound discussions.

Promoting International Dialogues

Dialogue is an important aspect of human life and a significant category of social activities. Abstractly speaking, it is a form of interaction among social forces; a means either for communication or avoiding conflicts and moderating confrontations. Sometimes, it appears as an objective set for a certain stage and can only be realized before certain conditions are met. According to the words of its initiator, Iranian President Mohammad Khatami, it should be interpreted as a process of “speaking and listening among civilizations and cultures.”² Furthermore, from the perspective of practice, international dialogues could be conducted through various diplomatic contacts, meetings, exchanges, consultations and so on.

Dialogues either among civilization, cultures or states all have a long history. Yet the history of international relations of last century could hardly be portrayed as a period of dialogues. Rather it could more accurately be seen as a century born in confrontation that predominated and was eventually replaced by dialogue. Confrontation once degenerated into two world wars and a Cold War lasting over four decades, casting on human society immense disasters and sufferings. A turning point came about in the 1980s. Only a decade ago, a strategic balance surfaced between America and the former Soviet Union. Normalization of diplomatic relations also evolved between America and China. A North-South dialogue was brewing between the developed countries and the developing world. And a search for “a small détente against the larger backdrop of tensions” began between the West and East Europe. All this paved the way for the global dialogues thereafter. In early 1980, the focus of international competition shifted away steadily from ideological contention and military confrontation to a rivalry of comprehensive national strength based on

^{1*}*Xiandai Guoji Guanxi* is the journal of the China Institute of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR). This article was originally published in Chinese.

² President Khatami's speech at Florence University, March 10, 1999,

economics power with science and technology in the lead. Later on, dialogue blossomed into a major trend in the international community and led to general moderation of global situation in the end. In 1988, the Editorial Department of the Beijing-based *World Affairs* invited some experts for a forum in writing over transformations in the international landscape. In the editor's note, the journal pointed out: "there is a new tendency of dialogue replacing confrontation on the international stage, the trends toward settling international conflicts through peaceful means and the evolving rapprochement in the global situation as a whole." In his contribution, HE Fang, an expert on international relations asserted that, "The symbol of a turning point in world situation was a marked relaxation in Washington-Moscow relations from saber-rattling confrontation to overall rivalry and dialogue/consultations, which was moving toward an institution and mechanism."³ Moderation finally led to the end of the Cold War confrontation and to the collapse of the bipolar world.

The demise of the Cold War opened up a vast vista for prevailing and deepening interstate dialogues over economic, political, security, strategic, human rights and other global issues. "Dialogue among civilizations" discussed today is not only the outcome of interactions among civilizations but indeed the culmination of the above-mentioned tendency. The scope of the global dialogue spread from political, military, security fields to underlying social and economic arenas and has been penetrating into the realm of culture and psyche. In the meantime, thanks to the end of the Cold War and the international tendency, dialogue among cultures and civilizations has entered a new era with clearer purpose, better organization, larger scope and greater sustainability.

Du Weiming, a professor from Harvard University, claimed that as president of the Hawaii-based East-West Center, he had been focusing on dialogue among civilizations in research and co-sponsored a series of international symposiums under the theme of world religions. In October 1992, some Chinese and Japanese experts and scholars also discussed the relationship between East and West cultures and the future of East culture. The publication in 1993 of Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations* aroused strong response and objectively stimulated further dialogue among civilizations. In October 1994, a report entitled *Our Global Neighborhood* was adopted by the Commission on Global Governance composed of prestigious public figures from over 20 countries, calling for "a new kind of dialogue among civilization".⁴ In May 1995, scholars from Japan and a dozen of European countries got together in Rumania for the second "Sinaia Dialogue", which advocated dialogues and exchanges among "different civilization centers". In October the same year, the then German President Roman Herzog delivered a speech at Frankfurt under the title "Inter-cultural Dialogue versus Global Culture Wars".⁵ In the same autumn, Pakistan hosted a large-scale "Dialogue between Islam and the West" at Karachi. In December 1997, the 8th Islamic Summit issued the Tehran Declaration "emphasizing the imperative of positive interaction, dialogue and understanding among cultures and religions, and rejecting the theories of clash and conflict which breed mistrust and diminish the grounds for peaceful interaction among nations".⁶ In September 1998,

³ HE Fang: *World Situation at Turning Point*, *World Affairs*, No.18, 1988.

⁴ *Our Global Neighborhood. -The Report of the Commission on Global Governance*, China Foreign Translation Co. , 1995.9, p.240.

⁵ Roman Herzog: *Preventing the Clash of Civilizations*, ed. by Henrik Schmiegelow, St. Martin's Press, 1999, p.13.

