

Cultural Hybridisation and the Perspective of Transcultural Philosophy in Jean-Yves Heurtebise's Theory

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This article aims to define the main features of questioning the differences between Western and Eastern civilisations in 21st-century transculturalism, highlighting the main signs of change in relation to traditional comparativism. The main focus is on the intersections between the thinking traditions of Chinese and Western civilisations. By reviewing Jean-Yves Heurtebise's analysis of this issue and his insights, the article seeks to identify the essential signs of change and differences in comparative studies (comparative studies) in relation to transculturalism. The article provides a concise overview of different concepts of culture and civilisation in the humanities and attempts to define and understand the images of Chinese and Western civilisations from the perspective of this theorist.

Keywords: dialogue, comparative studies, transculturalism, East, West

INTRODUCTION

When attempting to clarify the issues surrounding the intersection of comparative studies and transculturalism, we must first understand the difference between the concepts of 'culture' and 'civilisation,' which are interpreted in various ways in the humanities. Sometimes they are used together as synonyms, but their relationship is not entirely clear and is semantically intertwined. Civilisation can be understood as a certain high level of cultural development. There is a tendency to imagine that civilisation is the opposite of barbarism – a lower level of development, followed by culture, with civilisation becoming the highest achievement. It often emphasises a historical-cultural unit or a community of nations that share a common geographical location, common values, and social institutions, rather than a specific set of values or beliefs. The distinction between 'civilisation' as the largest and highest socio-historical unit and 'culture' as a smaller, lower unit belonging to 'civilisation' is useful in order to meaningfully explain the widespread phenomenon of cultural appropriation and civilisational hybridisation. However, although the content of 'civilisation' and 'culture' often overlaps, some theorists believe that the differences between these terms are too obvious to be completely dismissed. In addition to almost unanimously giving preference to 'civilisation' when referring to modern societies and 'culture' when referring to primitive societies, these theorists

tend to distinguish between the meanings of these terms in another sense as well: in a peculiar hierarchy of concepts, 'civilisation' is given a higher category than 'culture'. In simpler terms, they tend to include the semantic content of 'culture' in the semantic content of 'civilisation', rather than the other way around.

One of the reasons why the concepts of 'civilisation' and 'culture' are semantically identical is that theorists, when trying to define 'civilisation', consciously or unconsciously use the concept of 'culture'. In other words, even if part of the semantic content of the concept of 'culture' coincides with the semantic content of the concept of 'civilisation', this does not prevent them from using the former concept to define the latter. They seem to forget that using the word 'culture' to explain 'civilisation' would require defining 'culture' itself, which would seem to be impossible without first defining the concept of 'civilisation'. For example, when Samuel Huntington gives his definition, he not only identifies these two concepts, but also defines one in relation to the other: 'Civilisation is a great culture' (Huntington 1996: 22–23). Similarly, Immanuel Wallerstein, in order to define 'civilisation', refers to the concept of 'culture' and believes that civilisation is 'a combination of worldviews, customs, structures and cultures' (Wallerstein 1994: 215). Based on studies of climate, demography, agriculture, trade, technology, transport, communication and social mentality, Fernand Braudel (1987) also considers culture as a specific stage of the evolution of all mankind on the path of civilisation. For him, each civilisation is a kind of 'cultural space' or 'living place' in which many different cultural phenomena exist and function in their own way. All civilisations have their own spiritual centres and boundaries, peripheral zones and fringes. Therefore, the processes prevailing in civilisations are multilayered, covering separate cultural areas, border zones of influence and tension between several interacting civilisations.

As we can see, the use of these terms in the Anglo-Saxon, Romance and Germanic humanities differs. For example, in his two-volume work *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (1918; 1922), the German theorist Oswald Spengler uses the concept of civilisation as an organic and logical sequence of culture, but also as its end and completion. When a certain culture reaches a high level, it stops developing. Although for this German theorist 'civilisation' is superior to 'culture' in the sense of a progressive historical narrative, this is only the case when 'culture' or the so-called 'high culture' reaches its peak, begins to decline and finally dies. Therefore, Spengler perceives the word 'civilisation' very negatively, it is the inevitable fate and death of any culture. Every culture has its own cycle – childhood, adolescence, maturity and old age, followed by its death and transformation into civilisation. Unlike Braudel, who emphasised the importance of the city as a spiritual centre in relation to the periphery and argued that 'the most striking external sign that distinguishes cultures from civilizations is the presence or absence of cities', Spengler gives this phenomenon of humanity a clearly negative connotation. For Spengler, the early ages mark the birth of the city from the countryside, the later ages mark the struggle between the city and the countryside, and civilisation is the victory of the city through which it frees itself from the earth and reaches its end.

