



# On the Blending of Eastern and Western Cultures from Religion, Trade and Popular Culture – Take China, Japan, Countries in Southeast Asia as Examples

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**Abstract.** With the advent of the Age of Discovery, cultural, economic, and intellectual exchanges between the East and West experienced their first peak, during which the fusion of East and West cultures was based on economic exchange and commercial interaction.

The Age of Exploration also brought about the exchange of knowledge and technology between different cultures. The Portuguese and Spanish brought back knowledge of new plants and animals, which were then studied and cultivated in Europe. The Chinese introduced the printing press to Europe, which revolutionized the way books were produced and disseminated.

we can conclude that from the Age of Discovery to the Millennium, there have been many waves of cultural exchanges between the East and the West, and the positive effects are mainly to promote the dissemination of knowledge and technology, the development of science and art, the rise of the nation-state and international relations, the diversity and inclusiveness of values, and the process of globalization.

**Keywords:** Cultural exchange; Age of Discovery; cultural industries; Japanese ACG culture.

## 1 Introduction

Cultural exchange has been an important research topic for both East and West scholars since the Age of Exploration, but I have found that most scholars in this field tend to focus on the Middle Ages and the Age of Exploration in their studies. Therefore, I intend to approach this topic from a new angle, starting from the Age of Exploration as the axis of time, and discuss how the cultural exchange between East and West was influenced by the fusion of cultures during the Age of Exploration, and then discuss the new impacts and achievements of cultural exchange in the post-WWII new era and the post-Cold War new millennium.

## 2 Age of Discovery

With the advent of the Age of Discovery, cultural, economic, and intellectual exchanges between the East and West experienced their first peak, during which the fusion of East and West cultures was based on economic exchange and commercial interaction. The cultural transmission from the East to the West included Chinese Taoist culture carried by tea culture, Indian Hindu culture carried by spice culture, and Buddhist cultures of Southeast Asian countries. Among the well-known goods were Chinese black tea, pu'er tea, Indian cinnamon, cloves, Malaysian turmeric, lemon grass, and banana leaves.

Along with these goods, people from various countries in the East also arrived in Europe. During this period, the fusion was a gradual and in-depth exploration of the commercial integration between the East and West.

While the rapid fusion of Chinese and Western styles in architecture, the same characteristics were reflected in the painting techniques and types of crafts of this period.

In "Why does Chinese watercolor painting reflect the fusion of Eastern and Western art?" —Interview with Ye Wu, Associate Professor of the School of Architecture, Tianjin University" There is such a dialogue, which records Associate Professor Ye Wu's views on watercolor painting:

Ye Wu: Watercolor painting is the art of painting that uses water as a medium to reconcile colors, and it is the third major type of painting that distinguishes it from oil painting and Chinese painting. Watercolor art originated in Europe, but it was in England in the 18th century that watercolor really developed into an independent genre, which is called "modern watercolor".

During the Ming and Qing dynasties, under the influence of "Western learning from the East", Western modern watercolor was introduced to China. In the early years of the Republic of China, under the active advocacy and promotion of the famous educator Cai Yuanpei, school education was introduced into the Western teaching system. Watercolor has been gradually popularized as an important means of basic art teaching. Nowadays, the watercolor paintings, which have been transplanted in the land of China for a hundred years, have gradually integrated traditional Chinese aesthetics, local culture and ink artistic conception through the continuous pursuit and creation of Chinese painters, forming a unique Chinese watercolor painting that integrates China and the West<sup>[1]</sup>.

Therefore, the author believes that watercolor painting can be regarded as one of the representative products of the combination of Eastern and Western cultures in the Age of Discovery

For other regions or countries, typical representatives include: the St. Paul's Church in Macau, China in the 16th century; the St. Mary's Cathedral in Nagasaki, Japan; and the St. Paul's Church in Malacca, Malaysia in the 17th century. Hoi An Ancient Town in Vietnam: Hoi An Ancient Town is known for its well-preserved ancient buildings and streets that blend elements from a variety of cultures such as Chinese, Japanese, and European. Chinatown in Singapore: As Singapore's Chinatown, the Chinatown area is rich in Chinese culture and architecture, as well as Malay and other Southeast Asian cultures.