⁶ Tehran Declaration, The Eighth Islamic Summit Conference, The Session of

Iranian President Mohammad Khatami made a formal proposal at the 53rd UN General Assembly that 2001 be designated as “the year of dialogue among civilizations”, which won universal approval. Similar resolutions were adopted at the 53rd, 54th and 55th sessions of the UN General Assembly. In early September 2000, a round-table conference under the theme of dialogue among different civilizations was held in New York with the participation of many heads of state, foreign ministers, prominent scholars and thinkers. It was pointed out in the Declaration of the UN Millennium Summit adopted on September 8th that “Peace and dialogue culture should be actively promoted among civilizations.” According to the agenda, a panel is to be held this year at the 56th session of the UN General Assembly to discuss how to push forward the cause.

All these developments indicate that dialogue among civilizations under UN sponsorship and promotion represent a major milestone in the history of human culture and international relations, a move enjoying widespread support and a profound social basis. The progress of dialogue among civilizations and nations reflects advances of human society. The two are distinct, yet inter-linked. Apart from natural scientists, philosophers and social scientists and artists also play their roles regarding dialogues among civilizations and cultures. Nevertheless, as long as no fundamental changes occur in the status of nations as the basic main body of international behavior, dialogues among civilizations, cultures and nations will remain closely intertwined. The international community today should make use of the inter-linked, mutual-accommodating and mutual-affecting relations among the trio to promote progress of human civilization and democratization of international relations, thus propelling the cause of peace and development, the central theme of the era.

Encouraging Civilized International Cultural Relations

Advances in dialogue among civilizations and international cultural exchanges are closely associated with each other. Post-Cold War cultural interaction among nations has witnessed an unprecedented upsurge, stimulating and nourishing each other with a spectacular grandeur. Nevertheless, this area has never been immune to pollution. There still exists the issue of how to civilize our cultural relations.

WANG Meng, a well-known Chinese writer (and former Minister of Culture) summed up five “models” for the relations among cultures: (1) cultural hegemonism and cultural colonialism, which treats the stronger culture as a measure for all other cultures, poses itself as the dominator of world culture and virtually tries to eliminate those in the weak position; (2) cultural exclusiveness or conservatism, which rejects any new ideas, even common norms in human cultures and value systems; (3) cultural chauvinism, which emphasizes conflicts among cultures in disregard of their exchanges, fusion, complementary and mutual promotion, stresses on confrontation and fuels cultural misunderstanding and hostility rising from bias; (4) cultural relativism, which justifies for anti-humanitarian thinking or behavior and complete denies shared values among cultural pluralism; (5) “the relatively ideal model, which advocates dialogue and exchanges across cultures, in search for common ground while reserving differences, a model that upholds mutual learning and mutual understanding in the hope of individual and common development.”⁷ No matter whether this

⁷ Wang Meng's speech at the Chinese People's Political Consultative Congress (CPPCC) 21st Century Forum's 2001 Seminar on Dialogue among Civilization,

summarization has any specific aim, it fills in with the reality in international cultural relations.

The author sees several notable features in present international cultural relations. Firstly, despite deepening dialogue among civilizations, the impact of the theory of conflicts of civilizations cannot be underestimated. In the eyes of some “realists,” hegemony and power politics carry little derogatory connotations. After cultural packaging with decorations such as “benevolence”, “good will” and “morality”, they seem to be able to openly throw their weight about. Secondly, with a condescending and overweening attitude, armed with their IT supremacy and media monopoly, cultures in strong position ruthlessly oppress weak ones, sparking fierce resentment from the latter. Thirdly, while serving as a major bond in international cooperation, the cultural factor also induces many conflicts. In the thriving post-Cold War regional cooperation, historical identification of homologous culture and more inseparable geographical links under the context of globalization are playing crucial roles. Meanwhile, in most of the post-Cold War armed conflicts, which exceed 27 cases annually on average, racial, ethnic, religious and other cultural factors served either as the immediate cause or as the source of a certain spiritual cohesion. And fourthly, progress made in the international system fall woefully behind the demand of the ever-changing situation. On the one hand, the effective, long-tested basic principles of the UN Charter have often been slighted or violated; on the other, the long-awaited new economic, political, security and cultural orders still seem to be in sight but out of reach. Some 300 years ago, Immanuel Kant, the pursuer of permanent peace, advocated “surpassing the lawless barbarian state.” Yet at the dawn of the new millennium, civilization of the international community in the field of system remains in an underdeveloped state.

