

According to a survey conducted at the Institute of Cultural Communication at the East-West Center in Honolulu in 1984, in the five East Asian culture areas Korea, Mainland China, Japan, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, the ranking order of Confucian values has a vibrant presence among common folk. In other words, common people still subscribe to basic Confucian values. According to that very expensive study, the ranking order is as follows:

1. Korea
2. Japan
3. Hong Kong
4. Taiwan
5. China

In fact, this ranking order, in my view, has been preserved for the last thirty years. If we did a survey today, Korea would still come out as the most Confucian. Even though Korea is also highly Christian, it has rich traditions in shamanism and Buddhism. It is certainly pluralistic. And Korea still, in this sense, is pragmatically a Confucian society. Moreover, cultural China, which includes not only Mainland China, but also Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macao, Singapore, and the Chinese diaspora throughout the world, is now going through what we call a cultural regeneration, renaissance, or renewal, which is visible not only at the top—in the leadership or the elite, the most academic, mass media, the business community, and so forth—but also among commoners, people in general. According to one account, there are more than ten million children between the ages of eight and thirteen in Mainland China that can memorize part of the Four Books.

## Spiritual Humanism

### *Personal experience*

To begin, I would like to share my personal experience in what I call the idea of spiritual humanism in the twenty-first century. And I underscore the word and the importance of spiritual. I've been developing this idea, together with an increasing

number of colleagues, for more than a decade—since my participation in the UN after I was appointed by Kofi Annan in 2001 for the Group of Eminent Persons to facilitate the year of the dialogue among civilizations. The effort, of course, continued to 2004, when I was privileged to present my ideas on inter-civilizational dialogue at the special session of UNESCO's Executive Committee or Executive Board in Paris by invitation from Ambassador Wrede of Germany at the time as well as Secretary-General Matsuura. I enjoyed a very stimulating and thought-provoking conversation with fifty-eight ambassadors starting at ten o'clock in the morning and lasting until about one and continuing with lunch. Last year, I gave a talk at the annual summit of the Alliance of Civilizations in Vienna. I was very much encouraged that the Alliance, which was a collaboration of Spain and Turkey, is furthering this vision of cultural diversity and shared common values for the human community in the twenty-first century.

### *An age of crises*

We are in an age of crises. According to one account, the viability of the human species is in question. Among many other difficult issues, we have to face international disorder, financial crises, the distribution of wealth, increasing violence (not only done by states and by groups but even sometimes by isolated individuals). We are facing a situation in which even just one person with the mobilization of various kinds of high technology can destroy a community. This is a very dangerous situation, and it is not just happening in Syria; it is also happening in Norway and many other countries, including the United States. So I am very grateful to Samuel Lee for offering this rather rare opportunity to share my ideas with colleagues who have devoted decades to the safeguarding—which I will interpret as preservation, maintenance, innovation, renewal, and certainly creativity—of intangible cultural heritage around the world, not only in exterior civilizations, but especially in indigenous regions.

Today, I share a highly condensed version of the idea of spiritual humanism, which requires not only individual efforts but also group efforts to be implemented.

## The Enlightenment

Arguably, the most influential ideology in human history is the Enlightenment

mentality of the West, which began in the eighteenth century and continues with force today. It is still very powerful. I am talking about great Enlightenment figures, such as Voltaire, Diderot, and so forth from France. Of course, before Enlightenment came pre-Enlightenment, with figures such as Leibniz, Wolfe, and Kant from Germany. Then we have the Scottish enlightenment thinkers, such as David Hume and Adam Smith, and of course, some major figures in America later. The reason I say it is the most powerful ideology in human history is that out this mentality grew both capitalism and socialism, not to mention liberalism, anarchism, communism, and so forth. In fact, these major ideologies have shaped not only human communities but also institutions, the market economy, democratic politics, civil society, multinational corporations, research universities, civil and military democracies. All of these are a part of the Enlightenment, which has never happened in pre-modern societies; these are part of the modern world.

### *Negative Outcomes*

It is important to note that over the last half century, some of the most brilliant minds in the West—North America and Europe—probably responded to the negative consequences of the Enlightenment mentality. What are these negative consequences?

- Very aggressive ethnocentrism—the human as the center of all things.
- Instrumental rationality—rationality applied not for communication, but as an instrument to control the world, manifested through imperialism, for example.

There is a Faustian drive not only to know and to appreciate but also to dominate and conquer. A teacher-friend of mine who recently passed away used the term possessive individualism. Rather than individualism focused on the identity of a person, possessive individualism is blatantly expressed by some of the most powerful financial whizzes, multinational corporate CEOs. They can never have enough. They have billions and billions of dollars, yet they are still extremely aggressive, possessive, and, of course, devastating to the hope for human coexistence.

