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# Values and Ethics Across Civilizations: Toward a Comparative Framework for Shared Moral Foundations and Pluralistic Coexistence

**Sophie Müller[1], Yuki Sato[2], Liam O'Connor[3], Nadia Aziz[4]**

[1]EuSoft University of Europe - Germany, [2]JP National University - Japan, [3]NorthTech University - New Zealand, [4]Sahara African University - South Africa

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**ABSTRACT**

The relationship between values, ethics, and civilization sits at the centre of contemporary debates about whether a plural world can sustain a shared moral horizon. Dominant readings, framed by the thesis of a coming clash of civilizations, treat cultural difference as a structural driver of conflict. This paper advances an alternative, comparative reading. Drawing on cross-cultural value theory, moral philosophy, and civilizational history, it asks two questions: first, whether the world's major civilizational traditions share an identifiable moral core; and second, how that core can be operationalised to support tolerance and pluralistic coexistence rather than confrontation. Methodologically, the study is a conceptual-comparative analysis that maps the ethical vocabularies of five civilizational clusters onto Schwartz's cross-culturally validated structure of basic human values, and situates the analysis within regional scholarship on moderation, identity, and tolerance published in this journal. The paper contributes a heuristic instrument, the Cross-Civilizational Value Convergence Index (CVCI), that expresses the degree of moral overlap between traditions on a bounded 0–1 scale. The analysis finds a robust convergent core organised around self-transcendence values (universalism and benevolence) and reciprocity, alongside genuine and durable divergence on the conservation–openness axis. It argues that coexistence is best served not by value-neutrality but by an ethics-based, moderation-centred model that names shared goods explicitly while protecting difference. Implications for governance, education, and inter-civilizational dialogue are discussed.

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*Corresponding author: sophie.muller@eusoft.europa.edu

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## 1. Introduction

Few questions are as persistent in the study of civilizations as the question of the good: what a community holds to be worthy, obligatory, or forbidden, and how those commitments shape its institutions and its encounters with others. Values are the trans-situational goals that a community treats as guiding principles; ethics is the reflective ordering of those goals into standards of conduct. Civilizations, understood as the largest cultural groupings through which human beings identify themselves, are in an important sense carriers of value systems. To study civilizations comparatively is therefore, unavoidably, to study values and ethics comparatively.

The dominant public framing of civilizational difference over the past three decades has been pessimistic. Huntington's influential thesis held that, with the end of ideological bipolarity, the fundamental sources of conflict would be cultural, and that the great divisions of humanity would fall along the fault lines between civilizations (Huntington, 1996). On this reading, differences in values are not merely descriptive facts about diversity but latent causes of confrontation. The thesis has been enormously generative, but it rests on a contestable premise: that civilizations are internally homogeneous, externally bounded, and organised around incompatible moral cores.

This paper questions that premise without denying that value differences are real and consequential. Its central claim is that the world's major civilizational traditions exhibit a convergent moral core alongside genuine divergence, and that the analytically and practically important task is to specify precisely where convergence and divergence lie. Where the clash thesis reads difference as fault line, a comparative ethics of civilizations can read a substantial part of that difference as variation around shared goods. The United Arab Emirates offers an instructive setting for this argument: its governance model has been characterised as an ethics-based architecture grounded in the Islamic principle of moderation, wasatiyyah, rather than in value-neutrality (Bochner, 2026), and its tolerance framework has been analysed as a deliberate institutional ecosystem for coexistence in a multicultural society (Brankovic, 2024).

Research questions. The study addresses two linked questions. ($RQ_1$) Do the major civilizational traditions share an identifiable moral core, and if so, how can it be characterised structurally rather than impressionistically? ($RQ_2$) How can such a shared core be operationalised to strengthen tolerance and pluralistic coexistence, given that real divergence persists?

Objectives. Correspondingly, the paper (i) synthesises cross-cultural value theory and civilizational scholarship into a single comparative frame; (ii) maps the ethical vocabularies of five civilizational clusters onto a validated structure of basic human values; (iii) proposes a bounded heuristic index of moral convergence; and (iv) draws implications for governance, education, and dialogue.

