

Encounters between East and West:
Intercultural Perspectives

Fred Dervin · Sude ·
Mei Yuan · Ning Chen

Interculturality Between East and West

Unthink, Dialogue and Rethink

 Springer

Encounters between East and West

Intercultural Perspectives

Series Editor

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About the Series

This book series publishes volumes problematizing the issue of East versus West. The topics covered in the series represent past, current and future trends in intercultural encounters and communication between the East and West, including: - The role of language in such encounters, for example plurilingualism and English as a global language. - The impact of digital technologies in East/West interactions. - The construction of the East/West in different kinds of discourses, such as in media, fiction, educational products and services, marketing and tourism. - Diachronic examinations of encounters between the East/West. - The impact of mobility/migration. - Comparison of different but similar populations in the East/West (e.g. migrants, teachers, etc.). - Redefinitions of the East/West, in terms of changing frontiers, political terms. The series also demonstrates innovative ways of conducting intercultural research. It has now become a cliché to say that intercultural encounters have increased over recent decades. Interculturality is not new – far from it! Encounters between people from different backgrounds speaking different languages have always taken place, but the difference today is the speed and ease with which they occur. Research on interculturality and intercultural communication dates back to the 1950s with different paradigms emerging over the years. However, we have now reached a mature stage of scientific development and discussions on this topic. While initially a simple understanding of ‘national culture’ was used to explain what happened when people from different countries met, today analyses of interculturality are more complex and also take into account elements such as gender, religion, social class and age. The last decade has seen major changes in the way interculturality is studied, with a shift from an overemphasis on culture to a focus on identity. Global politics has also changed since the 1950s and some countries that used to be colonies or ‘closed’ societies have (re-)emerged and in some cases taken on economic, political and symbolic positions. The dichotomy of the East vs. West has also reappeared after the collapse of the Soviet Union. This largely imaginary and political characterization of our world now deserves more attention, especially in relation to intercultural encounters and communication between these two spheres.


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谢谢妈妈可口的饭菜, 辛苦了.

Praise for *Interculturality Between East and West*

“The authors have been thinking, questioning, and arguing about interculturality throughout this book. I admire their bravery and resilience. This book will prompt further thinking, debate and wider reflection towards a deeper understanding of interculturality. Challenge the authors and yourself while reading as they challenged themselves while writing!”

—Lixian Jin, *Chair professor of Applied Linguistics, Dean of Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, City University of Macau*

“The pandemic crisis, which broke out in 2020, has caused unprecedented transformations for us all. In education and research, the crisis has sent the urgent message that there is a need to shake things up in the way we communicate with each other across national borders. In this book the authors conceptualize afresh the contentious but stimulating notion of interculturality, *beyond the canon*. Unthinking, dialoguing and rethinking together, and with their students, the authors manage to provide some of the most meaningful insights on the importance of listening to other ways of ‘doing’ interculturality. *Interculturality Between East and West* deserves a wide audience from educators to the global academic community in the many and varied fields related to interculturality.”

—Zhongying Shi, *Dean, Professor of education, Institute of Education, Tsinghua University, China*

“*Interculturality Between East and West* begins with an invitation to search for ‘the pearl’—through unthinking, dialoguing and rethinking our understandings of interculturality. The global orchestra of research and practice in the field easily gets dominated by a few ‘loud’ voices and interpretations of interculturalism, falsely believing that these would apply in a similar way around the world or even be shared by those next door. When in fact, as we learn from the book, the traditional meaning for the Chinese word for culture referred to the change happening to people through their encounters with each other. Understanding interculturality this way, as change occurring to and between people who meet each other, the emphasis shifts from

the dominance of the few to the opportunities of everyone for reciprocal learning in dialogue. This is what the authors invite us into, through the volume: to work together to stimulate a radical capacity to rethink interculturality.”