Advanced dialogue among civilizations took place in extensive international context and is not only aiming at the theory of “conflicts of civilizations.” Former German President Roman Herzog reiterated on many occasions that “I am thinking here of the so-called *clash of civilizations*, which, following the Cold War, some people predict as the next great conflict looming on the horizon. This scenario is to my mind highly questionable both intellectually and morally. But it is nonetheless highly dangerous. For this idea, once implanted in the minds of the elite both in the West and in Asia, might become a self-fulfilling prophecy, hence a new security risk.”⁸ Being a scholar himself, Herzog’s criticism is both incisive and profound.

According to the analysis of the advocates and commentators of dialogue among civilizations, differences in cultures and civilizations may under certain conditions turn to factors igniting conflicts:

1. ZI Zhongyun (former Director of the Institute of American Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences) explained the phenomenon this way, “Differences in cultures themselves should not have sparked conflicts, the real culprit was the attitude toward other cultures.” She added that, “Conflicts or wars related to beliefs, thoughts or ideologies were actually driven by interests, which used religion or ideology just as an excuse; in other cases, they may be traced to ignorance, arrogance or biased narrow-mindedness, which regard the beliefs and cultures of other nations as heathen cults.”⁹ Her views

⁸ Roman Herzog: *Preventing the Clash of Civilizations*, ed. by Henri Schmiegelow, St. Martin's Press, 1999, p. 42.

⁹ ZI Zhongyun: Mutual Prosperity-Harmony vs. Divergence, *Renmin Zhengxie Bao*(

are more or less the same with WANG Meng's cultural hegemonism or chauvinism.

2. Bassam Tibi pointed out that, "In fact, what leads to an actualization of a clash of civilizations is the politicization of civilized world outlook that results in the political ideologies of religious fundamentalism."¹⁰
3. Herzog asserted that, "The so-called 'conflicts of civilizations' are inner uncivilized behavior of cultures rather than conflicts among civilizations. We should prevent the evolution of such degeneration of civilization into global conflicts."¹¹
4. Constantine Von Braun drove the point home, saying, "Only when exhausted of content will a culture attempt to override others."¹²

Whether "politicization of cultural differences", "degeneration of civilizations" or "exhaustion of cultural content", the crux of the matter lies in the attitude toward other cultures.

The author reckons that initiators of dialogue among civilizations, no matter whether they come from the Islamic world, Europe, East Asia or other regions, are generally cold-headed toward the relations among cultures and civilizations. They uphold openness and tolerance toward alien cultures and heterogeneous civilizations in the hope of realizing mutual communication, learning and understanding through dialogues and exchanges. Development of such a dialogue will not only rectify the theory of the *Clash of Civilizations*, but will also play a purifying role in overall international cultural relations.

Coping with Economic Globalization

Dialogue among civilizations sprang up along with the advances of economic globalization. The former won the notice of upholders of globalization, whereas the latter captured the attention of the advocates of dialogue of civilizations. In fact, the progress of globalization has set the basic context and major theme for the dialogue.

A Chinese scholar offered us such questions: "Does globalization mean that confrontation would be replaced with dialogue, war with peace and plunder with cooperation? Will globalization change the game of 'one swallows up another' into coexistence, the 'life and death' game into win-win game? Will pluralism, openness and harmony take over national seclusion, unilateral arrogance and the philosophy of unending struggles under globalization?" His answer was that "History would say 'yes' to all of these questions at the end of a tortuous and bumpy trajectory for mankind."¹³ In my personal view, regardless of their specific connotations, the questions put forward are sharp indeed. Yet the answers to them would vary from person to person.

Some Western scholars tend to define globalization and its future as a victory for

¹⁰ Bassam Tibi: *International Morality and Cross-Cultural Bridging*, Roman Herzog: *Preventing the Clash of Civilizations*, ed. by Henrik Schmiegelow, St. Martin's Press, 1999, p.113-114.

¹¹ Roman Herzog: *Preventing the Clash of Civilizations*, ed. by Henri Schmiegelow, St. Martin's Press, 1999, p.70.

¹² Constantine Von Braun: *A Road to Cross-cultures. Deutschland* (Chinese Version), No.3, 2000, p.48.

¹³ ZHU Houze: *Random Thoughts on Globalization, The Paradox of Globalization*, YU Keping and HUANG Weiping, Eds. Central Translation and Compilation Press,

liberalism. Zbigniew Brzezinski, an advocate of the “collapse of communism”, alleged that the world has entered the “post-communism era”. Francis Fukuyama, a proponent of “the end of history” asserted that the impending end of the 20th century was witnessing not only the end of the Cold War and the elapse of a specific period in the post-war history, but also the end of history or the evolution of human ideologies, popularization of Western freedom and democracy as the last form of rule for mankind. Alvin Toffler, a U.S. futurist advocating “power shifts” holds that Marxism as an ideological system is dying because the system that failed to manage the economy well in “the second wave” blundered in the third one as well. British former Foreign Secretary Geoffrey Howe talked glibly that his official position was a source of joy—wherever he went, China, the Soviet Union, Asia and Latin America, he had the feeling that history was moving in the direction of his path. Such are the mind-set of some people at the end of the Cold War and in the face of globalization. In 1993, Samuel Huntington came up with his theory of Clash of Civilizations, which in essence was not much different from the above-mentioned statements, yet his mood was not so “joyful”. Many of his argumentation on civilizations reflected certain concerns over the Western civilization and globalization.

