The Role of Education in the Advancement of Cultural Harmony (REACH): Toward a Global Initiative

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ABSTRACT

An important mean for dealing with Huntington warning of “clash of civilizations” is to enhance “cultural harmony” and establish “cultural pluralism”. In essence, cultural harmony is a knowledge society problem concerned with “cultural knowledge: CK” preparation, diffusion and exploitation in real life practices. In this respect, educational institutions, through their knowledge mission, can play an essential role in the promotion of cultural harmony. This paper is concerned with initiating a global initiative on the “role of education in the advancement of cultural harmony: REACH”. It provides a background on the issues and structure of the target initiative. In addressing the issues two types of references have been considered. One is concerned with how key educational and other related institutions view cultural harmony in the 21st century; while the other is related to how key cultural dialogue efforts view the role of education in this harmony. The target structure of the initiative is considered to be based on the knowledge society ecosystem framework of “knowledge circle in the scope of strategy, technology, organization, people and environment: KC-STOPE”.

The paper hopes to provide the first step toward the initiation of REACH, putting it into global practice, and contributing to peace and well-being.

Keywords: Clash of Civilization, Cultural Competence, Cultural Dialogue, Cultural Diversity, Cultural Pluralism, Education, Higher Education, KC-STOPE Framework, Knowledge Society Ecosystem

INTRODUCTION

This section provides the necessary background for the work presented in this paper. It considers cultural harmony, as a knowledge society issue, and emphasizes its importance for world peace, development and well-being. It also introduces key efforts and views on the role of education in promoting cultural harmony, including those associated with educational institutions, and those related to organizations concerned with cultural dialogue. In addition, the section gives the purpose of the work presented in this paper, and outlines its basic contents.

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Cultural Harmony

A recent paper addressed cultural pluralism as a knowledge society problem and discussed its various issues according to the knowledge society ecosystem framework of knowledge circle in the scope of strategy, technology, organization, people and environment (KC-STOPE) (Bakry & Al-Ghamdi, 2011). The paper identified cultural pluralism as “harmonized cultural diversity”. It considered that cultural diversity without harmonization risks the misinterpretation and misuse of cultural knowledge (CK), and this may lead to “clash of cultures or civilizations”, as has been emphasized by Huntington, who considered it to be an expected phenomena in the post cold war era (Huntington, 1996; Wikipedia, n. d.).

The work Bakry and Al-Ghamdi (2011) viewed CK as associated with three main activities: CK production through searching, investigation and documentation; CK dissemination and exchange through preaching, sharing, education, and dialogue; and CK exploitation and practice in real life. With cultural diversities, these activities may lead to clash of culture, in the absence of harmonization, as illustrated in Figure 1 (Bakry & Al-Ghamdi, 2011). Harmonization through education and other means can transform diversity into pluralism that would likely lead to peace, development and well-being, as shown in Figure 2. With pluralism, the CK activities of production, dissemination and practices would take the integrated form given in Figure 3; and this can be incorporated into the KC-STOPE knowledge society ecosystem framework according to Figure 4.

Harmonization Efforts and Views

Since harmonization of cultural diversity is the road to cultural pluralism, as illustrated in Figure 2, an obvious question that should be raised here would be concerned with achieving the required harmonization. In this respect, various educational organizations and individuals, concerned with planning for the development of higher education (HE) in the 21st century, have emphasized intercultural competence for its graduates. This competence was viewed as “the ability to move comfortably between different cultures”. Examples of key references, that addressed this issue, include the following:

- The declaration on HE for the 21st century, issued in October 1998, by the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural organization (UNESCO, 1998);
- The future HE directions in the USA, recommended by major associations of HE institutions (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2005; American Council on Education, American Association of State Colleges and Universities, American Association of Community Colleges, Association of American Universities, National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities, & National
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