Contribution. The paper's contribution is integrative and conceptual. It does not report new survey data; rather, it offers a framework that connects a well-established psychology of values to the historical study of civilizations, and links both to a regional body of scholarship on moderation, identity, and tolerance. In doing so it reframes coexistence as a positive ethical project rather than a residual outcome of mutual restraint.

Structure. The remainder of the paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 sets out the conceptual background, defining values and ethics, reviewing civilizational and cross-cultural value theory, surveying the philosophical search for a shared moral ground, and locating the argument within regional scholarship. Section 3 details the conceptual-comparative method and introduces the Cross-Civilizational Value Convergence Index. Section 4 presents the comparative analysis, with three tables and three figures. Section 5 discusses the findings against the two research questions. Sections 6 and 7 develop implications and acknowledge limitations, and Section 8 concludes.

## 2. Conceptual Background and Literature

### 2.1 Values and ethics: working definitions

Following the cross-cultural tradition, values are defined here as desirable, trans-situational goals, varying in importance, that serve as guiding principles in the life of a person or group (Schwartz, 1992). Ethics is the second-order activity of ordering, justifying, and applying such values as norms of right action. Three features of values matter for a civilizational analysis. First, values are motivational: they specify what a community is for, not merely what it does. Second, values are structured: they stand in relations of compatibility and conflict, so that emphasising some tends to de-emphasise others. Third, values are comparable: because the same small set of motivational goals recurs across societies, distinct traditions can be described in a common vocabulary without erasing their particularity.

### 2.2 Civilizations as carriers of value systems

The comparative study of civilizations has long treated moral and spiritual orientation as constitutive rather than incidental. Toynbee's monumental survey framed the rise and decline of civilizations partly in terms of their capacity for creative moral response to challenge (Toynbee, 1934–1961). Huntington (1996) subsequently made value difference the axis of a geopolitical forecast. Fukuyama (1992), writing from the opposite pole, argued that a convergence toward liberal-democratic norms represented an end-point of ideological evolution. These three positions—civilization as moral organism, as fault line, and as convergent telos—bracket the debate this paper enters. The comparative-ethics approach adopted here treats none of them as fully adequate: against Huntington it stresses shared cores; against Fukuyama it denies that convergence implies a single Western terminus; and with Toynbee it treats moral response as central.

### 2.3 Cross-cultural structures of value

Empirical cross-cultural psychology provides the structural vocabulary this paper uses. Hofstede's foundational work established that national cultures differ along a small number of stable dimensions, and that value orientations are patterned rather than idiosyncratic (Hofstede, 2001). Schwartz's theory of basic human values refined this into a model of ten motivationally distinct value types—self-direction, stimulation, hedonism, achievement, power, security, conformity, tradition, benevolence, and universalism—arranged in a circular continuum and subsumed under four higher-order categories along two bipolar dimensions: openness to change versus conservation, and self-enhancement versus self-transcendence (Schwartz, 1992, 2012). The structure has proved robust across more than eighty countries, which makes it an unusually suitable common frame for civilizational comparison. Inglehart and Welzel's analysis of World Values Survey data added a macro-level map on which societies are positioned along a traditional/secular-rational axis and a survival/self-expression axis (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005). Figure 1 reproduces the Schwartz circular structure that anchors the present analysis.

### 2.4 The search for a shared moral ground

A parallel philosophical literature has argued, against relativism, that traditions can reach an overlapping moral consensus. The Global Ethic project distilled from the world's religious and ethical traditions a small set of shared imperatives—non-violence and respect for life, solidarity and a just economic order, tolerance and truthfulness, and equal dignity—expressed as a common minimum rather than a merged creed (Küng & Kuschel, 1993). Appiah's cosmopolitanism defends obligations to strangers that cross communal boundaries while insisting on the value of particular attachments (Appiah, 2006). Sen's critique of the clash thesis argues that reducing persons to a single civilizational identity is both descriptively false and practically dangerous, because human beings hold plural affiliations (Sen, 2006). MacIntyre, from a very different direction, reminds us that the virtues are always embedded in traditions and practices, so that a shared ethics cannot be wholly detached from particular communities (MacIntyre, 1981). Taylor's politics of recognition and Kymlicka's theory of multicultural citizenship supply the political-theory bridge: both ask how a shared civic order can accommodate deep value diversity without either forced assimilation or fragmentation (Taylor, 1994; Kymlicka, 1995). At the level of international norms, UNESCO's Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity affirms both the value of diversity and the existence of universal commitments that frame it (UNESCO, 2001).