Whether in China or in the West, there are diversified theories about globalization, portraying the phenomenon as “a rising sun,” “a rotating earth”, “a myth”, “a pitfall”, “a paradox” or “a bunch of inherent contradictions”. The author would like to only highlight the very last one. Ulrich Bech, German professor of sociology, once illustrated the issues of universalism vs. particularism, connection vs. fragmentation, centralization vs. Decentralization and conflict vs. balance inherent in globalization.¹⁴ Chinese economist QIU Yuanlun further listed eight pairs of intrinsic contradictions of economic globalizations. They are supra-sovereignty vs. Sovereign state; market economy vs. state intervention; increased economic wealth vs. unfair social distribution; intensified competition vs. enhanced coordination; “fast economies” vs. “slow economies”; old order vs. new order; centralizing state power vs. decentralizing state power and globalization vs. regionalism.¹⁵ Another Chinese economist YU Keping also maintains that “globalization has essentially been a process replete with inner contradictions, which represent unity of opposites: it embraces trends toward integration and disintegration, singleness and diversity, centralization and decentralization, international orientation and native orientation.” In sum, Globalization is “a process composing of two things that are both opposite and complementary to each other. It is a paradox.”¹⁶

Globalization is indeed a highly complicated process. As an outcome of science and technology development and improvement in productive forces of human society, it has inevitably shortened the distance among nations and civilizations and created conditions favorable for bringing about and pushing forward the dialogue tendency. In the meantime, however, it has so far been undeniably been under the sway of leading capitalist countries, thus having the likelihood of turning into soil for a variety of confrontations. As a matter of fact, globalization in real life has aggravated and highlighted imbalances in human society and the international community. These include imbalances in economic development, between efficiency and fairness,

¹⁴ Ulrich Bech: *What is Globalization?* Polity Press, 2000, p.49-51.

¹⁵ QIU Yuanlun: Eight Pairs of Contradictions in Economic Globalization, *World Economy*, No.11, 1997.

¹⁶ *The Paradox of Globalization*, YU Keping and HUANG Weiping, Eds. Central

superstructure and economic base, spiritual civilization and material civilization, and imbalance in East-West or North-South power structure. In its recent Report on African Economic Development, the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) records the decrease of the continent's growth rate from 4.5% in the mid-1960s to 4.2% in the 1970s, then to 2.5 % in the 1980s and further to 2.3% in the 1990s. By 2000, the per capita income there had dropped 10% over the past two decades with 28 million people on the verge of starvation.¹⁷ This, however, represents only part of the picture of worldwide imbalances.

Regarding the imbalance issue emerging along with globalization, the Declaration of UN Millennium Summit pointed out that, “We believe that the central challenge we face is to ensure that globalization becomes a positive force for the world's people. For while globalization offers great opportunities, at present its benefits are very unevenly shared, while its costs are unevenly distributed. We recognize that developing countries and countries with economies in transition face special difficulties in responding to this central challenge. Thus, only through broad and sustained efforts to create a shared future, based upon our common humanity in all its diversity, can globalization be made fully inclusive and equitable. These efforts must include policies and measures, at the global level, which correspond to the needs of developing countries and economies in transition, and are formulated and implemented with their effective participation.” Some insightful people in the developed nations also come up with a call for “a humanitarian globalization”. Some developing countries hope to see “a globalization based on unity and mutual assistance”. China, for its part, pursues “an economic globalization featuring equality, mutual benefit, coexistence and a win-win outcome”. These proclamations of statesmen and views of specialists are undoubtedly imbued with “a civilized spirit” showing concern for mankind and nature. Yet their realization awaits arduous dialogue and conscientious practice.

