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# CFP: The Fifth Global Forum of Critical Studies: Asking Big Questions Again

# Topic: How to Differentiate Cultures from One Anther?

# Abstract

How can we differentiate cultures? It is a difficult question for westerners to distinguish Hong Kongese culture from Chinese, Taiwanese, Korean and Japanese, for they are too similar to each other. In order to maintain the political security and the national unity of China, Chinese Communist government keeps on oppressing local cultural identities, particularly Hong Kong cultural identity in recent year, although Hong Kong is an autonomous region (known as "Special Administrative Region") which should be free from Chinese political intervention.

Traditional philosophy of culture, which defines culture as "spirit" or value systems, can hardly help us differentiate cultures in East Asia, particularly when globalisation and regionalisation further diversify the values of cultures there. For instance, you can hardly define a clear value system of Hong Kong Culture.

As the author of the new book *A Discourse on Hong Kong Culture* (Traditional Chinese: 香港文化論), in my presentation I would like to introduce a new definition of culture in my book (known as "existential hermeneutical definition"), that culture as a power of interpretation provided by the community. I would argue that without our own culture we shall lose our ability of interpretation. When the people in a community shares a similar existential situation (similar history, same geographical location and social-economic interaction), the same language, similar values, similar ways of living and they are linked by a community network, they form a cultural self. Using Hong Kong culture as a case study I am going to demonstrate that the cultural self is emergent when an individual member realises that someone is culturally different from him. The new concept of culture may be applied in not only cultural studies, but also the political theories and social activisms for separatism, nationalism or localism.

Keywords: Culture, Hong Kong, Cultural Identity, Philosophy of Culture, Hermeneutics, Existentialism, Kierkegaard's Philosophy

# 1.    Introduction: How to Differentiate Two Cultures?

There are numerous definitions of culture. Paul Gilbert argues that the concept of culture 'presupposes that cultural features can be collected together in such a way as to characterise its participants' whole way of life, as this is often expressed 'one culture can be distinguished globally from another as picking out a distinct way of living'[i]. But defining culture merely as a 'way of living' ignores the nature of culture as a source of meanings and values. Will Kymlicka defines the culture as 'synonymous with "a nation" or "a people"— that is, as an intergenerational community, more or less institutionally complete, occupying a given territory or homeland, sharing a distinct language and history'. A societal culture, i.e., a culture with both 'shared memories or values' and 'common institutions and practices',[ii] provides 'meaningful options' for its members to choose[iii]. Therefore, for Kymlicka culture is a value systems and societal culture is capable of providing meaningful options for its member to choose. Similarly, Ronald Dworkin considers societal culture as a language providing 'a shared vocabulary of tradition and convention.'[iv]

If culture is defined as a value system, we should distinguish different culture as follow:

Normative Formula: *Culture Cx is a different culture independent from culture Cy iff Cx has a set of value Vx which is not equivalent to the set of value Vy of Cy.*

Or, if culture is defined as a way of living, we would have another formula:

Positive Formula: *Culture Cx is a different culture independent from culture Cy iff Cx has a set of cultural phenomena Px which is not equivalent to the set of phenomena Py of Cy.*

However, in this paper, I argue that both formula fails to distinguish cultures from one another. Instead I will suggest a new way of distinction of cultures by providing an existential-hermeneutical definition of culture. I will firstly reconstruct the traditional definition of culture as value systems and shows its failure due to the arbitrariness of value. At the same time I will point out that the definition of culture as a way of living fails to distinguish cultures if they lack obvious behavioural patterns, e.g. Hong Kong culture. Secondly, I will explain my existential-hermeneutical definition of culture as interpreting power based upon Kierkegaard's existentialism and Gadamer's hermeneutics. I will criticise the formulas mentioned above of imagining abstract theory without explaining the existential reality and argue that culture comes from the tradition which provides as possibility of understanding of ourselves, the others and the world.