### 2.5 Regional scholarship: moderation, identity, and tolerance

Three contributions in this journal locate the argument regionally. Bochner (2026) analyses the UAE's governance as an ethics-based governance architecture in which Qur'anic moral values, read through the principle of wasatiyyah (moderation), actively guide coexistence rather than a posture of neutrality; the study proposes a multi-scalar index to trace how moderation is institutionalised across law, diplomacy, public space, and education. Brankovic (2024) documents a tolerance ecosystem resting on policy, education, and multi-stakeholder partnership, and argues that such an ecosystem directly shapes quality of life and the building of an inclusive society. Habbal and Taha (2025) reframe identity itself as an open project, finding a marked preference among participants for a flexible identity that embraces pluralism and intercultural communication over any monolithic self-definition. Together these works supply the paper's applied horizon: moderation as an organising virtue, tolerance as an engineered ecosystem, and identity as open rather than closed.

### 2.6 Between relativism and universalism

The comparative study of values sits between two unattractive extremes. Strong moral relativism holds that values are so bound to their traditions that cross-civilizational judgment is impossible; if true, it would make any shared ethics of coexistence incoherent from

the outset. Strong universalism, at the other pole, risks projecting one tradition's particular commitments—historically, a Western liberal set—onto all others in the name of neutrality, a projection that the ethics-based reading of governance explicitly resists (Bochner, 2026). The position adopted here is a middle path that is itself a form of wasatiyyah: it accepts that traditions genuinely differ in the ordering and institutional expression of values, while maintaining that a comparable structure of basic human values, and a recurring reciprocity norm, allow traditions to recognise one another's goods without collapsing into either relativism or homogenisation. This is the philosophical counterpart of the empirical robustness of the Schwartz structure across cultures: difference is real, but it is structured difference, legible on a shared map. MacIntyre's (1981) insistence that virtues live within traditions and Sen's (2006) insistence that persons hold plural identities are, on this reading, complementary rather than opposed—the first guards against rootless universalism, the second against imprisoning particularism.

## 3. Conceptual Framework and Method

### 3.1 Research design

The study is a conceptual-comparative review. Its aim is theory integration rather than hypothesis testing, and its method is the disciplined mapping of civilizational ethical vocabularies onto a validated value structure, followed by the derivation of a heuristic index. This design is appropriate where the goal is to reorganise existing knowledge into a more tractable frame, and where primary value measurement across whole civilizations would be neither feasible nor, given existing survey infrastructure, necessary. The figures that present quantitative profiles in this paper are explicitly illustrative: they visualise the structure of the argument, not new empirical measurements.

### 3.2 The comparative frame

Five civilizational clusters are used as analytical units: a Western-secular cluster; an Islamic cluster read through the lens of moderation; a Confucian / East Asian cluster; a South Asian / Dharmic cluster; and an African / Ubuntu cluster, with a Latin-Catholic cluster included in the value-space map. These clusters are heuristic simplifications; each is internally plural, and their boundaries are porous—precisely the point Sen (2006) and Habbal and Taha (2025) press. Each cluster is characterised by (a) its central ethical concepts in their own terms and (b) the Schwartz higher-order categories those concepts most strongly express.

### 3.3 A heuristic index of convergence

To move beyond impression, the paper proposes the Cross-Civilizational Value Convergence Index (CVCI). Let two traditions be profiled across the same set of k value dimensions, each scored on a common bounded scale. Writing the normalised emphasis of tradition A on dimension i as $a_i$ and of tradition B as $b_i$ (each in the interval [0, 1]), the pairwise convergence is defined as one minus the mean absolute difference across dimensions:

$$CVCI(A, B) = 1 - ( 1 / k ) \cdot \Sigma_{i=1}^{k} | a_i - b_i |$$

The index is bounded on [0, 1], where 1 denotes identical value profiles and 0 denotes maximal divergence. A weighted variant assigns each dimension a salience weight $w_i$ (with $\Sigma w_i = 1$) to reflect that some goods—for example, respect for life—may reasonably be treated as more central to coexistence than others:

$$CVCI_{weim}(A, B) = 1 - \Sigma_{i=1}^{k} w_i \cdot | a_i - b_i |$$

A system-level convergence score for a set of m traditions is the mean of all pairwise indices:

$$\bar{C} = [ 2 / ( m ( m - 1 ) ) ] \cdot \Sigma_{i=1}^{m-1} \Sigma_{j=i+1}^{m} CVCI( A_i , A_j )$$