Promoters of dialogue among civilizations will neither believe in the myth about globalization nor fall into its pitfalls. Instead, they intend to face up to this paradox through dialogue and seek to moderate or solve its “hidden contradictions and conflicts”. Iranian President Khatami said “Dialogue among cultures and civilizations should be transformed from a doctrine into a program of action, addressing recent international developments. ‘Globalization’, as the most pressing of such developments, has opened new horizons for human societies, albeit affected by the monopolies of power and capital. Globalization should not be utilized to open greater markets for a few or to assimilate national cultures into a uniform global one. Instead, what is required is the collective articulation of common interests, norms and laws.”¹⁸ Explaining the background of his president's proposal for dialogue among civilizations, Mohammad Houssein Malaek, Iranian Ambassador to China, said that the negative consequences of globalization “are clearly inimical to the spirit of freedom, cultural diversity, and pluralism. They can easily fan the flames of commotion and violence”. “The totality of these challenges and opportunities (of globalization) remind us of the necessity of international cooperation yet, mutual understanding is the ultimate requisite to international cooperation and it cannot be obtained in the absence of dialogue.”¹⁹ It is obvious that the advocates of dialogue among civilizations are taking

¹⁷ *Guangming Daily*, September 19, 2001.

¹⁸ Address by President Seyyed Mohammad Khatami at the Millennium Assemblé of the United Nations, September 6, 2000. *The Iranian Journal of International Affairs*, Fall 2000, p. 514.

¹⁹ Speech by Mohammad Malaek at the 21st Century Forum's 2001 Seminar on

positive attitudes toward globalization.

Exploring New Paradigms for International Relations

How should we take advantage of new opportunities arising since the end of the Cold War? How should we respond to the new challenges facing the world? Initiators of dialogue among civilizations generally place their hopes on changes in the underlying doctrines governing international behavior and on the revision or renewal of paradigms of prevailing international relations.

President Mohammad Khatami regards dialogue among civilizations itself as “an alternative paradigm for international relations”, namely “the new paradigm of dialogue among cultures and civilizations.”²⁰ In his address at the Millennium Assembly of the United Nations, Iranian Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi emphasized that the Roundtable on Dialogue among Civilizations, which was held in New York on the eve of the Millennium Summit, “should become the new paradigm of international relations”.²¹

Mr. Herzog said, “We would not be really satisfied till the ‘national interests politics’ formed over centuries were transformed into responsible global politics.” He even put forward a global preventive foreign strategy with eight-point foreign policy norms for his “global responsibility community”.²²

The Shanghai Five and its successor Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) have also been ardent promoters of dialogue. In his speech at the SCO inaugural ceremony on June 5, 2001, Chinese President JIANG Zemin pointed out that, “The development of the ‘Shanghai Five’ represented an important diplomatic practice in international relations. It initiated a new type of security concept featuring mutual trust, disarmament and cooperative security. It also has enriched the brand new state-to-state relationship jointly initiated by China and Russia with the core of non-alignment, and created a new regional cooperative mode featuring joint proposition by large and small countries, priority of security, mutual benefit and friendly cooperation. The Shanghai Spirit, which has been developed during the ‘Shanghai Five’ process and features mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality, consultation, respect to different civilizations and common prosperity, is not only the summary of the experiences of the five countries in handling mutual relationships, but is also of practical significance in pushing forward just and rational new world political order and economic order.”²³

Given the differences in the cultural traditions, current conditions and backgrounds of the advocates, there exist some divergences in their proposed new

Dialogue among Civilizations, Beijing, September 11, 2001.

²⁰ Speech by President Seyyed Mohammad Khatami at the “Dialogue Among Civilizations Conference” at the United Nations, September 5, 2000; address by President Khatami at the Millennium Assembly of the United Nations, September 6, 2000. *The Iranian Journal of International Affairs*, Fall 2000, p. 520.

²¹ Statement by Dr. Kamal Kharrazi at the 55th Session of UN General Assembly, September 15, 2000; address by Mohammad Khatami at the UN Millennium Assembly, September 6, 2000, *The Iranian Journal of International Affairs*, Fall 2000, p. 530.

²² Roman Herzog: *Preventing the Clash of Civilizations*, ed. by Henri Schmiegelow, St. Martin's Press, 1999, p. 68-71.

²³ JIANG Zemin's Speech “Deepening Unity and Cooperation and Building a Bright Century by Joint Efforts” at the Shanghai Cooperative Organization

paradigms or conceptions for international relations. Yet they share consensus over the following major respects.

Dialogue is crucially important. We must replace confrontation with dialogue. President Khatami said that “among the worthiest achievements” of the 20th century are the “acceptance of the necessity and significance of dialogue and rejection of force”. Elevation of human civilization, whether at national or international level, “is contingent upon dialogue among societies and civilizations representing various views, inclinations and approaches”. If humanity at the beginning of the new century and millennium “devotes all efforts to institutionalizing dialogue, replacing hostility and confrontation with discourse and understanding, it would leave an invaluable legacy for the benefit of the future generations”.²⁴ Former UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros Ghali said that only through sustained state-to-state dialogue and exchange of views, would it be possible to promote democratization of international relations, which would serve as the foundation of the world peace. He added, “War and conflicts originate in human hearts and minds. We should hold dialogue with souls of the people ... our hopes for a new type of interstate relationship may be realized through cross cultural exchanges and dialogue.”²⁵