After the 20th century, various humanitarian studies revealed that in many contexts we should avoid using generalising terms such as 'Indian culture' or 'Chinese culture'. The same applies to the concepts of 'East' and 'West'. These are essentially huge simplifications that can be used for quick generalisation, but from a postcolonial perspective, such terms are considered distortions that should be abandoned. The term 'civilisation' can also be understood as a 'mega-concept' encompassing many smaller cultures. Western European civilisation

encompasses a variety of cultures, just as Indian or Chinese civilisations encompass many cultures that differ from one another.

Transculturalism is a concept that describes the dynamic interaction and transformation of cultures, going beyond simple coexistence (multiculturalism) and emphasising the creation of new, hybrid realities and identities through the mixing, interaction and synthesis of cultures. This concept was developed by Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz to show how cultures transform themselves, rather than simply influencing each other. It emphasises that individuals and societies constantly combine elements from different cultures, forming complex, fluid identities that transcend the boundaries of individual cultures, focusing on shared experiences, translation and the creation of new meanings.

THE APPROACH TO CULTURAL HYBRIDISATION IN J.-Y. HEURTEBISE'S THEORY

Jean-Yves Heurtebise, in his work *Orientalisme, occidentalisme et universalisme: Histoire et méthode des représentations croisées entre mondes européens et chinois (Orientalism, Occidentalism, and Universalism: A History and Method of the Mutual Representation of the Worlds of Europe and China)* (2020), presents a compelling archaeology of the intersection of Chinese and European discourses and ways of life, offering a theoretical analysis that examines the complex relationships between Easternness, Westernness, particularity and universality. Heurtebise insightfully observes how Chinese thought and culture were received in European modernity, focusing primarily on the field of philosophy, but also incorporating social, political and literary contexts. In addition, he explores the complex interaction with Chinese discourses on Occidentalism and Orientalising self-interpretations. These aspects enable the author to formulate an alternative model of transcultural philosophy that not only deconstructs the East–West binary relationship, but also critically analyses the existing forms of Occidentalism that adhere to these oversimplified oppositions.

In one of his articles, he takes a negative view of the previous practice of comparative studies and argues that, when looking at comparative philosophy, the very idea of culture seems self-evident. When attempting to analyse the processes of interaction between different cultures and civilisations, we must first understand that:

Human life is a process of constant hybridization: genetic hybridization, social hybridization, ethnical hybridization, and linguistic hybridization. Genes, classes, people, and words flow in all directions, meet in every location and cross-breed on every occasion (Heurtebise 2015: 105).

According to the theorist, for certain reasons, this understanding of hybridisation has been suppressed and marginalised in the tradition of comparative studies:

However, if hybridization is the fact of human life, this fact has always generated an intense sentiment of fear and, consequently, a desire to prevent and forbid or, at least, to isolate and purify the manifold mixtures of hybrids. This desire to split and compartmentalize people and cultures found some 'scientific' support in the methodology of classical 19th century anthropology, influenced by the rise of nationalism and the biased paradigm of Volksgeist (ibid.).

For Heurtebise, relying on cultural stuff to sort out conceptual differences is wrong and misleading: it gets in the way of understanding cross-cultural disagreements and how they might resonate in other cultural settings. Such resonances force us to hypothesise about ways of thinking that are transcultural in nature. If culturalism is the belief that intercultural

differences are stronger, deeper and higher than cultural differences, then transcultural thinking is primarily the idea that intercultural disagreements in different cultures that are seemingly unrelated have certain structural similarities, even if their modes of expression differ.

Heurtebise's goal is to deconstruct sinology as a practice of reifying cultural identities, narrowed down to a set of unique and fixed mental categories ('Western being' and 'Chinese becoming', 'Western logic' and 'Chinese ethics', etc.), and to establish Chinese studies as an archaeology of historical hybridity (analysing the ongoing process of mutual interaction). According to the scholar, hybridity is a concept that can replace the paradigm that unjustifiably dominates cultural studies, according to which each individual is assigned a single, specific cultural identity, supposedly derived from their belonging to a specific nation. Heurtebise assumes that all Chinese and Western thinkers in the past were connected by a common cultural foundation, which they necessarily expressed in their works, and that today the Chinese and the West are connected by the same primary foundation through their native languages. In other words, there is 'Chineseness' or 'Westernness' that all Chinese and Westerners are expected to express or must agree with. However, while being Chinese or European is a fact, the 'Chineseness' or 'Westernness' that we must conform to is a historical and political construct.