### *Positive Outcomes*

One of the most important intellectual and spiritual developments in the last fifty years turned out to be feminism. In North America and Western Europe, some very profound and meaningful reflections on the human condition are discussed by scholars of feminism. Without a feminist revolution, it is very difficult to imagine the world today not only in terms of inter-human relationships but also in terms of power, in terms of governance, in terms of education, and so forth. Feminism is one of the great liberating traditions of the last fifty years.

Ecological consciousness and wellness is another concept that has also become extremely important.

### *Cultural Diversity*

I think UNESCO has played a critical role in underscoring the importance of cultural diversity. The idea of multiculturalism, which is expected in America, is considered a curse by some neoclassical economists and in conservative religious views. But multiculturalism is a force of the world. The world is becoming diversified; it is not going to be controlled by only one or two or even three ideologies. We are moving away from this bipolar world. Some people talk about a tripod as the right way to view the problem: North America, European Union, East Asia. But is India going to wait for the tripod to be in control? How about Turkey, Indonesia? How about Brazil? How about countries in Africa? All these societies are flourishing. And because they are flourishing, cultural diversity and religious pluralism need to be recognized not just as ideas but as facts of life.

### *Dialogical World vs. Conflictual World*

I would like to offer spiritual humanism as a sympathetic understanding and critical examination of Enlightenment mentality, as a philosophical resource for addressing some of the critical issues that we face.

For a while, a colleague of mine promoted the notion of classless civilizations and had a great deal of popularity. Although conflict and tension will always be present,

world views and mentalities are moving away from conflict. An increasingly large group is putting more emphasis on communication, on negotiation, on collaboration, on mutuality. The dialogical mode—rather than the conflictual mode—is the wave of the future.

Part of the reason we fail to transform our civilizations into dialogical civilizations and allow conflictual situations to continue is that survivability of human community is highly doubtful. For our own survival to be flourishing, we need to understand the world in terms of globalization rather than simply in terms of homogenization. It is true that economic globalization enhances homogenization. Around the world, airports all have common features. Convention halls, universities, and any structure related to tourism and entertainment are highly homogenized. Yet cultural globalization is spreading very fast around the world. Originally, it was just assumed that cultural globalization, like economic globalization, would go through this homogenization process.

### *Language*

Someone once told me that he believed that fifty or sixty years from now, there would be just one language that mattered. After a visit to China, he thought perhaps two. With the idea of homogenization, there was an obsession to have only one or two languages; yet despite this, despite the fact that dozens of languages disappear each year, and despite faulty notions about the power of English, linguistic diversity continues. After my colleague's work on classless civilizations, he became obsessed with the problem of American cultural identity, with the question "who are we?" He is deeply worried—and he is not alone—about the status of English in America because more than 50 percent of Californians now speak Spanish as their native tongue. And that may also be true for people in New Mexico, in Florida, and in Texas. So this whole question about language diversity varies depending on the point of view. From the point of view of cultural diversity, from the point of view of cultural globalization, and from my own philosophical tradition, all the forces that shape a person into a concrete living person continue to be powerful and important for human survival and promotion. Thus cultural diversity includes: race, ethnicity, gender—which is why the feminist movement is so powerful—and language. Eighty percent of Chinese people speak

Mandarin, but millions and millions of people are very much attached to their native tongue. In Taiwan, nationalists tried to impose Mandarin as the only language worth using and prohibited high school kids from speaking their native tongue, which people now do as a rebellion. Even among major officials, Hokkien is spoken deliberately against Mandarin. So language is not something that we can oppress. Singapore has recognized that as well.

### *Age culture*

In the fifties and sixties, we began to realize that there is something called "youth culture." Because demographics have changed, young people no longer learn from their fathers and grandfathers nor from their teachers; they learn about themselves; they learn from mass media. They have their own culture, their own entertainment, their own orientation. We have to recognize the importance of age culture, and of course, of place of birth, the question of spiritual reality, and also class, the different social strata, not to mention the importance of religion, which means your basic value orientation. All these factors are important. This is the reason why intangible cultural heritage is so great, why we need to learn from indigenous people because they manage to coexist with their mind for more than millennia, ever since the Neolithic period. They managed to do that, and modern people fail. There is a great deal we need to learn. We need to recover humanity.

### *Core Values*

The universal core values that we should all embrace include freedom, rationality, human rights, equality, legality—which means due process for all—and dignity of the individual. All these values happen to have emerged from the Enlightenment mentality, all because of modernization, early westernization, and globalization. Unfortunately, if you put all of them together, it is not enough for human survival—let alone human flourishing. In addition to freedom, you need justice. That is why the Islamic world is angry with the West. In addition to rationality, especially international rationality, we need sympathy; we need empathy; we need compassion. In addition to human rights, we need human responsibility, human duty, and duty consciousness. In addition to

equality, we need to appreciate differentiation, differences. In addition to legality, we need to focus on civility. And of course, in addition to dignity of the individual, we have the question of social harmony.