In the Age of Discovery, the cultural fusion of Eastern and Western religions and arts was manifested vividly in China, Japan, and Malaysia, not only in the architectural style but also in the artworks and cultural heritage.

The cultural fusion in the 16th century not only included religion and arts but also involved the exchange of science and knowledge, which was of great significance for promoting scientific and technological progress and understanding and cooperation among different civilizations. The Arab academic tradition in the Middle Ages played an important role by preserving and developing the scientific and philosophical knowledge of ancient Greece, Rome, and India. In the 16th century, European scholars showed great interest in the Arab academic tradition. Through the Age of Exploration, the world was opened up to new trade routes and cultural exchanges. The Portuguese and Spanish were among the first Europeans to venture out into the unknown, seeking new trade routes and riches. They encountered new cultures and lands, and brought back stories of exotic places and peoples.

The Age of Exploration also brought about the exchange of knowledge and technology between different cultures. The Portuguese and Spanish brought back knowledge of new plants and animals, which were then studied and cultivated in Europe. The Chinese introduced the printing press to Europe, which revolutionized the way books were produced and disseminated.

The Age of Exploration had a profound impact on the world, leading to the establishment of new colonies and the spread of new religions. It also led to the exploitation of indigenous peoples, as the Europeans sought to exploit the natural resources and labor of these lands.

Despite the negative impacts of the Age of Exploration, it also brought about many positive changes. It led to the development of new technologies and scientific discoveries, which improved the lives of people around the world. It also helped to create a more interconnected world, as people from different cultures came into contact and shared ideas.

Overall, the Age of Exploration was a time of great change and discovery. This era was an era that greatly promoted the integration of Eastern and Western cultures, and along with the cultural integration was the migration of people from different countries. From the perspective of humanities and anthropology, the author believes that population migration and cultural migration are mutually reinforcing. The Age of Exploration and the Spice Trade in Malacca can be considered as one of the important starting points of globalization. According to the book "The Manila Galleon," by 1965, Manila had a population of 42,000, of which 15,000 were Chinese, 7,000 were Spaniards, and 20,000 were Filipinos. This is enough to prove that in the Age of Discovery, Manila was an important link between Eastern and Western cultures<sup>[2]</sup>.

At the same time, European colonizers left behind many architectural and urban planning heritage sites in Malaysia, such as the Dutch Red House in Malacca and the colonial buildings in Kuala Lumpur. These buildings and urban planning reflect European architectural styles and city layouts, and have had a profound impact on the urban landscape of Malaysia. Therefore, it is undeniable that although European colonizers caused significant impact on the cultural and social structures of various Asian regions,

the Spice Trade and the Age of Exploration played a positive role in globalization and cultural exchange.

Professor Brocki of the Open University of Catalonia, Spain, mentioned in the article "Manila galleons and reflections on globalization" that if only the modern meaning of the concept of globalization is considered, Manila is likely to be the first global city in human history, that is, a city dominated by a mixed culture. Professor Sialsita gave us plenty of examples: the ancestors of Chinese merchants who used Spanish names, the Religious clothing that blended Asian and European trends, the local cuisine that included Chinese and American foods, the Chinese stone lions that guarded the doors of churches, etc. Thus, Manila in 1600 had more people than New York in 1770<sup>[4]</sup>.