Sinologist and Hellenist François Jullien's position that China is a blind spot for is problematic for Heurtebise, because it seems that China and Europe are two sides of the same coin, each reflecting the opposite of the other: as if there were only one coin with two sides, as if there were only one image on each side. As a result, 'viewing China as the opposite of Europe leads one to believe that Europe can be reduced to a single form of thinking and leads to the self-westernization of Europe, which reinforces China's orientation towards itself (which is *l'impense*)' (Heurtebise 2020: 133).

The theorist notes that the contemporary French approach to Chinese philosophy and its studies was primarily determined by Martin Heidegger's ambiguous position on Western metaphysics. It is this German philosopher who opens up two paths that are not necessarily contradictory: either we assert that philosophy is exclusively Western/European and accept the consequences, or we believe that China offers a valid alternative to the Western metaphysical project. In his opinion, Gilles Deleuze took the first path, while François Jullien took the second. Jullien argues that, on the one hand:

Heidegger stated very clearly that philosophical thought is purely Western thinking about being, asserting that to philosophise is to think about being, and that being is neither a simple word nor a mental epiphenomenon, but a trace of the 'spiritual destiny of the West'. Thus, Heidegger put forward the idea that the uniqueness of Western thought is not just a coincidence, but the result of a process of opposition and separation from the mythical-Asian 'mass' (ibid.: 126). This paradigm of thought holds that 'the great beginning of Western philosophy did not come out of nowhere; it became great because it managed to overcome its greatest antithesis – the mythical in general and the Asian in particular' (ibid.: 126).

Heurtebise believes that Deleuze/Guattari's assertion that the miracle of philosophy was determined by the fractal geography of the Aegean islands, distant from the Persian Empire, and that the model of European development does not stem from science, as Edmund Husserl believed, but from capitalism as an immanent form of generalised equivalence, paradoxically supports a rather 'Eurocentric' position, even though it seems problematic in terms of philosophical consistency with the rest of his work (ibid.: 127). Therefore, in general, it seems that he follows the philosophical Eurocentrism of Immanuel Kant, Johann Gottfried Herder, and Georg

Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. On the other hand, Jullien's philosophical goal was to use Chinese *différance* to overcome the conceptual habits and limitations of classical Western philosophy. Heurtebise notes that in order to implement such an ambitious program, it is necessary to clarify the true reality of China. However, this sinological dream poses the most dangerous pitfalls for Chinese studies, because China is a hybrid reality (Heurtebise 2015: 119). This pushes aside the understanding that the China of the Qin dynasty is not the China of the Qing dynasty, just as northern China is not southern China, or the China of Confucius is not the China of Laozi. Moreover, the China we know is a constant joint creation of Chinese and Western scholars. In this sense, Jullien's vision of China was inspired by Mou Zongsang, who was influenced by Kant, who was influenced by Leibniz, who was influenced by the Jesuit view of China; the latter were influenced by the neo-Confucian scholars of the Ming dynasty, who represented almost the entire Chinese culture with its Daoist, Buddhist and Tocharist components (ibid.: 119–120).

Heurtebise asserts that:

To describe the differences between China (traditional) and Europe (modern), intellectuals, both European and Chinese, often rely on various categorical dichotomies, which they list as follows: 'China = old/past/traditional/spiritual/mental/feudal agrarian/pacifist/family-oriented/emotional/calm/intuitive/pessimistic/fatalistic/obedient; The West = new / present / modern / material / physical / constitutional / industrial / militaristic / individual / legalistic / active / rational / optimistic / creative and progressive / free' (according to the table of categories proposed by Shih 2001: 53). The use of this categorical binary division in an intercultural approach signals an Orientalist type of discourse (if created by 'Westerners') or a Western type of discourse (if created by 'non-Westerners') (Heurtebise 2020: 264).

However, according to the theorist, the perception of cultural differences between China and Europe as a dichotomy between ways of thinking and seeing the world is historically questionable. It is assumed that the so-called 'Chinese' and 'European' cultures lived in isolation from each other and without mutual contact until the 'shock' of religious and military colonialism. But, for example, the arrival of Buddhism in China brought not only a new 'Western' religion from the 'West', but also the 'Indo-European categories of thought' in which the classical Buddhist texts were written (in Sanskrit or Pali). The assimilation of Buddhism was the first cultural hybridisation with non-Chinese culture before the arrival of the Jesuits and the introduction of Western painting, European mathematics, and philosophy in the 16th century. According to Heurtebise, 'All cultures are hybrid in the sense that cultural exchange is not just a binary dialogue between two subjects with their own unique identities; cultural exchange, whether direct or indirect, gradually but irreversibly changes both cultures' (ibid.: 266).

