

Misinterpretation of Chinese Civilization in Huntington's "Clash of Civilizations"

Jiayu Wu*

College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Xi'an Polytechnic University, Xi'an, 710660, China

*Corresponding author. Email: 42007030106@stu.xpu.edu.cn

Abstract. Samuel Huntington's theory of the clash of civilizations has caused extensive as well as profound discussions in academic circles, and its theory is prescient. The theory of the clash of civilizations has been widely spread, but there are also many controversies. In Huntington's exposition, he described the Confucian ideological system as a religious product, which is inconsistent with reality. In China, Confucianism is regarded as a moral principle, such as respecting the old and loving the young. Confucian culture is just a complete philosophical theory, just like Taoism and Legalism. These two are also two important ideas produced at the same time as Confucianism. Secondly, under the background of China's multi-ethnic history, it is natural that many people of different nationalities live together in China, and naturally, they also have different beliefs. Huntington believes that Chinese culture is centered on the Han people, but in fact, Chinese culture is the product of national integration, and the cultures of all ethnic groups are included in it, not just the culture of the Han people. Finally, regarding China's rise, China has no history of hegemony, and "harmony" is the core of the Chinese nation. The concern of western countries about China's rise is that the West brings itself into China's role by predicting all the menace, not China's ideas. The theory of civilization conflict affords a viewpoint to apprehend the world political order and human culture. In the hope of a compatible human world, precautions should be taken for the potential conflicts, and the Chinese civilization should not be viewed as a menace but as a solution.

Keywords: Chinese civilization, the Clash of Civilization, Confusion, Misinterpretation.

1. Introduction

It has been two years since the outbreak of COVID-19, and the whole world has suffered from it. As two superpowers, the United States and China have also been seriously affected. The clash of civilizations is what the United States and Western forces fear most. This study mainly discusses Huntington's misunderstanding of Confucianism in the theory of civilization conflict; misunderstandings of religious nationalities in Chinese history; and the misunderstanding of China's rise and China's international status. At the same time, this study also discusses the thinking and value that Huntington's viewpoint still brings to people.

2. Misinterpretation Of Confucianism

Confucianism is a philosophical concept, not religion. It is a value of traditional culture and the concept of life. Confucianism is not a religion. Its core changes from time to generation, not absolute, coercive, or inflammatory. In Fu Pei-Jung 's *Philosophy Class: Pre-Qin Confucian Philosophy*, in the first lecture of this book, Professor Fu Pei-Jung pointed out that the concept of Confucianism was interpreted as religion because the two attitudes of Confucianism as philosophy and Confucianism as religion would lead to different understandings of Confucianism. The religionization of Confucianism is a very bad tendency, which will lead people to give up their thinking and replace rationality with fanaticism [1].

It was the early Western missionaries who first called Confucianism a religious thing. Because the doctrine of Confucius was deeply rooted in the hearts of the people in China, which seriously affected the missionary undertaking. They regard Confucianism as the biggest opponent of their missionary cause, so Confucianism is considered a religion. This gave rise to the later "Chinese etiquette dispute". The missionaries translated a large number of ancient Chinese classics at that time.

After the translations arrived in Europe, the concept of Confucianism as a religion was also accepted by some European scholars. Later, these ideas in Europe were exported back to China. Under the trend of overall westernization, it seems to have become the religion--Confucianism.

Due to the needs of different dynasties, China has integrated Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. Chinese people regard it as a tradition rather than dogma and canon. More importantly, no matter what the real balance of different cultural and religious identities is in contemporary China, they have only marginal influence in Chinese politics.

In Huntington's book, an Islamic civilization association and the China Alliance threaten the global position of the West and break the interests and global domination of the West. In the process, China will continue to expand the spread of Confucianism and replace the West [2]. Contrary to Huntington's perception, Here, Confucianism is forced to become another religious concept equivalent to Islam, which is a powerful concept that can compete with Western civilization. This is a misunderstanding of Confucianism. For example, one of the Confucian ideas is filial piety, respect for the elderly, and attaching importance to family relations. Confucianism never contains the content of conquering other nations or countries. Confucius' disciple Zengzi wrote in the book the Great Learning "Only the people who first rectified their hearts, then first cultivated their persons; who know how to regulate their families, then they ruled the states well. Finally, they know how to illustrate illustrious virtue throughout the kingdom" [3].