### **3 The New Era After World War II is a Blend of Eastern and Western Cultures**

In his article "The Changes and Transformation of the Chinese Community in Malaysia after World War II," Liao Wenhui of Malaysia mentioned that although the ecology and pattern of the Chinese community in Malaysia after World War II were inherited before the war, they underwent adjustments and changes with the development of the economy and politics. Firstly, as one of the three treasures of the Chinese community, organizations remain the core of the community, with the emergence of a large number of educational and cultural organizations reflecting the community's defense and pursuit of education and culture. Secondly, individual single-fight organizations are moving towards cooperation, using collective strength to serve the community. Thirdly, the functions of Chinese organizations have changed from serving South Chinese immigrants to fighting and working for local Chinese communities, with the emergence of the Chinese Federation of Associations as the most representative example. Fourthly, secret societies gradually disappeared and transformed into legitimate organizations. Religion, as always, did not shrink with the progress of society and remained an important element of daily life for Chinese communities. The New Village Plan implemented by the Malaysian government basically broke the original settlement pattern of Chinese communities and changed the mode of gathering and activities of Chinese people. These changes, except for the New Village Plan, are basically slow and gradual adjustments<sup>[3]</sup>.

After World War II, with the end of colonialism and the independence of third-world countries, as well as the anti-war culture and multiculturalism becoming the mainstream, the East-West cultural integration gradually shifted to a form of peaceful coexistence. It was based on the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence proposed by Zhou Enlai, and many countries also issued a series of official documents and policies to support it. The cultural policy documents issued by governments aimed to promote the development and protection of their own cultures. These documents included cultural development plans, cultural industry support policies, cultural heritage protection laws, etc. Documents related to education system reform aimed to balance the education content of their own cultural traditions and Western culture. These documents may include curriculum frameworks, textbook editing guidelines, and educational policy

documents. At the same time, cultural exchange cooperation agreements or treaties were signed between third-world countries and East-West countries. These treaties may include cultural exchange projects, art exchange activities, cultural festivals, exhibitions, etc. For example, the Cultural Exchange Agreement signed with other countries by Malaysia; the Malaysia International Arts Festival, the Malaysia International Film Festival; the Malaysia Cultural Heritage Protection Act, the Malaysia Folk Culture Protection Act;

In China, a Cultural Ambassador Program was launched: some well-known cultural figures were sent as Cultural Ambassadors to represent Chinese culture around the world and promote cultural exchanges between China and other countries. These Cultural Ambassadors may be writers, artists, musicians, or performing artists. At the same time, a Cultural Exchange Fund was established: some cultural exchange funds were set up to support and fund international cultural exchange projects, art performances, etc. With the establishment of a series of international organizations led by the United Nations, a series of documents promoting cultural exchange and protection were issued by international organizations.

For example, the UNESCO's declarations and conventions on the protection of cultural heritage, cultural diversity, and cultural exchange.

These also played a crucial role and facilitated the exchange and integration of East and West in the new era. In summary, the features of cultural exchange and integration between East and West after World War II mainly include the following aspects:

1. Globalized dissemination channels: After World War II, the rapid development of communication technology made information dissemination more convenient, greatly promoting cultural exchange and integration between the East and West. Television, radio, and the internet are important cultural dissemination channels, making it easier for East and West cultures to understand and influence each other.

2. Deepening of Cross-cultural Communication: After World War II, with the improvement of international political relations and the increase in trade, people from East and West exchanged more frequently, leading to a deepening of cross-cultural communication. People cooperated more in areas such as business, academia, and the arts, promoting cultural integration and sharing.

3. Rise of Cultural Industries: Cultural industries experienced rapid growth after World War II, with many internationally influential works and artists emerging in fields such as film, music, and art. Eastern and Western cultural products influenced, learned from, and blended with each other, forming new cultural styles and trends.

4. Influence of Multinational Companies: After World War II, many multinational companies emerged, which not only crossed economic boundaries between East and West, but also exchanged and integrated cultures. These companies spread their cultural values through advertising and brand image, influencing consumer culture globally.

5. Rise of Pluralism: After World War II, people began to place greater emphasis on pluralism and cultural diversity, respecting differences between different cultures and striving for common understanding and consensus. This open-minded attitude promoted exchanges and fusion between Eastern and Western cultures, making the world more diverse and vibrant.