HEURTEBISE'S PERSPECTIVE ON TRANSCULTURAL PHILOSOPHY

Criticising traditional comparative philosophy, Heurtebise draws attention to a non-culturalist approach that is opposed to cultural essentialism. He believes that only by deconstructing 'culture' as a racial, political and narcissistic concept it is possible to achieve a transcultural philosophy that is no longer just one of the branches or trends of philosophy. In one of his conversations, he argues that transculturalism itself should be equated with philosophy, or, in Nietzschean terms, with thinking against oneself. Philosophy is transcultural because the condition for the possibility of thinking is, to recall Nietzsche's concept, 'self-overcoming' (*die Selbstüberwindung*) (Heurtebise: <https://culturezine.ccstw.nccu.edu.tw/interview/2176>). Recalling Deleuze, he says that such thinking is a process in which difference is internal when one distinguishes oneself not only from others, but first and foremost from oneself. Therefore,

for example, Heidegger's concept of the development of Western metaphysics seems to him to be overly culturalistic and essentialist, assuming that European philosophy from Plato to Nietzsche can be reduced to a single narrative. Such a belief seems 'pre-delusional' to him. In *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), Deleuze and Guattari developed the fundamental idea that there is no such thing as a unified European philosophy, because there are two directions: philosophy majeure and philosophy mineure. One can list such major Western philosophers as Plato, Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, René Descartes, Kant, Hegel, Husserl, and others, as well as minor philosophers: Heraclitus, Epicurus, Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and others. According to Heurtebise, what Heidegger calls 'Western metaphysics' applies only to the great European philosophers, whoever they may be. This division into 'great' or 'orthodox' thinkers (Confucius, Han Yu, Zhu Xi, etc.) and 'minor' or heterodox thinkers (Zhuangzi, Huiguo, Wang Fuzhi, etc.) is also noticeable in China. Therefore, instead of contrasting and comparing European and Chinese philosophy as two different entities, Heurtebise's practical and methodological project of transcultural philosophy would compare philosophers along the lines of great/minor transcultural philosophers. This means that we need to understand the 'terrain' in the conceptual map of thought of the philosophers we are comparing from an intercultural perspective, comparing not the philosophers themselves, but their differences. In this sense, transcultural philosophy is a differential method of comparison in the mathematical sense of the term. Therefore, for example, when comparing Plato's philosophy with Zhuangzi, we are comparing not only two different cultures, but also two different ways of being and thinking. Heurtebise emphasises that the big/small dichotomy is in itself rather primitive – it is only the beginning of the investigation, not the end, the aim of which is to break up the supposedly unified block of 'Western metaphysics'. Moreover, it is not similar to differences in ways of thinking: the big/small dichotomy implies a bipolar division, while the concept of ways of thinking is multipolar and still needs to be defined.

When thinking about the relationship between the Western and Chinese worlds, Heurtebise believes it is important to avoid reducing cultural differences and similarities to a logic of civilisational opposition, which is problematic on anthropological (imitation and proximity), historical (sometimes parallel development), cultural (contacts and hybridisation) and geopolitical levels (ibid.: 273). Ultimately, this is required by the latest challenges in the world (e.g. the ecological crisis). In seeking a common response to them, it is necessary to find what is unique and different in each culture, different but not opposed, in other words, universal. This is the belief that one culture (Western or Eastern) has elements that can be universal (ibid.: 281–282).

This leads to the conclusion that if the philosophical limitations of 'oppositional dualism' and 'integrative dualism' in understanding the true dynamics of intercultural relations seem obvious, then this means that the only truly effective methodological system is 'complementary dualism' (ibid.: 273).

According to Heurtebise, 'the goal (*creatur*) of comparative (or rather comparativist) philosophy should be not so much to enable each culture to reclaim its "essence" as to question it and transform it to a certain extent. The goal of transcultural studies is not so much to confirm what we are, but to discover what we can become' (ibid.: 277).

By conducting a historical and critical analysis of cultural interaction and cross-representation between Europe and China, Heurtebise raises the philosophical problem of the nature of cultural relations at the most abstract level, formalising various modalities of ontological dualism that link the heritage of different 'cultural spheres'. The theorist argues that:

Cultural studies and comparative philosophy usually directly or indirectly 'compare' different cultures through writers and/or thinkers belonging to different 'cultural spheres'. Usually, two different authors from 'two' different cultures are compared: Chinese or Indian (or 'Asian') authors and European or American (or 'Western') authors. If intercultural studies involve comparing works from two different cultures, then how 'dualism' itself is defined will have a direct impact on how the principles that guide comparative studies of thinkers, writers, artists, etc. are established (ibid.: 259–260).