Due to China's cultural and religious diversity, the Chinese government does not regard Confucianism as the most important moral code. Since this century, the Chinese government has paid more attention to the core values of socialism, a total of 24 words, which are accurate and not ambiguous. Although Confucianism can certainly promote the traditional ideas of nationalism and patriotism, just like everything, Confucianism is not perfect, and Confucianism is not perfectly in line with the culture and customs of all ethnic groups in China [4]. The Confucian concept is to urge people to love the country and the world from the individual to the family to the country and from small to large.

Confucianism requires continuous and cautious self-control to maintain the human dignity of the world; Puritan ethics requires such self-control to systematically unite people's will. Confucian ethics deliberately puts people in their relationships, whether naturally generated or caused by social superiority and inferiority. Confucianism only sanctifies the obedient obligations of human beings arising from interpersonal relationships, such as monarchs and ministers, upper and lower, father and son, brothers, teachers and students, and friends [5]. From the connotation of Confucianism to its development to its core, Confucianism is rational thinking and a summary of experience. Confucius is a man with rich philosophical thoughts. More importantly, he was a living person in the world, not a God. As a Chinese native philosophy, Confucianism is critical, the crystallization of wisdom and the product of harmony. There is no aggressive factor at the core of Confucianism.

3. Misinterpretation Of Chinese History And The Current Situation Of Ethnicity And Religion

The core of Chinese civilization is harmony. China has not colonized any country since ancient times. It is the Chinese people who have adhered to Confucianism for thousands of years and put peace first. China has been a country with multiple ethnicities since ancient times, especially now. Chinese people respect and tolerate different beliefs. Nowadays, you can see Taoism, temples, Catholic churches, and Christian churches built in a village. Different beliefs do not bring narrow ideas to the Chinese people but make different ethnic groups more harmonious.

China has been a multi-ethnic country as early as the Zhou Dynasty which is more than 3,000 years ago, Dongyi, Huaiyi, Jingman, Guifang, Huron, Sushen, and other ethnic groups lived on Chinese land together. During the Spring -Autumn Period (770 BC to 476 BC), there were Yi, Rong, Baipu, Donghu, Linhu, Yu, Soufan, Baiyue, Xiongnu, and other ethnic groups. During the Qin and Han Dynasties (221 BC to 220 AD), there were Yue people, Xiongnu, Qiang, Wuhuan, and

Xianbei, as well as ethnic groups in the Western Regions and Southwest China. Most of the ethnic groups in the Sui, Tang, and later dynasties were formed by the development, evolution, integration, and reorganization of ancient ethnic groups. It is a recognized objective historical fact that many ethnic minorities and Han people lived together in the land of the motherland in various historical periods.

Diversified nationalities will naturally bring diversified religious beliefs, and Chinese people of different nationalities in different regions will have different traditional customs and living habits. This is the result of historical development and a tradition that the Chinese people have long been accustomed to. It is also the source of “harmony” and an important reason for the harmonious coexistence of various cultures.

Moreover, there are mainly five religions in China, and their power is balanced. They are Buddhism, Taoism, Catholicism, Christianity (Protestantism), and Islam. The moment Huntington paid attention to China’s rapid growing economy as an outcome of reform and open [6], Huntington did not realize that while discussing China’s multi-ethnic issue, China’s deepening reform and opening up have led to the continuous improvement of China’s economic level. The political mobilization of cultural and religious identity has inevitably been marginalized because people in different regions have gained rich benefits in the process of capital expansion and returned to their regions. No matter which ethnic group, everyone voluntarily came to the Pearl River Delta region and the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region to look for business opportunities. It is in their sole interest to maintain a relatively stable social environment, regardless of their identity background, to ensure a safe environment in which people make more profits [6]. The migration of people has also doubled during this period. There is no passive relationship between different ethnic and religious beliefs and economic prosperity. Generally speaking, economic development has brought the premise and foundation for people of all ethnic groups to live in harmony. China’s economic prosperity has enabled the people of all ethnic groups to flourish.

On the contrary, in some immigrant countries, the reason for the intense conflicts between different races is the inequality of social resources. In the final analysis, it is the conflict of interests rather than the conflict of civilization. The low level of the economy will naturally lead to racial or ethnic conflicts [7, 8].