# 1.    Two formula of Differentiating Culture
## 1.1.    Culture as Value Systems

The term culture comes from the Latin word *cultura,* which means cultivating. The term *cultura* was introduced by Cicero, a Roman philosopher, who 'formulated the idea of educating man into a social and political being also in terms of *cultura animi philosophia*: philosophy is culture of the mind.' By the seventeenth century, however, philosophers began to use the term culture in the sense of human development or civilization[v]. According to the sociologist Norbert Elias, French philosophers in the seventeenth century understood the concept of culture as 'a complex whole encompassing political, economic, religious, technical, moral and social facts', while German philosophers at that time tended to distinguish culture as merely 'spiritual sphere' from civilization as 'political and economic sphere.' German philosophers always relate the term culture to the term *Bildung* (education).[vi]

Hegel, however, seems to combine both ideas of culture. Vasiliki Karavakou describes Hegel's idea of culture as 'the reflection of man's rational nature', which implies that (1) 'culture constitutes a rationally articulated structure' or 'a publicly shared ethical background'; (2) the significance of a culture is understood and appreciated through 'its members' active re-constitution of and participation in its practices and institutions'; and (3) 'rais[ing] the veil of culture' would only devastate the culture as it leads to no cultural significance once we remove the cultural clothes from ourselves. According to Hegel, through Sittlichkeit (usually translated as Ethical Life), the social orders determines every individual how they should live. In Hegel's context, the word Bildung' involves not only the education of mind and character', but 'has also a pervasive social and ethical dimension', because everyone's behaviour is shaped by Sittlichkeit. Therefore, 'Hegel makes it clear that the modern imperative of being cultured should no longer be understood as the free development of personality, but our being in a constant dialogue with the finest values of our and of other cultures'[vii].

According to Hegel, Sittlichkeit is 'the concept of freedom *developed into the existing world and the nature of self-consciousness.*'[viii] There are three levels of Sittlichkeit: family, civil society (economic production) and state (political institution). Here Hegel emphasises the importance of institutions and laws which constitutes Sittlichkeit, for both determines 'the whole way of living and acting of a person or people.'[ix] Sittlichkeit is the contextualisation which tries to combine universal aspiration with local inflection[x]. Culture is the development of the spirit which determines the individual's values, ideas and thinking. The cultural behaviour practised by the individual cultural members are merely application of the 'universal' value of the culture. Culture itself is a system and it manifests itself in the development of the society and history. Individuals are merely its instruments of manifestation.

Based upon the concept of 'spirit' or value system, German historian Treitschke argues that 'English posses a commercial spirit', i.e. 'a love of money' and therefore 'all notions of honour and class prejudices vanish before the power of money, whereas German nobility has remained poor but chivalrous.'[xi] Defining culture by values or spirit is also popular among contemporary East Asian philosophers. Lao Sze-kwang, for example, suggests that the spirit of Chinese culture is 'the spirit of virtue' while the spirit of Western culture is 'the spirit of wisdom'[xii]. In his *Institutes of Chinese Culture*, Lao Sze-Kwang distinguishes cultural phenomenon (文化現象 man4 faa3 jin6 zeong6) from cultural spirit (文化精神 man4 faa3 zing1 san4), where the latter involves the concept of 'self-consciousness and freedom'. Cultural spirit is a 'consciousness of values' (價值意識 gaa3 zik6 ji3 sik1), namely the human's intention to perform cultural phenomenon[xiii]. Through the diagnosis of the value system of a culture, philosophers may explain not only the appearance of the cultural phenomenon, but also the limitation and the possible direction of development for the culture. Lao Sze-Kwang thinks that the problem of Chinese culture is the lack of objectification due to the overemphasis on the spirit of wisdom[xiv].