Power logic and Cold War mentality should be abandoned and peaceful culture should be built. “We ought to critically examine the prevalence and the glorification of might.” “From an ethical perspective, the paradigm of dialogue among civilizations requires that we give up the will to power. Instead what we need is the will for empathy, compassion and understanding, otherwise there would be no hope for the prevalence of order in our world.” “Our task today is to transform the logic of international relations, distancing it from the logic of power.”²⁶ “We have to renounce nationalism, arms race, and traditional power politics.” “We should not replace the ideological confrontation of the Cold War with scenarios of ‘global cultural wars’. It seems to someone the human race could not do very well without the law of the jungle.”²⁷ “We should commit ourselves to unity in our common endeavors to create for our people a future of peace, stability and prosperity.”²⁸ World security and everlasting peace require “rejection of the paradigm of the Cold War”, which was based on the premise of practical external enemy in existence or imagined.²⁹ “Without a solemn rectification of the Cold War mentality, confidence and peace would be unavailable. The advances of peaceful cultures are conditioned on acknowledgement of the constructive role of the state and avoidance of dominance, unilateralism,

²⁴ Speech by President Mohammad Khatami at the UN General Assembly, September 21, 1998, www.dialoguecenter.org.

²⁵ Boutros Boutros Ghali’s Interview with Chinese reporters, *People’s Daily*, September 14, 2001; *Guangming Daily*, September 13, 2001.

²⁶ Speech by President Seyyed Mohammad Khatami at the “Dialogue Among Civilizations Conference” at the United Nations, September 5, 2000; address by President Khatami at the Millennium Assemble of the United Nations, September 6, 2000. *The Iranian Journal of International Affairs*, Fall 2000, p. 515.

²⁷ Roman Herzog: *Preventing the Clash of Civilizations*, ed. by Henri Schmiegelow, St. Martin's Press, 1999, p. 70.

²⁸ Tehran Vision Statement, the English Islamic Summit Conference, “The Session of Dignity, Dialogue, Participation”, December 11, 1997. www.dialoguecentre.org.

²⁹ Statement by President Mohammad Khatami, Tehran, December 9, 1997,

confrontation and rejection.”³⁰

We should seek harmony between human generality and world diversity for establishing a new order based on common values and participation on an equal footing. SONG Jian, Chinese member of the UN special panel of prestigious public figures for dialogue among civilizations, maintained that “Diversity of culture and civilization is the general law of the universe, the legacy of history, the treasure handed down from human ancestors, the permanent fountain of human wisdom and knowledge and the origin of the brilliance of the modern world.”³¹ “In the course of fusion among civilizations, more similarities can be discerned and common values be developed... The calling for dialogue among civilizations aims at enhancing tolerance and understanding, widening consensus, dissolving conflicts, forwarding the stable, healthy progress of world cultural and economy, and realizing peace and common prosperity of human society in the end.”³² While drafting the report on dialogue among civilizations, Kofi Annan's personal representative Mr. Pick and his colleagues noted that, the new paradigm had to make clear that diversity was not a synonym for enmity and that globalization was not the opposite of individual identities; the new paradigm of international relations should include elements of accommodation, equality, search for generality, participation, recognition of the value of every single human life in each society. The UN Millennium Summit Declaration states that freedom, equality, solidarity, tolerance, caring for nature, shared responsibility and so on are “certain fundamental values considered to be essential to international relations”. President Khatami held that “International relations are in the process of transition from the previous bipolar system to a new stage of history. In our view, a new order based on pluralism is taking place in the world, that, God willing, will not be the monopoly of any single power.” “(We) envisage new responsibilities for the United Nations in the common endeavor to initiate a participatory global order based on dialogue, tolerance and synergy.”³³

The pursuit of a new paradigm for international relations has been a primary task for concerned theoreticians, on which many scholars and experts have been working unswervingly. Whenever a major event took place or came to an end, whether it be war or revolution, peace or development, hot war or cold war, globalization or anti-globalization, people would swell the ranks of explorers for new paradigms, not just experts and scholars, but also statesmen and diplomats. However till now, of the innumerable theories of international relations and the colorful spectrum of practice in this arena, it has been a rarity to find one genuinely calling for abandoning the will of power and distancing from power logic. With post-Cold War world situation and international realities in mind, advocates of dialogue among civilizations called for replacing confrontation with dialogue, abandoning power logic and Cold War mentality and seeking harmony between the generality and diversity. Their ideas have significance for both theory and practice.

³⁰ President Khatami's Speech at the United Nations General Assembly, September 21, 1998, www.dialoguecentre.org.