In Huntington’s vision, China will have conflicts with Russia in the future, Russia will join NATO, and the United States will promote Tibetans, Mongolians, and Uighurs to oppose Chinese rule [2]. China’s ethnic minority groups, especially those who accept it as true in Islam, are now not only merchandise at the country-wide level, nor are they simply the political pastimes of the nation or “minorities”. From its inside analysis, it ought to be the interplay between the Muslim country and social politics. In such an environment, the two facets continue to talk and negotiate. Up to now, a symbiotic reciprocal relationship has been formed, which can be considered a proper relationship between civilizations alternatively than violence [9]. For Huntington, a culture defined the fault lines along which civilizations are bound to conflict in the post-cold war world [10]; for Bakhtin, culture and all aspects of identity are relational, defined, and re-defined in interaction with an “Other” in a contingent social sphere [11].

In emphasizing his point of view, Huntington believes that Chinese civilization and Islamic civilization have an immeasurable danger to the West because there is a chasm between the two and the Western civilization.

However, Arabs, Chinese, and Westerners are now not section of any broader cultural entity. They constitute civilization. Therefore, civilization is the highest cultural group. European communities will share their unique cultural traits with Arab or Chinese communities. The broadest level of cultural identity is defined by way of people’s subjective self-identification and frequent objective factors (such as language, history, religion, customs, and system) [10]. In Dr. C. Gladney’s research, he studied the ethnic minorities who believed in Islam and found that the same religion not only brings a sense of identity but also conflicts with different ethnic groups. He found that Kazakhs in Almaty clashed with Uighurs and Hui in Xinjiang due to different interests and goals. Even if these three

ethnic groups are Muslims, there will be conflicts within them, and the most fundamental reason for contradictions is not identity or culture, but conflicts of interests. Different ethnic groups and religions have long learned symbiosis rather than assimilation in the millennium. The “clash of civilizations” tends to be internal contradictions because of the adjustment of places of residence and settlements [9].

Therefore, in the separation of the two “cultures” in China, that is, the Muslim minority and the Han people, Huntington’s view of culture and civilization is misguided, and it is not helpful to understand the cultural nationalism and ethnic conflicts in the modern world.

Another example is Lu Jinpeng and Zhao Xia discussing the order of civilization along the fault line of the Han, Hui, and Tibetan ethnic corridors in Gansu Province. It is pointed out that Lanzhou, with Confucian civilization as the core, Linxia, characterized by Islamic civilization, and Gannan, represented by Tibetan Buddhist civilization, is the fault zones of civilization. The Han, Hui, and Tibetan people live and live together. The closed geographical structure has shaped the inward-looking psychological structure of each ethnic group, and the frequent commercial trade and social interaction have enhanced the understanding of the ethnic groups and reduced the conflict. The inheritance of history and the diffusion of culture promote the organic integration of the three major civilizations [11]

Huntington ignored the richness of the Chinese civilization, the inclusiveness of multi-ethnic and multi-religious beliefs in Chinese history, and the contradictions within a civilization or religion. Therefore, the conflict between the Chinese civilization and the Western civilization is predicted to be more exaggerated, which will be discussed in detail in the next part.

4. Misunderstanding Of China’S Rise And China’S Role In The World

Huntington referred to President Jiang Zemin’s position in 1995 that “China will not ally with any country”. This is a national policy that China will firmly adhere to now and in the future after reform and opening up since the 1980s. Huntington is aware of China’s position, and China has never violated such a position in more than 30 years. Huang Wanyi believes that Chinese civilization has the characteristics of pluralism in both development and ideological kernel, which will not only not cause a clash of civilizations, but also eliminate the clash of civilizations. First of all, the pluralistic integration of the creation of Chinese civilization. Six original civilizations, which originated in the middle reaches of the Yellow River, the lower reaches of the Yellow River, Jiangnan District, the Yangtze River Delta District, Ganyue District, and Longdong Fortress Outer District, have gradually converged into Chinese civilization. Secondly, the pluralistic integration of the core of the thought of Chinese civilization. The development of Chinese civilization integrates many cultures, including Confucianism, Taoism, Mo, Dharma, soldiers, and Yin and Yang in the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period, the complementarity of Confucianism and Taoism in the Qin and Han Dynasties, and the integration of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism in the Sui and Tang Dynasties. Therefore, Chinese civilization is completely different from Western civilization. It has the characteristics of tolerance and the pursuit of harmony, which is conducive to resolving the crisis of Western civilization [12].