Lao Sze-Kwang's distinction between cultural phenomenon and cultural spirit is quite common in the western philosophy, too. Every culture has both internal and external aspects. External aspects refer to the observable cultural phenomenons or behaviours while internal aspect refer to the unobservable cultural values or meaning behind. A cultural phenomenon corresponds to certain values. For example, for Hong Kongese, the cultural phenomena of celebrating Ching Ming Festival, e.g. ancestor worship and cleaning the graves, expresses the meaning of family love and respectfulness of the ancestors. Such 'inner outer model' implies a correspondence theory of culture: that there must be some certain values behind a cultural phenomenon. Obviously these values do not exist independently. The values themselves should belong to a system which relate them into one culture. Traditional Chinese culture, for example, is a value system of Confucian, Buddhist and Taoist values where Confucian values are dominant. The ancestor worship is the practice of Confucian ideas of respecting the origin of life. Culture with strong religious background seems to have more obvious value systems. For example muslim and jewish do not eat pork because of religious doctrines. The celebration of religious festivals like Eid al-Fitr and Passover are also the external practices of internal religious values. Such dualist model of internal vs external implies that we can find an absolute and unique value for every cultural phenomenon or behaviours.

To distinguish a culture from another, therefore, we should look at the value system or the spirit of cultures, if culture is defined as value system. So we need to have to procedure as follow:

(1) diagnosis of what core values of two cultures have,
(2) compare their differences in terms of values, and
(3) determine whether they are different independent culture.

Let's take the comparison between Japanese culture and Korean culture as an example. Let $C_j$: Japanese culture, $C_k$: Korean culture, $V_j$: Japanese values and $V_k$: Korean values and these are all sets. And let s: Shinto value, c: Confucian value, z: Zen Buddhist value, h: Korean Shamanist value, d: Taoist value and b: Buddhist value, and these are all elements. Given that $C_j$ = $V_j$ = {c, s, z} and $C_k$ = $V_k$ = {c, b, d, h}. Then we may have sets as follow:

$C_j$ = $V_j$ = {c, s, z} (Given)
$C_k$ = $V_k$ = {c, b, d, h} (Given)

∵ $V_j$ ≠ $V_k$

∴ $C_j$ ≠ $C_k$

Therefore, Japanese culture is different from Korean culture.

The values of Korean culture consist of Korean Shamanist, Confucian, Taoist and Buddhist values, while those of Japanese culture consist of Shinto, Confucian and Zen Buddhist. Korean culture is different from Japanese culture because it contains Korean Shamanist belief while Japanese has Shinto. Therefore they are different independent culture.

But when we look into the case of modern and young cultures, such distinction fails as we can hardly define clear value systems. Hong Kong culture, for example, lacks clear and distinct value system. In 2004 pan-democrat politicians in Hong Kong wrote the 'Declaration of Standing Firm on Hong Kong's Core Values', arguing the core values of Hong Kong are 'liberty, democracy, human rights, rule of law, fairness, social justice, peace and compassion, integrity and transparency, plurality, respect for individuals, and upholding professionalism.'[xv] But these are all merely political values that is shared universally among western democratic countries. It may make Hong Kong slightly different from China but not from countries like USA or UK. Besides one can hardly correspond any particular cultural behaviour to these abstract political ideas. There is no obvious moral values that is unique to Hong Kong where British and Chinese values and ways of living are integrated.

We may see similar problems in the cases of modern western cultures where cultural exchanges are extremely frequent. In the age of secularism, it is difficult to evaluate the importance of Anglican and Presbyterian values on the cultural phenomenon of British culture. Obviously Treitschke's judgement of English cultural spirit as 'commercial spirit' is arbitrary as he provides little empirical evidence for his judgement. We cannot make an accurate judgement on the value system even for a traditional culture with obvious values like traditional Chinese culture. For Chinese culture itself is a multiculturalism: with Confucian, Buddhist and Taoist values and the seven major Chinese languages are incommensurable with one another. You may think Confucian values are the most essential values for Chinese culture, but a Chinese Buddhist monk may disagree with you. Moreover after the cultural revolution the traditional values become history in the Communist China.