Criticising traditional comparative studies, in which China has always been understood in opposition to the West and mostly through the prism of his own experience abroad, Heurtebise concludes:

This perception of cultural differences between China and Europe as a dichotomy between ways of thinking and worldviews is historically questionable. It assumes that the so-called 'Chinese' and 'European' cultures lived in isolation from each other and without mutual contact until the 'shock' of religious and military colonialism. In fact, the arrival of Buddhism in China brought not only a new 'Western' religion from the 'West', but also the 'Indo-European categories of thought' in which the classical Buddhist texts were written (in Sanskrit or Pali). The assimilation of Buddhism was the first cultural hybridisation with non-Chinese culture before the arrival of the Jesuits and the introduction of Western painting, European mathematics, and philosophy in the 16th century (ibid.: 266).

According to the thinker, 'all cultures are hybrid in the sense that cultural exchange is not just a binary dialogue between two subjects with their own unique identities; cultural exchange, whether direct or indirect, gradually but irreversibly changes both cultures' (ibid.). Ultimately, it becomes clear that viewing the East through the prism of Orientalism, adhering to the persistent myth that the West is rational, scientific, masculine and individualistic, while all Eastern thinking is vague, mystical and holistic, means seeing a distorted reality.

CONCLUSIONS

In his historical and critical analysis of cultural interaction and cross-representation between Europe and China, Heurtebise raises the philosophical problem of the nature of cultural relations at the most abstract level, formalising various modalities of ontological dualism that link the heritages of different 'cultural spheres'. His works show that looking at the East through the prism of Orientalism means seeing a distorted reality, which seems to consist of opposing poles: the West is rational, scientific, masculine and individualistic, while the East is intuitive, superstitious, feminine and collective. This perpetuates the myth that all Western philosophy is rigid, analytical, and logically rigorous, while all Eastern thinking is vague, mystical and holistic. According to the theorist, hybridity has not yet been integrated into sinology studies as a necessary methodological paradigm. In order to define the nature of Chinese thinking in relation to Western philosophy, a convenient but epistemologically problematic *modus vivendi* has prevailed, in which both China and the West have created self-reflective narratives.

Heurtebise sets the task of deconstructing sinology as a practice of reifying cultural identities, narrowed down to a set of unique and fixed mental categories ('Western being' and 'Chinese becoming', 'Western logic' and 'Chinese ethics', etc.), and to establish sinology studies as an archaeology of historical hybridity (analysing the ongoing process of mutual interaction). Applying this methodological strategy, historical hybridity appears unchallenged in Jullien's works, and therefore his assertion that China is an absolutely different civilisation also becomes a target of criticism.

According to the scholar, hybridity is a concept that could replace the paradigm that unjustifiably dominates cultural studies, according to which each individual is assigned a single, specific cultural identity, supposedly derived from their belonging to a particular nation. Heurtebise assumes that all Chinese and Western thinkers in the past were connected to a single common cultural foundation, which they necessarily expressed in their works, and that today the Chinese and the West are connected to the same primary foundation through their native languages. In other words, there is a 'Chineseness' or 'Westernness' that all Chinese and Westerners are expected to express or must agree with. Heurtebise's perspective also requires a rethinking of traditional comparative methodology.

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TAUTVYDAS VĖŽELIS

Kultūrinė hibridizacija ir transkultūrinės filosofijos perspektyva Jeano-Yveso Heurtebise'o teorijoje

Santrauka

Straipsnyje siekiama apibrėžti pagrindinius Vakarų ir Rytų civilizacijų skirtumų kvestionavimo bruožus XXI a. transkultūralizme, išskiriant pagrindinius slinkties požymius ir jų santykį su tradicine komparatyvistika. Pagrindinis dėmesys sutelkiamas į Kinijos ir Vakarų civilizacijų mąstymo tradicijų sankirtas. Apžvelgiant Jeano-Yveso Heurtebise'o šios problematikos analizę ir jo mąstymo įžvalgas, siekiama įvardyti esminius slinkties požymius ir skirtumus komparatyvistikos santykyje su transkultūralizmu. Straipsnyje taip pat glaustai aptariamos skirtingos kultūros ir civilizacijos sampratos humanitarikoje, siekiant apibrėžti ir geriau suprasti Kinijos ir Vakarų civilizacijų vaizdinius, žvelgiant iš šio teoretiko perspektyvos.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: dialogas, komparatyvistika, transkultūralizmas, Rytai, Vakarai