In 2005, President Hu Jintao delivered a speech which putting forward the political proposition of “harmonious world” for the first time. He stressed that mankind should establish a world ruled by law. Countries, regions, and groups should not be forced by force and coexist peacefully; Economically, countries, regions, and groups should achieve win-win and common prosperity. China’s development should be shared with the world’s development; Culturally, countries with different civilizations should follow the principle of a “harmonious world” to strengthen dialogue, seek common ground while reserving differences, learn from each other, and respect the diversity of civilizations. The idea of a “harmonious world” is China’s indirect response to Huntington’s worry about China in the “Clash of Civilizations”.

President Xi has always emphasized the “community with a shared future for mankind”, rather than taking China out as a special and higher existence.

This way of doing things in China has also been proven in history. In the Ming Dynasty, Zheng He, a minister, went to the west to give gifts to the countries he passed by, and then left peacefully, instead of taking the form of western colonists to occupy other nations' lands “Datong” in Chinese civilization means “the world is public”, and “public” refers to the people; it also refers to the ideal world that human beings can finally achieve, representing the beautiful vision of human beings for the future society. The basic characteristics are that people get along with each other, love and help each other, the family lives and works in peace and contentment, and there is no war. Although “Datong” Thought is Chinese Thought, the thought of Western utopia and the modern global village is also very similar to that of “Datong” in many places [14].

In 1922, after Russell visited China, he wrote the Problem of China, including the following paragraph:

The exchanges among civilizations have proved to be a milestone in the development of human civilization many times in the past. Greece learns Egypt, Rome learns from Greece, Arabia refers to the Roman Empire, medieval Europe imitates Arabia, and Renaissance Europe imitates the Byzantine Empire [15]. Conflicts between different cultures are always temporary integration and exchanges between cultures, which is the real “paradigm” between civilizations.

Confucius said that “harmony is the most important thing for the use of Rites”. “Harmony is the most precious” is a traditional Chinese thought. The “harmony” in different fonts in the performance of the opening ceremony of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games shows the world China's attitude towards world politics after its rise. After thousands of years of inheritance, the Chinese civilization has achieved a great renaissance. For other civilizations, it is not destructive but constructive. China has always advocated and practiced the principle of peaceful coexistence, which will greatly promote the harmonious development of world civilization [16].

Historically, it attaches great importance to unification and does not advocate expansion. China adheres to an independent foreign policy of peace, does not ally with any country or group of countries, does not participate in any military bloc, opposes any form of power politics, hegemonism, and aggression, and promises never to seek hegemony.

5. Conclusion

Professor Huntington's theory of civil conflict has an undeniable impact on the culture, religion, and nation in the world. His view took shape in the post-Cold War era and has an important role in the present nearly 30 years later.

This paper mainly discusses the misunderstanding of Confucianism, Chinese history, ethnic groups and religion, as well as China's status in the Clash of Civilizations, to eliminate the misunderstanding between China and the West and achieve common development. Confucianism is a philosophical thought, the crystallization of the wisdom of Confucius and his descendants, and the result of rationality. Its connotation is “harmony”. The Confucianists attach importance to the family concept, respect the old and love the young, and support order, not religious belief. The Confucianists attach importance to the present world and encourage people to love life and respect each other. Due to its vast territory, China has been unified since the Qin Dynasty, and all ethnic groups live in compact communities. The Hui nationality is the product of the friendly coexistence of all ethnic groups. In this process, cultural exchanges have greatly increased and cultural diversity has been encouraged. In terms of China's position in the world, the first two points are also related. The Confucian idea of valuing peace has influenced China's adherence to the principle of peace, and the history of multi-ethnic development has also enabled China to understand the different civilizations brought by different religions. In 1955 Premier Zhou Enlai proposed and adhered to the principle of seeking common ground while reserving differences, which is still the pursuit for China now.

In Huntington's argument, China strives to improve its status to become the first on the earth, and then threatens the United States and other countries. This is unrealistic. COVID-19 could be taken as an example. This virus war has not been treated differently because you are a developed country, a developing country, or a backward country. This kind of crisis is global. Only when all countries unite and take effective measures can they save their citizens. Just like the development of the world, development will inevitably bring competition, and competition will bring new technology, technology, and knowledge. No one will win forever. Competition is an inevitable means to bring about development rather than the ultimate goal. Benign competition is always stronger than the vicious competition.

Huntington mentioned that one way to balance and contain China with a balance is the US-Japan military alliance, and the other way to contain Islam is the joint alliance between China and the US camp. In his view, it seems that the best way to solve the contradiction is through military means, and violent conflict. However, facts have proved that the power of culture is infinite at this stage. Most countries want to have a peaceful international environment to develop their comprehensive economic strength. War is the last choice.