To conclude, it seems impossible for us to find any empirical evidence for the existence of abstract cultural values. We cannot text whether a culture Cx is having a value system Vx or not. Culture is unseen and every member of a cultural group may have different interpretation on his own culture. Cultural phenomenon are merely resulted from cultural spirits or values. Without a scientific method we cannot infer the cause from the effect.

## 1.2.    Culture as a Way of Living

Many anthropologists considers culture merely as a way of living. Herskovits says that 'Culture is the man-made part of the environment'[xvi] while Meade says culture 'is the total shared, learned behaviour of a society or a subgroup.'[xvii] Similarly, Paul Gilbert defines culture as a way of living:

> 'To speak of a culture here is to presuppose that cultural features can be collected together in such a way as to characterise its participants' whole way of life, as this is often expressed, so that one culture can be distinguished globally from another as picking out a distinct way of living.'[xviii]

Gilbert disagrees with the definition of culture as value system by simply denying the existence of any inner aspect of culture. He borrows the concept of *habitus* from Piere Bourdieu, namely, 'the system of behavioural dispositions which enable us to act in the world in ways appropriate, in some sense, to it, without presupposing any conscious purposes or a grasp of how to attain them.' The members of cultural group are just used to the habitual behaviours (i.e. cultural phenomenon) and they do not necessarily reflect on what they have done culturally. Not all Hong Kongese or Singaporean would reflect on the philosophical question of the meaning of milk tea everyday when they drink it. Habitus shape the identities of the member of a cultural group, but as it does not presuppose any conscious purposes, it is 'not to be thought of as a system of internalised rules or norms.'[xix] Gilbert than introduces Judith Butler's concept of identity as being performed. Similarly, Merleau-Ponty 'characterises as a cultural world in which the meanings of each other's actions are transparent to them so that they share a common ground on which to interact'[xx]; 'the "for me" and the "for others" co-exist in one and the same world.'[xxi] Based upon Merleau-Ponty's idea, Gilbert distinguishes 'obtrusive body-for-others' ('as someone else's body might appear to me as a stranger to his activity') from 'unobtrusive body-for-others' ('as when the body is not specifically focused on because it is the action that is the object of attention in the ordinary shared activities of life'). Here body means 'cultural body' 'shaped in its appearance and styles of behaviour by broadly speaking cultural factors' instead of the biological body.[xxii]

Gilbert criticises the definition of culture as value system by arguing that different members of a cultural group may have different interpretation to the same cultural behaviours. Therefore a cultural phenomenon

may represent different values for different people. Gilbert use the case of Madame Faiza Silmi as an example. She is a Moroccan Muslim woman who lived in France but insisted to wear burqa. As a result her application of French citizenship was rejected by the Conseil d'État. The Conseil d'État considers Mme Silmi's wearing of burqa as 'radical practice of her religion incompatible with the essential values of the French community'[xxiii]. Instead, Gilbert provides us a non-value judgement explanation of the cultural conflict between Mme Silmi and the 'French community'. By wearing burqa Mme Silmi's body-for-others is obtrusive in French community but unobtrusive in some Muslim community. As Mme Silmi wants to identify herself, she 'draw[s] upon common cultural materials deriving from their original community.'[xxiv] He suggests three parameters of differences 'between member-to-member appearance and member-to-non-member appearance', namely, (1) degree of 'obtrusiveness to non-members compared to unobtrusiveness to member', (2) degree of 'comprehensibility of the body-for-others to non-member compared with its presumed transparency to non-members', and (3) 'difference between member-to-member and member-to-non-member appearances of the body.'[xxv]

Now let's try to distinguish cultures by using the positive formula. Let Cm: Morocco muslim culture, Cf: French culture, Bm: Morocco muslim cultural behaviours, Bf: French cultural behaviour and these are all sets. And let m1, m2, … , mn are all Morocco muslim cultural behaviours, f1, f2, … , fn are all French behaviour, where n is a natural number and n>0, given m1 is not equivalent to any element in the set of Cf. Given that . Then,