³¹ SONG Jian: *Diversity is the Natural Law in the Universe*, Renmin Zhengxue Bao, December 23, 2000.

³² SONG Jian: *Dialogue among Civilizations: the Common Desire of the World*, People's Daily, September 21, 2001

³³ Statement by President Mohammad Khatami, Tehran, December 9, 1997, www.dialoguecenter.org; address by President Khatami at the Millennium Assembly of the United Nations, September 6, 2000. *The Iranian Journal of*

These ideals about the new paradigm for international relations remind one the viewpoint of Chinese scholar LIANG Shoude (a professor of Beijing University). He said, "Despite its complexity and fluidity, the nature of international politics is always the struggle between power and rights. Given their superior position and strength, developed nations mostly pursue, safeguard and expand their power; by contrast, weak and developing nations mostly seek, defend and solidify their rights. Interstate relations in world politics, are, in essence, relations between power politics and rights politics." "In the final analysis, rights politics means fighting against hegemony in defense of sovereignty and human rights in the hope of substantiating, improving and unifying the two." He added that a new tendency in post-Cold War international politics is "the rights politics becoming the principal aspect of contradictions."³⁴ If his view represents a relatively objective judgement of the history of international relations and global realities, then the above-mentioned consensus over the new paradigm for international relations among advocates of dialogue among civilizations should be the ideal objectives for our incessant pursuit.

Injecting More Civilized Spirits into Global Dialogue

Somewhat different interpretations have been offered for the dialogue among civilizations in the Chinese academic community. Professor ZHANG Yijun held that "Dialogue among civilizations should emphasize on dialogue itself. This signifies the recognition that all kinds of civilizations possess the grounds and value for existence. Therefore we stand for handling their relations or divergences with an approach of dialogue rather than confrontation. The extension of the spirit of 'dialogue rather than confrontation' from the realm of international politics and economics to the arena of culture will signify a major improvement."³⁵ ZI Zhongyun, for her part, put it this way, "As I see it, the significance of the current stress on international dialogue rests with the spiritual side. Our goal should be set for counterbalancing the phenomenon of mankind being overwhelmed by its pursuit of and contention for material things."³⁶ In the personal view of the author, apart from a certain difference between the two in their perspective and points of emphasis, there exists no difference in essence at all. Dialogue among civilizations pays equal attention to dialogue itself and to civilization and spirit. So far as international relations are concerned, undoubtedly we need to promote dialogue vigorously, which itself needs to be further civilized as well.

In fact, international relations is a realm consisting of multiple ideals, forces, practices and spirits. A variety of factors can be found to explain why some divergences or contradictions among countries have aggravated to certain types of confrontation. Such cases are sometimes inevitable. Meanwhile, the driving force behind international dialogues varies in one case and another. Though better than confrontation, dialogue does not always fit in with the requirements of the advance of civilization. Thus far, instances are often seen that dialogues ended up in

³⁴ LIANG Shoude: Rights Politics: A Tendency of World Politics after the Cold War, *China Review*, January, 2001.

³⁵ ZHANG Yijun: Dialogue among Civilizations Seeding Peace, *Renmin Zhengxie Bao*, September 12, 2001.

³⁶ ZI Zhongyun: Dialogue among Civilizations vs. International Relations, the 21st Century Forum's 2001 Seminar on Dialogue among Civilizations, Beijing,

confrontation. Apart from factors such as economic interests and political rights, which are also the roots of confrontation, one could attribute such failures to the lack or insufficiency of civilized spirits too. Successful dialogue often demands sustained efforts and even necessary price. Any fruitful dialogue is indeed a process of plentiful interactions between different civilized spirits._

By civilized spirits we mean scientific rationalism and humanism which can be found in the world's major civilizations. There are quite a few of expounds in this respect given by advocates of and commentators on dialogue among civilizations. Here the author will just highlight those points required for international dialogues.