For two thousand years, the Confucian tradition has evolved, starting with Confucius and then with masters like his grandson—Tzu-ssu—Mencius, and Dong Zhongshu of the Han dynasty. Over hundreds of years, they developed five core values, the five constant virtues. (First, in honor of the place where we are meeting, Gwangju, here is the letter gwang, which means “shining light” or “fire.”) The five core values are:

- *rén* (仁) meaning “humanity”
- *yì* (義) meaning “justice”
- *lǐ* (禮) meaning “civility”
- *zhì* (智) meaning “wisdom”
- *xìn* (信) meaning “trust”

The Enlightenment values emphasize freedom, rationality, human rights, equality, legality, and dignity of the individual. These are great values each one of us embraces as universal values. Confucian values are also universal values—humanity, justice, civility, wisdom—not just data, information, knowledge, but practical wisdom—and, of course, trust. These are not Asian values as opposed to universal values; they are universal values deeply rooted in East Asia, just like the universal values that are deeply rooted in the Enlightenment. Dialogue is absolutely necessary.

I’ve been lecturing in America for a long time, and students at leading universities all believe that humanity is an important American value—benevolence, righteousness, justice, not to mention civility, wisdom, and trust.

I asked my students to choose between freedom and justice, rationality and empathy, rights and responsibility, legality and civility, and dignity of the individual and social harmony. Twenty years ago, an overwhelming majority of the students at Harvard—about five hundred undergraduate students of all levels and from different disciplines—chose freedom, rationality, human rights, equality, and dignity of the individual. Three years ago, before I left, I asked again. That time, justice was just as important as freedom, sometimes even more. If you look at gender differences, more women chose

sympathy over rationality. Human rights still dominated, but human responsibility is coming up very quickly, not to mention civility. America has become a litigious society, so people appreciate civility.

## Conclusion

I’d like to end with the idea of humanity as a way of understanding the human being. We don’t have to define a human being as a rational animal, even though it is liberating—the Greek philosophers tell us. We don’t have to define the human being as a tool user like Karl Marx did, or as a linguistic manipulator. Human beings are holistic. Human beings are emotional, social, political, historical, and aesthetic. The six Confucian classics show us this. *The Book of Poetry* says that human beings are affective and emotional animals. *The Book of Rites* tells us that human beings are social animals. *The Book of Documents* tells us that human beings are political animals. Another book says that we are historical animals, and another says that humans are aesthetic animals. And the Book of Changes says that we are metaphysical animals.

We must think not only with our brains and minds but also with our bodies. I had the great opportunity to serve as the director of the Institute of Culture and Communication at the East-West Center in Honolulu. One of the things that I did was learn from Hawaiian *kahunas*—spiritual leaders. And through them, we managed to have a meeting with some of the most important spiritual leaders of indigenous traditions from a variety of Native American cultures. We asked them to choose a theme they would like to explore. After a few days of careful consultation with elders, they proposed the idea of ancestry, which implies a sense of continuity, a sense of participation.

We are now entering an age of dialogue among civilizations, but there are two central dialogues that we have to conduct for our mission. One is the dialogue between religion and science, which means the two great traditions of the West, the Greek and the Judaic, will have to come together at some point. In the light of all spiritual traditions outside of the West—in China, in India, in many other cultures with indigenous traditions—we must think, reflect, rationalize, and feel and embody. These are not separate; they are part of the human community. The idea of “I think,

therefore I am” is totally outmoded. Descartes is a great philosopher, but it is totally outmoded. We think with our body. We want to understand the world here now, not as a secular world but as a sacred domain. Anything we do in the privacy of our home is socially, politically, and even metaphysically significant. So I propose that we may be philosophically beginning to think about the idea I proposed, which means embodied thinking, embodied knowledge. The word rén, as people who study Chinese know, means “humanity,” and the characters stand for “person” and “two.” The recent discovery of the Guodian material in 1993 gives us a good example that can be extremely stimulating. The character rén is not written as a “human” and “two,” but as the body on top and heart and mind at the bottom—this is humanity.

So these four dimensions I mentioned—how to integrate heart and mind and soul and spirit; how to interact fruitfully with an increasing number of people, not only family members, but strangers as well; how to establish a sustainable, continuous relationship between the human species and nature; and how to develop a sense of neutrality and mutual responsiveness between human heart and mind and the way of heaven—are important for the development of a humanistic vision, which is abrasive, which is religiously musical, which is not a critique, rejecting everything that the Enlightenment taught us, but which aims to give it a moral sense, a human context.



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**Chapter 1.**  
**What Effects Has the 2003 Convention Had in  
the Asia-Pacific Region?**

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