The CVCI is offered as an organising heuristic, not as a validated psychometric instrument. Its value is threefold: it forces explicit, dimension-by-dimension comparison; it distinguishes shared cores (high per-dimension convergence) from genuine fault lines (low convergence on specific dimensions); and it makes the intuition behind an ethics of coexistence auditable rather than rhetorical. Section 4 applies it to the higher-order categories.

### 3.4 Scope conditions and interpretation

Three scope conditions govern the interpretation of the index and, more broadly, of the comparative frame. First, the unit of comparison is the value profile, not the tradition in its full richness; a high CVCI signals structural similarity in motivational emphasis, not identity of belief, practice, or theology. Second, the dimensions compared must be genuinely commensurable, which is why the analysis works at the level of the four higher-order Schwartz categories rather than attempting to translate thick, tradition-specific concepts directly into one another. Third, convergence is not by itself a normative endorsement: two traditions could converge on a value that a third rightly criticises. The index measures overlap, and overlap is an input to ethical dialogue rather than a substitute for it. With these conditions stated, the instrument can be read for what it is—a disciplined way of seeing where traditions stand close and where they stand apart.

## 4. Comparative Analysis

### 4.1 Core ethical concepts across traditions

**Table 1.** sets out, for each cluster, a central organising virtue or concept, its characteristic articulation of the reciprocity norm, and the primary Schwartz categories it expresses. The reciprocity norm—some form of the injunction to treat others as one would wish to be treated—recurs in every tradition surveyed, a convergence long noted in comparative ethics and formalised in the Global Ethic (Küng & Kuschel, 1993).

| Civilizational cluster | Central ethical concept | Reciprocity / golden-rule expression | Primary Schwartz categories |
|---|---|---|---|
| Western-secular (liberal) | Autonomy & human dignity; individual rights | Kantian universalisability; equal moral respect for persons | Openness to change; self-transcendence (universalism) |
| Islamic (wasatiyyah) | ʿAdl (justice) & iḥsān (excellence/benevolence); moderation | "None truly believes until he wishes for his brother what he wishes for himself" | Self-transcendence; conservation (tradition, security) |
| Confucian / East Asian | Rén (humaneness) & lǐ (right relation/ritual propriety) | "Do not impose on others what you do not desire" (shu) | Conservation; self-transcendence (benevolence) |
| South Asian / Dharmic | Dharma (right order/duty); ahiṃsā (non-harm) | "One should never do to another what one regards as injurious to oneself" | Self-transcendence (universalism); conservation |
| African / Ubuntu | Ubuntu: "a person is a person through other persons" | Communal reciprocity; identity constituted through relation | Self-transcendence (benevolence); conservation |

**Table 1.** Central ethical concepts and reciprocity norms across five civilizational clusters, with their dominant higher-order value categories. Concepts are stated in each tradition's own terms; category assignments follow the Schwartz (2012) structure.

### 4.2 Mapping onto the Schwartz structure

**Figure 1.** presents the Schwartz circular structure of the ten basic values and the two bipolar dimensions along which they are organised. The circular arrangement is the theory's central proposition: adjacent values express compatible motivations, while values on opposite sides of the circle express conflicting ones (Schwartz, 2012). This structure is what makes cross-civilizational comparison tractable, because every tradition's moral vocabulary can be located on the same map.