Cm = Bm = {m1, m2, … , mn}   (Given)
Cf  = Bf = {f1, f2, … , fn}        (Given)
m1 ≠ f1,
m1 ≠ f2,
 …
m1 ≠ fn (Given)
∵ Bm ≠ Bf

∴ Cm ≠ Cf

Different from values, it is almost impossible to count all cultural behaviours of a culture, that's why I have assumed them to be infinite. Maybe such formula does not exactly follow Gilbert's idea of obtrusive-body-for-others, but at least he won't disagree with the explanation above which does not assume any values. Besides the explanation above agree with anthologists like Herskovits and Meade who consider culture as merely behaviours.

But Gilbert's account implies serious problems. Firstly, by denying the significance of value systems, culture becomes invaluable and there is no reason to maintain cultural differences and conserve a culture. So, at the end even such account may distinguish a culture from another one, such cultural difference is meaningless. Moreover, by arguing cultural differences merely as obtrusive body-for-non-members and unobtrusive body-for-members, transcultural critique of cultural phenomenon becomes impossible. A Hong Kongese cannot make a strong value judgement on the cultural behaviour of a Chinese peeing on the street because such Chinese body is just obtrusive-for-Hong Kongese but unobtrusive-for-Chinese. In the next section I am going to provide an existential hermeneutical definition of culture as interpreting power and shows why it is a better account.

## 2.   Existential Hermeneutical Definition: Culture as Interpreting Power
### 2.1.   Tradition and Understanding

Let's come back to the two formulas mentioned before:

Normative Formula: *Culture Cx is a different culture independent from culture Cy iff Cx has a set of value Vx which is not equivalent to the set of value Vy of Cy.*

Positive Formula: *Culture Cx is a different culture independent from culture Cy iff Cx has a set of cultural phenomena Px which is not equivalent to the set of phenomena Py of Cy.*

The main problem of normative formula is that we have no objective method to demonstrate that culture Cx must have the values of Vx. Such methodological problem is clearly explained in previous sections. How-

ever for positive formula the problems are implicit. It is more about the implications of the theory rather than the theory itself. However, when we look at Gilbert's specific account, we will find a general theoretical problem of the definition of culture merely as ways of living.

The biggest problem of the definition of culture merely as ways of living is the ignorance of the relation between culture and language. Gilbert tries to demonstrate that he is conscious of such relation, but he fails to recognise such relation *de facto*:

> 'No doubt, too, this language is important for me: I should not be writing these words without it or thinking these thoughts. But none of this implies either that I have a cultural identity in terms of membership of a cultural group of the wide-ranging sort we have been considering, partly defined by language use; or that, if indeed I have – being English say – then this has value for me. … my use of the language does not require membership of the group that provides my putative identity. I can use the language without any such membership and lose nothing by it.'[xxvi]

Actually cultural membership is assumed by using a language. According to W.V. Humboldt,

> 'Just as without language no concept is possible, so also there can be no object for the mind, since it is only through the concept, of course, that anything external acquires full being for consciousness. But the whole mode of *perceiving* things *subjectively* necessarily passes over into cultivation and the use of language. '[xxvii]

According to Humboldt, human is the only animal who can speak a language. The ability to speak a language is known as 'human intellectuality'. Everyone who has human intellectuality is a 'spiritual being'. Based upon certain rules, we transform an 'articulated sound' into an 'expression of thought'. But language is not merely an instrument of communication. Language is subjective but objective, passive but active; language is objective and active because it is invented by human intellectuality and expresses our thoughts[xxviii]. However, language is at the same time subjective and passive as it is determined by the spatio-temporal dimension and therefore historicity and social context. For example, Cantonese is the mixture of Baiyue languages and ancient Middle Chinese due to three major North-to-South Han Chinese migration (Disaster of Yongjia in 311 during Jin dynasty, An Lushan Rebellion from 755 to 763 during Tang dynasty and Jingkang  incident in 1125 during Song dynasty). The development of Cantonese is determined by the development of Chinese history. At the same time language interacts with the development of human thoughts, including culture and individual thoughts. Both Humboldt and Hegel understand culture as spirit which represent the collective thinking of a community, however Humboldt argues that culture is limited by language. There is no present continuous tense in French, so in English while I may say 'I am coming', in French I can only say 'Je viens' without expressing the meaning of continuity. But the English concept of 'continuity' is even more strange for Cantonese speakers who have no tense at all in their languages. To learn English as a Cantonese speaker we have to learn a new worldview which is limited by another language[xxix]. To learn a new worldview, you have to learn a new culture and tries to know how the member of such culture thinks. But as a Cantonese native speaker you don't need to overcome the differences of worldview. For your cultural membership as Hong Kongese or Cantonese implies that you share the prejudice, tradition and horizon of Hong Kong or Cantonese culture. Your cultural membership is important because it is your beginning point of understanding the world.