In summary, the features of cultural integration between East and West after World War II mainly include the spread of globalization through communication channels, the deepening of cross-cultural exchanges, the rise of cultural industries, the influence of multinational corporations, and the emergence of pluralism. These features jointly drive the integration and development of East and West cultures on a global scale.

## **4 The New Era of the Millennium is a New Atmosphere of Blending Eastern and Western Cultures**

Since the nineties of the last century, Japanese ACG culture has begun to be widely popular around the world, among which the most influential are the Ultraman series of special effects under the Japanese Tsuburaya company, the comic "One Piece", and the anime "Evangelion" (abbreviation: EVA), which are directly or indirectly influencing the development and style of the American comic industry and the Chinese animation industry.

In "Investigation and study of the current situation and employment of the ACG industry in Japan- Take the Japanese animation industry as an example": "In 2017, the sales volume of the ACG industry in Japan was dominated by TV program sales of 3.6 trillion yen, newspaper sales of 1.4 trillion yen, online game sales of about 1.3 trillion yen, and sales of online and mobile advertisements and magazines of 1.0 trillion yen. It can be seen that the main carrier of Japan's ACG industry is changing from traditional media such as newspapers, television, and magazines to new Internet media. The transformation of media has reduced the cost of ACG cultural dissemination, greatly improved the speed of dissemination and update, and enriched the amount of information and content, which has facilitated the expansion of overseas markets."<sup>[5]</sup>

### **4.1 The Influence on Japanese ACG Culture is Mainly as Follows**

1. Global Cultural Influence: Japan's animation, manga, and game industries have a huge global impact. From Dragon Ball and Saint Seiya to Hayao Miyazaki's Studio Ghibli animated film series, to best-selling manga such as Man☆ Kantaro and Naruto, these titles have a huge fan base around the world.

2. Promoted the development of the global animation industry: The success of Japan's ACG culture has sparked interest and enthusiasm for the animation industry around the world. From Disney and DreamWorks in the United States to online comics in South Korea and domestic animation in China, all countries have begun to pay attention to the development of the animation industry and have launched local works.

3. Cross-cultural influence and integration: In the process of spreading, Japanese ACG culture has continuously absorbed and integrated elements from all over the East and the West. For example, many Japanese anime and games have elements of Western mythology and science fiction, as well as American comics and movies.

4. Promote transnational cooperation and exchanges: The global spread of Japanese ACG culture has promoted transnational cooperation and exchanges. Many animation and game production companies have collaborated across borders to create cross-

cultural productions. At the same time, comic exhibitions and comic exhibitions in various countries have also become platforms for transnational exchanges.

5. Improvement of cultural soft power: As one of Japan's important soft powers, Japan's ACG culture has enhanced Japan's influence on the global cultural stage. It not only increases Japan's international recognition, but also promotes Japan's cultural export and economic development.

As a unique cultural phenomenon, Japanese ACG culture not only has a wide influence on East Asia, but also has a far-reaching influence in the Western world and the world, promoting the exchange, integration and development of Eastern and Western cultures.

In recent years, with the vigorous promotion of the "Belt and Road", China has also played the role of a world ambassador for the spread of oriental culture, and the Belt and Road Initiative has connected Asia, Europe and Africa and other regions, promoting cultural exchanges and interactions between countries and regions along the route. Through activities such as personnel exchanges, cultural exhibitions, and art performances, people from different countries and regions have a deeper understanding of each other's cultures, histories, and traditions. Through cultural exchanges and cultural cooperation, countries along the Belt and Road have enhanced their cultural soft power on the international stage. This kind of soft power is not only good for the country's image and international relations, but also helps to enhance friendly feelings and mutual trust between peoples. Professor Zhang Changan once mentioned in the article "Learning from History, the 'Belt and Road' Cultural Exchange Lasts for a Long Time": Cultural exchange has always been an inevitable requirement for people to realize spiritual civilization. As of the end of 2021, China has signed more than 200 cooperation documents with 145 countries and 32 international organizations, and has achieved fruitful results in economic and trade development. The Belt and Road Initiative has actively practiced its founding purpose, created unlimited development opportunities for countries along the route, continuously improved the development level of countries along the route in finance, science and technology, education, infrastructure construction, etc., and continuously improved the material and cultural living standards of the local people.