China needs to make prudent choices. China's choice should be based on ideals and reality, that is, the goal to achieve is consistent with the national identity. Chinese civilization is a very unique civilization. On the one hand, it lacks strong transcendence value and does not have monotheism, so it will not have extreme conflicts with other civilizations; on the other hand, it has internal transcendence, which is enough to form China's own identity and inner centrist and form peace with other civilizations.

Different nations and countries should achieve a certain consensus in dialogue (negotiation) and discussion through cultural exchanges and dialogue, which is a process from "difference" to "mutual" identification in a certain sense. This mutual identification is not the elimination of one side or the assimilation of one side. It is to find the intersection between two different cultures and boost the advancement of both cultures on this common view. This is the duty of harmony. Among them, Habermas, a German thinker, put forward the concept of justice and unity [17].

Through dialogue and exchanges, the Chinese can always form a virtuous circle of interaction between different ethnic cultures. The principles of justice and solidarity should be based on the recognition of the principle of "harmonious but different". In this way, nations and countries with different cultural traditions can obtain equal rights and obligations. The Confucian Principle of "harmonious but different" should become a basic principle in dealing with different cultures. Today's human society desires special cultures to improve the traits of different cultural traditions through mutual absorption and integration, to achieve "cultural coexistence" on a new phase.

References

- [1] Fu Pei-Jung, *Fu Pei-Jung's Philosophy Class: Pre-Qin Confucian Philosophy*, Beijing United Publishing Co.Ltd, Lecture 1, 2018.
- [2] S. P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, Simon& Schuster, 1996.
- [3] Zengzi, *the Great Learning, Daisheng, the Book of Rites*, Southeast University Press, 2017.
- [4] Zheng Y, *Discovering Chinese Nationalism in China: Modernization, Identity, and International Relations*, Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- [5] M. Weber, *Confucianism and Taoism*, Shaanxi Normal University Publishing Co. Ltd, 2010, pp.265-266.
- [6] Chen L., *How Inevitable Is A "Clash of Civilizations"?* *Journal of Cambridge Studies*, 5, 104, 2010, <https://doi.org/10.17863/CAM.1362>
- [7] American Psychological Association, *Ethnic and Racial Minorities &Socioeconomic Status*, Date created: July 2017, Retrieved on August 26, 2022, <https://www.apa.org/pi/ses/resources/publications/minorities>.
- [8] D.R. Williams, N. Priest, N.B. Anderson, *Understanding Associations Among Race, Socioeconomic Status, And Health: Patterns And Prospects*, *Health Psychol*, 2016.

- [9] D. C. Gladney, A Dialogue of Civilizations? Relational Ethnicity and Islam in China, *Al-Mesbar's* 105th monthly book, Date created: March 12, 2018 in featured, Retrieved on August 26, 2022, <https://mesbar.org/a-dialogue-of-civilizations-relational-ethnicity-and-islam-in-china>.
- [10] S. P. Huntington, The Clash of Civilizations? in: *Foreign Affairs*, 1993, 72.3, pp.22-49.
- [11] M. M. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Edited and Translated by Caryl Emerson. Russian edition, University of Minnesota Press, 1984.
- [12] Lu J, Zhao X, The order of civilization in the Han Dynasty, Hui, Tibetan Corridor and Fault Line: Reflection on Huntington's "Clash of Civilizations", *Postgraduate Journal of Huazhong Normal University*, 2013.
- [13] Huang W, Theoretical origin and ideological limitations of "Clash of Civilizations", *Journal of Shanxi Normal University: Social Science Edition*, 2012.
- [14] Lo Jung-pang, "Zheng He", *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1 Jan. 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Zheng-He>. Accessed 26 August 2022.
- [15] Chen D., Hu J., No, There Is No US-China "Clash of Civilizations", Date created: May 08, 2019, Retrieved on August 26, 2022. Retrieved from: <https://thediplomat.com/2019/05/no-there-is-no-us-china-clash-of-civilizations>.
- [16] R. Bertrand, 1922, *The Problem of China*, Retrieved August 26 2022 <http://books.google.com/books?id=7fhwAAAAMAAJ>.
- [17] Han Y, Brief discussion on Chinese civilization in the theory of clash of civilizations, *Rule of Law and Society*, 2014.
- [18] H. BRUNKHORST, R. KREIDE, & C. LAFONT (Eds.), 2018. *The Habermas Handbook*. Columbia University Press. <https://doi.org/10.7312/brun16642>.