The criticism of Gilbert's account by Humboldt's philosophy of language is applicable to all definition of culture as ways of living (which ignores the relationship among culture, worldview and language). And such criticism leads us to Gadamer's hermeneutics which explain how we understand the world. 'In phenomenology, the "horizon" is, in general terms, that larger context of meaning in which any particular meaningful presentation is situated.'[xxx] Horizon of the present is not a fixed set, for it comes from 'tradition' inherited from previous generation of our cultural group. Tradition brings us prejudices including languages, concept, cultures and moral values etc. Prejudices, however, is not necessarily negative. On one hand prejudice limits our understanding, but on the other hand it is the foundation of our understanding. Without language and concept we cannot think at all.

The horizon of the present is 'continually in the process of being formed because we are continually having to test all our prejudices.'[xxxi] As Gadamer says,

> 'The concept of "horizon" suggests itself because it expresses the superior breadth of vision that the person who is trying to understand must have. To acquire a horizon means that one learns to look beyond what is close at hand—not in order to look away from it but to see it better, within a larger whole and in truer proportion.' [xxxii]

Gadamer may disagree with the definition of culture as value system if the system is fixed. For Gadamer horizon is always changing as we tries to understand the others. Rita D. Sherma and Arvind Sharma argue that we have to keep on testing our own horizon by understanding the tradition where we come from:

> 'An important part of this testing occurs in encountering the past and in understanding the tradition from which we come. Hence the horizon of the present cannot be formed without the past. There is no more an isolated horizon of the present in itself than there are historical horizons which have to be acquired. Rather, understanding is always the fusion of these horizons supposedly existing by themselves.'
> 'When we engage a historical object, we move into its horizon, while we bring ours with us. In this movement of one horizon (ours) into another (the one in which the historical object is situated), a fusion of horizons occurs'[xxxiii]

The movement of one horizon is known as 'fusion of horizon' in Gadamer's own terms. Through the fusion of horizon we can understand not only the horizon of the past but also the contemporary horizon of the other culture. If a Cantonese native speaker from Hong Kong culture wants to learn British English, he needs to move his own horizon into British's horizon. So culture is the *tradition* which constitutes our horizons. It is an *interpreting power.* But how can we use such definition to distinguish a culture from another?

## 2.2. From Community Network to Cultural Self

In hermeneutics, tradition brings us the horizon of the present to understand the world. People coming from the same cultural group should share similar tradition with similar prejudices and similar horizon. But how can these members of such cultural group be related to each other and becomes a community with the same cultural identity? This leads us to Kierkegaard's existentialism which has detailed discussion on the relationship between individual self and others:

> 'In the "public" and the like the single individual is nothing; there is no individual; the numerical is the constituting form and the law for the coming into existence [Tilblivelse] of a generatio aequivoca; detached from the "public" the single individual is nothing, and in the public he is, more basically understood, really nothing at all. In community [Menighed] the single individual [den Enkelte] is; the single individual is dialectically decisive as the presupposition for forming community, and in community the single individual is qualitatively something essential and can at any moment become higher than "community," specifically, as soon as "the others" fall away from the idea. The cohesiveness of community comes from each one's being a single individual, and then the idea; the connectedness of a public or rather its disconnectedness consists of the numerical character of everything. Every single individual in community guarantees the community; the public is a chimera. In community the single individual is a microcosm who qualitatively reproduces the cosmos; here, in a good sense, it holds true that unum noris, omnes. In a public there is no single individual and the whole is nothing; here it is impossible to say unum noris, omnes, for here there is no one. "Community" is certainly more than a sum, but yet it is truly a sum of ones; the public is nonsense-- a sum of negative ones, of ones who are not ones, who become ones through the sum instead of the sum becoming a sum of the ones.'[xxxiv]

Here Kierkegaard distinguishes the pubic from the community by arguing that the single individual is nothing in the former but 'qualitatively something essential'. 'Every single individual in community guarantees the community' because everyone is connected by relationship within a community, while in the public there is only 'disconnectedness' 'consist[ing] of the numerical character of everything.'[xxxv] Numerical characters means that in the public only the number of people is concerned. If 90% of the public agrees to establish a communist society, the public would probably actualised such majority opinion without taking care of the opposition by the minority individuals. 'For the publicist the battle of opinions in public life is neither more nor less than the business of a stock exchange' as he 'is concerned only with the opinion having the highest percentage.'[xxxvi] Community 'is not the association of several people of the same age; it is rather a unity which shows various ages in the most intimate interrelation. Thus: the grandparents, man and wife, children of various ages—this is really community.' Community is based upon the individual's relation to others, an unity of people from different generation when everyone is a corrective of each other.[xxxvii] According to J. Michael Tilley, Kierkegaard argues that 'person's community and culture functions most effectively when the individuals within the community are sufficiently developed intellectually, ethically and spiritually'[xxxviii].

In the case of culture, a cultural group should be a community rather than a public. Every single individual is important in the community and every member has a relationship with one another. Within the cultural

group as community, every member share similar traditions, prejudices and horizons because they are thrown to a similar existential situation. Hong Kong is a city of refugee from the Communist China after 1949, therefore Hong Kongese were in the same historical situation. They moved to Hong Kong and establishes different small communities within the city: rural villages, urban private apartments and public estates etc. Although many people speak Hakanese, Hokkien/Minnanese, Szeyap, Teochew and Shanghainese etc., Cantonese is the dominant language and gradually becomes the common language among the refugee. These Cantonese speaking communities in Hong Kong integrated with each other into the culture group of Hong Kong Culture as they share similar horizon by succeeding the same tradition. The common language Cantonese shapes the ways of thinking into a similar mode and therefore Hong Kongese can understand each other.

However, it should be noticed that Kierkegaard himself dislikes the idea of distinguishing a culture from another, as he thinks the concept of cultural distinction is an obstacle to the neighbour love:

> 'Have not this culture and the zeal with which it is coveted rather developed a new kind of distinction, the distinction between the cultured and the uncultured?'
> 'Think of the most cultured person, one of whom we all admiringly say, "He is so cultured!" Then think of Christianity, which says to him, "You shall love the neighbour!" Of course, a certain social courtesy, a politeness toward all people, a friendly condescension toward inferiors, a boldly confident attitude before the mighty, a beautifully controlled freedom of spirit, yes, this is culture—do you believe that it is also loving the neighbour?'[xxxix]

However I think it is not appropriate for me to discuss Kierkegaard's disagreement with the topic of this paper, for the original aim of this paper is assumed to find the most appropriate account to distinguish a culture from another. While Kierkegaard may disagree with the original aim of this paper I think I can still introduce his concept of community here so as to explain the formation of a cultural group.