—Arniika Kuusisto, *Professor of Child and Youth Studies, Stockholm University, Sweden*

“*Interculturality Between East and West* is one of few truly intercultural books. Dervin, Sude, Yuan and Chen do not just recount a juxtaposition of different ideas and viewpoints. Instead, they present an interaction of different perspectives that is based on thinking, talking and listening among diverse scholars, practitioners and students. Nowadays, the concept of ‘interculturality’ became a new populism, that is dominated by ‘Western’ ways of thinking. Considering the terminological confusion and misunderstandings across the world and across disciplines (and also the many creative related concepts and terms that have been invented in recent years), there is an urgent necessity to develop a shared terminology, grounded in epistemological bases. This book offers readers the opportunity to ‘listen to China’, to engage with her, to start a dialogue with her around ‘interculturality’. If readers are ready to go beyond stereotypes and prejudices, they will discover many unknown paths. They will not learn an orthodox normative scaffolding related to the term ‘interculturality’. Instead, by listening to different ‘musicians’, the book delivers precious opportunities for developing perplexity, modesty and generosity—fundamental steps for finding shared meanings and terminology.”

—Agostino Portera, *Professor of intercultural education, University of Verona, Italy*

“This book represents an important contribution to research on language and intercultural education, genuinely building bridges between the ‘East’ and the ‘West’. Interculturality is an eminently complex notion that calls for methods of analysis that appeal to the paradigms of the *pluri-* and the *multi-* (in short: to a *dynamic whole*). Building upon Dervin, Sude, Yuan and Chen’s already well-established research, the book manages to provide a convincing approach to the *inter-* by defeating binary, comparative, and explanatory attempts to oppose the East and the West. Written dialogically, the book offers original perspectives anchored in the authors’ and their students’ experiences and reflections. In the chapters, the authors confront many stereotypes and ‘blow them up’ by subjecting interculturality to precise analyses. They also renew and actualize the gaze on a ‘notion in motion’ that requires constant reconfiguration, hence the centrality of the topic of identities in the book. The close ties between interculturality and languages are also rightly remembered. All in all, the authors do not describe interculturality in order to *understand* and/or *explain* it. Rather, through their multifaceted dialogues, they want to capture it in its eye-opening diversity, beyond the problematic binary of *East and West*.”

—Prof. Dominique Macaire, *University of Lorraine, France*

“I applaud Dervin, Sude, Yuan, and Chen’s *Interculturality Between East and West* for taking on the challenge of tackling a deep-rooted problem in the field of intercultural studies—a wide-spread misunderstanding that interculturality means the same and is ‘done’ the same way around the world. It is time to listen to lessons learned from the dialogues between the author from the West and the authors from the East and from the dialogues with their students in China. I have been teaching about interculturality in intercultural communication and intercultural education classes for nearly two decades on several continents, including Asia. A book that would address interculturality from the East Asian, Chinese in particular, perspective has been on my wish list for a long time. This book fills a gap in multiple fields of research and education related to interculturality. As China is becoming more engaged with the rest of the world, this volume is a must read.”

—Dr. Phyllis Bo-yuen Ngai, *University of Montana, USA*

“Dervin, Sude, Yuan and Chen have put together a book that provides urgently needed contributions and corrections to hegemonic global discourses on interculturality in several ways. Even though our globalized world attaches great importance to the phenomenon of interculturality, yet the term is still often misunderstood and does more harm than good. The point is to radically decolonize and de-center a formerly Western concept. The authors do not understand this task as a mere call to our consciousness, but they equally practice and live this de-centering and decolonization in their book. Interculturality here is challenged on the levels of theory-building, developing research methods as well as ethical considerations. Not to forget that from a Western point of view, China is still a prototypical bluescreen for culturalist stereotyping. Readers thus gain vivid insights into the multifaceted nature and complexity of what can be understood by interculturality worldwide. *Interculturality Between East and West* illustrates the extent to which we need to move away from old patterns of thinking in research around interculturality. Dervin, Sude, Yuan and Chen have succeeded here in producing a very unique book which actually should set a new standard.”

—Prof. Dominic Busch, *Bundeswehr University Munich, Germany*

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Chapter 1

Introduction



Abstract The introduction explains why the authors wrote the book and situates it in today's scholarship and education about interculturality. They argue that the important questions of *What is interculturality? What does it 'do' to people? How do people (scholars, students and decision-makers) conceive of interculturality? How could we deal with it?* must be asked again and again, especially beyond too easily accepted paradigms and ideologies that have been put forward by the 'West'. The introduction explains that China—a country that is being increasingly discussed but also misunderstood in certain parts of the world—is given a privileged position in the book in order to offer alternative ways of rethinking basic aspects of interculturality. The special working method of the book is also presented: multifaceted dialogues between the authors, the authors and their students and students with students. The authors argue that this approach allows to complexify discourses of interculturality and to reveal new aspects of the notion and serve as a mirror to examine our different takes on the notions. The structure of the book is introduced in the final section.