At the same time, the "Belt and Road" is a bridge of friendship that builds people-to-people exchanges and cultural appreciation. Cultural exchanges and mutual learning can share human wisdom, enrich people's social production and life, and enhance the sense of gain and happiness of both sides of the exchange. Over the past nine years, the Belt and Road Initiative has adhered to the concept of harmony and diversity, mutual learning and reciprocity, respected the spiritual creation and cultural traditions of the people of countries and regions along the Belt and Road, and held art festivals, film festivals, music festivals, cultural relics exhibitions, book exhibitions and other activities with countries along the Belt and Road, and cooperated in the creation of books, radio, film and television products, as well as mutual translation and broadcasting. As of 2022, the Silk Road International Theater Alliance, Museum Alliance, Art Festival Alliance, Library Alliance, and Art Museum Alliance have been established one after another, and 539 domestic and foreign member units have been developed, covering 92 countries and 2 international organizations, and more than 10 cultural exchange and

education cooperation brands such as "Luban Workshop" have gradually taken shape. "Chinese civilization is an open system formed in continuous exchanges and mutual learning with other civilizations", "There are many countries along the Belt and Road, rich in cultural resources and variety, with more than half of the world's cultural heritage, strengthening cultural exchanges and cooperation between the two sides can not only enrich Chinese culture, but also promote the development of cultural co-prosperity, promote the harmonious coexistence of diverse cultures, and provide a steady stream of spiritual food for mankind<sup>[6]</sup>.

Overall, the Belt and Road Initiative is not only an extension of economic cooperation at the cultural level, but also promotes global cultural exchanges and interactions, promotes the protection and development of cultural diversity, and creates new opportunities and platforms for the prosperity of cultural industries and international cooperation.

## 5 Conclusion

To sum up, we can conclude that from the Age of Discovery to the Millennium, there have been many waves of cultural exchanges between the East and the West, and the positive effects are mainly to promote the dissemination of knowledge and technology, the development of science and art, promote the rise of the nation-state and the development of international relations, the diversity and inclusiveness of values, and the process of globalization.

At the same time, in addition to promoting globalization, economic, technological and cultural development, the integration of Eastern and Western cultures has also brought a deeper impact on society:

1. Social and political change: This exchange has affected not only the economy and technology, but also the social and political structure. It promotes the development of democracy, human rights and social justice, and increased individual freedom and political participation.
2. Cultural Diversity and Inclusion: The blending of Eastern and Western cultures has led to an increase in cultural diversity and cultural inclusion. People are beginning to have a greater respect for and appreciation for the differences between different cultures, which has fostered cultural exchange and cooperation around the world.
3. Education and knowledge dissemination: This exchange also greatly facilitates the dissemination of education and knowledge. Through exchanges, people gain a wider range of knowledge and perspectives, which promotes the reform and innovation of the education system.

As a result, the cultural convergence of the East and the West has not only brought significant progress in the economic and technological fields, but has also had a profound social, political, cultural and educational impact, making an important contribution to building a more open, pluralistic and inclusive world.

If we focus on the future, the fusion of Eastern and Western cultures, driven by globalization and information technology, will continue to promote the sharing and understanding of global cultures. People are more able to appreciate and respect the



uniqueness of different cultures, thereby promoting harmony and tolerance in the global community. The constant exchange and integration of cultures provides endless possibilities for innovation. In the future, the fusion of Eastern and Western cultures will continue to give rise to new technologies, arts, designs and business models that will drive innovation and development in the global economy. At the same time, cultural integration also brings some challenges, such as the reshaping of cultural identity and the balance of cultural values. The society of the future will need to build a more inclusive and mutually understanding cultural co-ecology based on respect for cultural diversity.

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