Based upon the hermeneutical-existential account demonstrated above, we may consider culture as an interpreting power shared by a community. Here by 'sharing interpreting power' I mean the members of a cultural group share similar horizon so they may not only share similar understanding of the world but also understand each other's understanding of the world. So, we may have a hermeneutical-existential formula to distinguish a culture from another:

*Culture Cx is an independent different culture from culture Cy iff the horizon Hx of Cx is different from the horizon Hy of Cy.*

Consider the case of Chinese toddler peeing on Hong Kong street which leads to strong condemnation by Hong Kongese as this is not the first time when Chinese urinates publicly in Hong Kong.[xl] But for the immoral person like Gilbert such conflicts involve no value conflicts, as such Chinese toddler peeing on Hong Kong street is merely obtrusive-body-for-Hong Kongese but unobtrusive-body-for-Chinese. If Gilbert was correct, cultural criticism would be impossible. For Gilbert there is nothing morally wrong for Chinese to pee on the street. However, if we try to use the traditional concept of culture as value system to explain the cultural conflict in this case, we can hardly demonstrate what is the value system for Hong Kong culture. But if we use the hermeneutical existential account, we may explain such case easily. Hong Kongese share the same horizon and under the tradition they succeed they make a value judgement that anyone peeing publicly is *wrong*. Obviously Chinese does not share the same horizon as they understand toddler peeing publicly as something acceptable. It is not merely about the obtrusiveness of the bodily behaviours by a Chinese toddler and her parents. It is about the different understanding of the same cultural behaviour due to the difference in horizons. The behaviour is not just obtrusive, but it is ethically considered as wrong behaviour. Such ethical judgement is facilitated by the tradition shared by a cultural group. Such ethical judgement is not a subjective feeling of obtrusiveness, but an *intersubjective* ethical belief. Here I have assumed no fixed or articulated value system of any culture, although at the same time I do not deny the existence or the significance of values within different cultures.

Therefore, under the hermeneutical existential account, the cultural distinction is not only possible but also meaningful. Different culture represents different worldview which is constructed by the horizons, prejudices and traditions. Our native language shapes our ways of thinking while our existential situation brings us certain historicity and grant us a membership to a cultural group. The membership to a cultural group implies the access to a particular horizon. Everyone has a membership to a cultural group and without such membership one can hardly understand the world.

### 3.  Conclusion

Cultural distinction is based upon the differences in understanding or interpreting the world. Defining culture as value system or spirit is problematic for we cannot demonstrate that some values must be essential to this culture and every member share the same understanding of these values. Defining culture as ways of living is even worse. The significance of values is ignored and cultural differences become merely different ways of living. So transcultural criticism becomes impossible and we cannot make moral judgement on other cultural behaviours. The misbehaviour of some Syrian refugee in Germany, for example, should not be understood as merely 'obtrusive'. Raping and sexual harassment is not just obtrusive, they are morally *wrong*. Such moral judgement comes from the horizon of our cultures. We may not be able to articulate every value that is embedded in our minds, but we can always make value judgement according to the intersubjective worldview or horizon shared by all members in the same cultural group.

If a community A has a very different horizon with another community B due to the difference in existential situation, they do not share the same culture. Under such account we do not need to articulate any value system of any culture. Instead we only need to portray how different members of different cultural group understand the world in different ways. Such difference does not necessarily implies value judgement against any particular culture, although sometimes it may implies moral conflicts.

The theoretical implication of this paper should be applicable to different cultures allover the world, particular for EU member countries considering the complexity of cultures and languages across the continent. In the age of globalisation when local cultural values or ways of living is being eroded, it is important for us to re-emphasises the cultural differences so as to maintain cultural diversity. European Union as a regional trade bloc should always respect cultural differences among member countries. Regionalisation should not imply the cancelation of cultural differences. We must understand different horizons of different cultural group and see whether fusion of horizons is possible.

China has shown us a bad example of cultural policy which aims to cancel cultural diversity by destroying the interpreting powers of different cultural groups. Schools in mainland China only teach and speak Mandarin. The unrest rebellions by Uyghur and Tibetan result from the oppression on the freedom of religion by the Communist Party who is atheist. Attempt to destroy the horizon of a culture inevitably lead to strong and even violent reactions.

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