1.1 Looking for a Special Pearl

In the Outer Chapters of the *Zhuangzi* (莊子), named after Master Zhuang, who contributed to the philosophy now known as *Daojia* (School of the Way), we are told about Huang-Di (黃帝, the Yellow Emperor, 2717–2599 BCE) who lost a pearl during a walk in the mountain. The story goes as follows:

黃帝游乎赤水之北，登乎昆侖之丘而南望，還歸，遺其玄珠，使知索之而不得，使離朱索之而不得，使吃詬索之而不得也。乃使象罔，象罔得之。黃帝曰：‘異哉！象罔乃可以得之乎？’

Huang-Di, enjoying himself on the north of the Red-water, ascended to the height of the Kun-lun (mountain), and having looked towards the south, was returning home, when he lost his dark-coloured pearl. He employed Wisdom to search for it, but he could not find it. He employed (the clear-sighted) Li Zhu to search for it, but he could not find it. He employed (the vehement debater) Chi Gou to search for it, but he could not find it. He then employed Purposeless, who found it; on which Huang-Di said, 'How strange that it was Purposeless who was able to find it!' (Legge, 1891: n.p.).

In order to find the precious pearl (which was in fact a symbol of the Dao, otherwise known as *the Path* in English), the Emperor sent *Knowledge* (*Wisdom* in Legge's, 1891 translation), *Acute Vision* (*Li Zhu*) and *Debate* (*Chi Gou*) to look for it, but they all failed to retrieve it, suggesting that the pearl cannot be understood by reason. *Xiang Wang* (*Purposeless*, translated at times as *Nothingness* or *Abstraction*) was able to locate it through a different approach. In this book, we argue that interculturality is like Huang-Di's pearl, a treasure, a way, a path that many people are trying to find around the world. And like Huang-Di's different emissaries we shall endeavour to look for it—most likely failing like *Knowledge*, *Acute Vision* and *Debate* while, maybe, catching some snapshots of it like *Purposeless*...

What is interculturality? What does it 'do' to people? How do people (scholars, students, decision makers) conceive of interculturality? How could we deal with it? are the questions that we are asking in this book.

We start from the idea that we have been somewhat tricked into believing that interculturality is the same, means the same and is done the same way around the world. However, behind every (daily, scientific and educational) discourse of interculturality, there is a silent musician who is controlling somewhat what it is about, shaping the way they want it to be, the way they want the music to sound—which means that there are many discordant voices around what interculturality is and what it does to people and what they do to it. Some of these musicians are louder than others in our worlds of research and education, and their interpretations of the musical pieces of interculturality dominate.

The illusion that we are talking about the same thing when we say *interculturality* in English and other languages is very much reminiscent of French King Louis XIV's declaration, *L'état, c'est moi!* (*I myself am the nation!*), as if some scholars and decision-makers had monopolized the notion and claimed that *I am myself interculturality!*—meaning the way they define and see interculturality cannot be otherwise. As such in a recent review paper of the 'history' of interculturality, based mostly on Anglo-saxon ideological perspectives, the authors from the field of (US) communication studies argue that 'the term *intercultural* predates [E.T] Hall [who is often presented as the 'father' of the intercultural]. Among its early conceptualizations was Edmund Husserl's first German usage of *interkulturell* as an adjective (1931/1974, p. 234) in his work on intersubjectivity and phenomenology' (Kulich et al., 2020). Although the authors refer here to a philosopher from Germany—beyond the anglophone world in a sense—and the way Husserl used the word 'intercultural' might have been very different from the tens of different perspectives and definitions of the notion in the English language today, this is still very much 'locked in' the 'Western' sphere.... As we shall see in this book the very Chinese word for *culture* (文化, *wenhua*) referred to a specific form of interculturality before the current (unstable) meaning of the same word was influenced by European thought. The word *culture* in Chinese used to refer to change happening to one or two people meeting, through contact with each other (as in the *inter-* of interculturality)... So, in this respect, if one understands interculturality as change occurring between people from different contexts who meet each other, the Chinese developed and problematized the idea of