1. **“Do not do to others what you do not want others to do to you.” This should be the prerequisite for dialogue.** Mr. Herzog upheld this spirit on many international occasions as a universal ‘golden rule’. He once said “We all too easily forget, for instance, that Sakyamuni, Confucius and Socrates were virtual contemporaries, all bent on the same quest for humanity, reason, wisdom and distinguishing good from evil. My response to the Clash of Civilizations is to insist on the ‘golden rule’ of ‘Do not do to others what you do not want others to do to you’, which is formulated in almost identical terms both in the writings of Confucius and in the Bible, and indeed in some form or other in all great civilizations.”³⁷ “If we could only to some extent succeed in making this ‘golden rule’ the maxim of practical politics, that in itself would be an excellent point of departure for safeguarding international peace and no less the rights of the individual.”³⁸ Indeed, this should also be an excellent point of departure for dialogue among cultures, civilizations and states because it embraces also the well-quoted spirits of tolerance and mutual respect, namely acknowledgement and tolerance of differences and respect for diversity.
2. **Exchanges on an equal footing and two-way communication. This should be the process of sincere dialogues.** President Khatami put it this way, “In a true dialogue, one party cannot impose his ideas on the other. In a true dialogue, one must respect the independent existence, the ideological, intellectual and cultural attributes of the other. Only under such stances can dialogue become a prologue to peace, security and justice.”³⁹ This reminds one of the “hegemonic words”, much talked about in China's cultural circle. If you fail to see that “every drop of water can reflect the seven colors of sunshine, every life has its own dignity and the culture of every ethnic group has its reason to exist”⁴⁰, then even sitting across a table, the dialogue can hardly be a process of exchange on an equal footing and mutual communication. Further more, a dialogue full of “hegemonic words” can only lead to the direction of confrontation.
3. **Mutual understanding based on seeking common ground while reserving differences. This should be not only the process of sincere dialogues but**

³⁷ Roman Herzog: *Preventing the Clash of Civilizations*, ed. by Henri Schmiegelow, St. Martin's Press, 1999, p. 43.

³⁸ Roman Herzog: *Preventing the Clash of Civilizations*, ed. by Henri Schmiegelow, St. Martin's Press, 1999, p. 19-20.

³⁹ President Khatami's Speech at Florence University, March 10, 1999, www.dialoguecentre.org.

⁴⁰ ZHANG Xiping: Coming back to the Equal Footing of Dialogue—a Review on China-West Cultural Exchanges over the Last 400 Years, *Guangming Daily*,

also the outcome to be striven for. It is important for international dialogues to pursue and expand consensus. Differences and contradictions, which cannot be solved for the moment, may be shelved till later days. As a dialogue principle and diplomatic tactic, *seeking common ground while reserving differences* played a unique role in ensuring the success of the 1955 Bandung Conference. Its spirit of respect for reality, shelving differences and seeking common interests is still of great significance today. It demands mutual understanding, which surely comes from observing the spirit. As was expressed in a joint report on dialogue between Central/East European and Japanese scholars, “The road to mutual understanding between civilizations involves, first of all, a mutual recognition of differences, visible and invisible, secondly, a recognition of the existence of a deeper universality within human society at the root of these differences, and finally, the formulation of moderate and universal rules and norms in the social order for the sake of multipolar stability and interdependence.”⁴¹

Like many others, advocates of dialogue among civilizations believe in a basic logic that peace and cooperation can be realized through mutual understanding derived from dialogue. This is both a realistic and idealistic logic. Realistic because dialogue does approve to be an effective approach to eliminate differences, remove confrontation and avoid conflicts in modern times. Idealistic because of the complexity of the source of conflicts, the evident lagging spiritual civilization progress behind material civilization of human society and the long, long process involved in purifying human souls. CHEN Luzhi, a Chinese expert on international relations, maintained that, “Dialogue is meant for removal of obstacles rather than creation of new ones...It should not deviate from the basic values for international relations such as equality, justice, human rights, freedom, tolerance and good neighborliness, which have been stipulated in the UN Charter. Of course, it cannot replace other measures and means also stipulated in the Charter for maintaining international peace and stability.”⁴² This is a rational attitude, which has practical relevance.

China is also an ardent promoter of dialogue. Earlier back in the 1980s, the Chinese leaders made clear their advocacy for replacing confrontation with dialogue. Since the end of the Cold War, China has launched an all-directional dialogue diplomacy and taken an active part in multi-dimensional and multi-leveled dialogues in various forms. China always stands for settling international disputes through political means including dialogue, replacing confrontation with dialogue over human rights issues and relaxing strategic competition by strategic dialogue. The declaration of the newly established Shanghai Cooperation Organization stated that, “In pursuit of the principle of non-alignment, not targeting at a third country or region, and opening to the outside world, the SCO is willing to carry out various dialogues, exchanges and cooperation with any other country and other international or regional organizations.”⁴³ Such statement once again expressed the positive attitude of the six member states toward dialogue among civilizations, cultures and states._

⁴¹ “Nation, Civilizations and Humanity in the 21st Century”, Report of Co-Chairmen on the Second Sinaia Dialogue with Japan, May 24-27, 1995, NSPSPA and JFIR, September 1995, p.11.

⁴² CHEN Luzhi: UN’s Role in Promoting Dialogue among Civilizations, the 21st Century Forum’s 2001 Seminar on Dialogue among Civilizations, Beijing, September 11, 2001.

⁴³ Declaration of Shanghai Cooperation Organization, June 15, 2001,