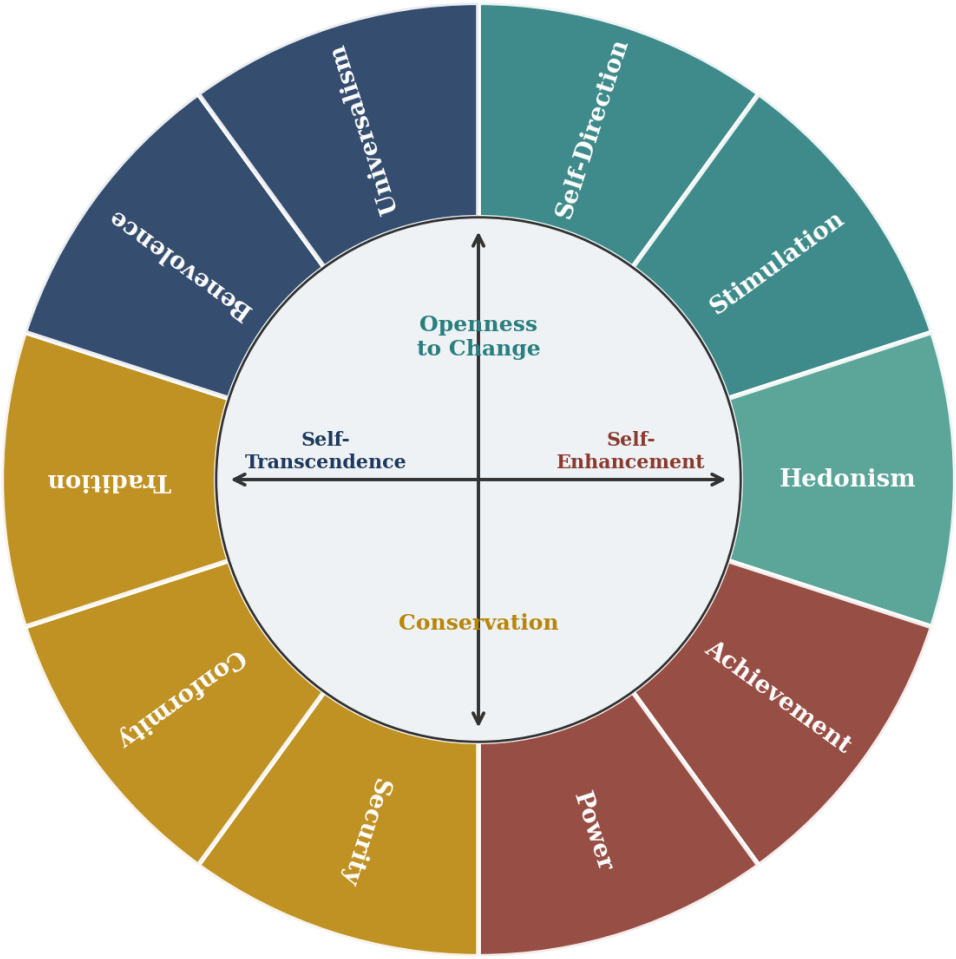



**Figure 1.** The Schwartz circular structure of ten basic human values, grouped into four higher-order categories along the openness–conservation and self-enhancement–self-transcendence dimensions. Adapted from Schwartz (1992, 2012).

Reading Table 1 against Figure 1 yields a clear pattern. Every cluster's central concept draws heavily on the self-transcendence quadrant—universalism and benevolence—confirming a shared orientation toward the welfare of others as a moral anchor. Traditions differ, however, in how strongly they couple that anchor to the conservation quadrant (tradition, conformity, security). The Islamic-wasatiyyah, Confucian, Dharmic, and Ubuntu clusters bind benevolence tightly to conservation, embedding the good in inherited order and relationship; the Western-secular cluster couples self-transcendence more to openness (self-direction), locating the good in individual autonomy. The fault line, in other words, is not primarily about whether others' welfare matters but about the relative weight of order and inherited relationship versus individual self-direction.

### 4.3 Convergence and divergence in value-space

**Figure 2.** situates the clusters in a schematic two-axis value-space adapted from the Inglehart–Welzel dimensions. The shaded region marks the overlapping self-transcendence core identified above. The map is illustrative: it visualises relative positions implied by the comparative literature rather than plotting survey coordinates. Its purpose is to show that clusters are dispersed on the axes of tradition–secularity and survival–self-expression while still sharing a common moral region.

**Figure 2. Schematic value-space of civilizational clusters (illustrative)**

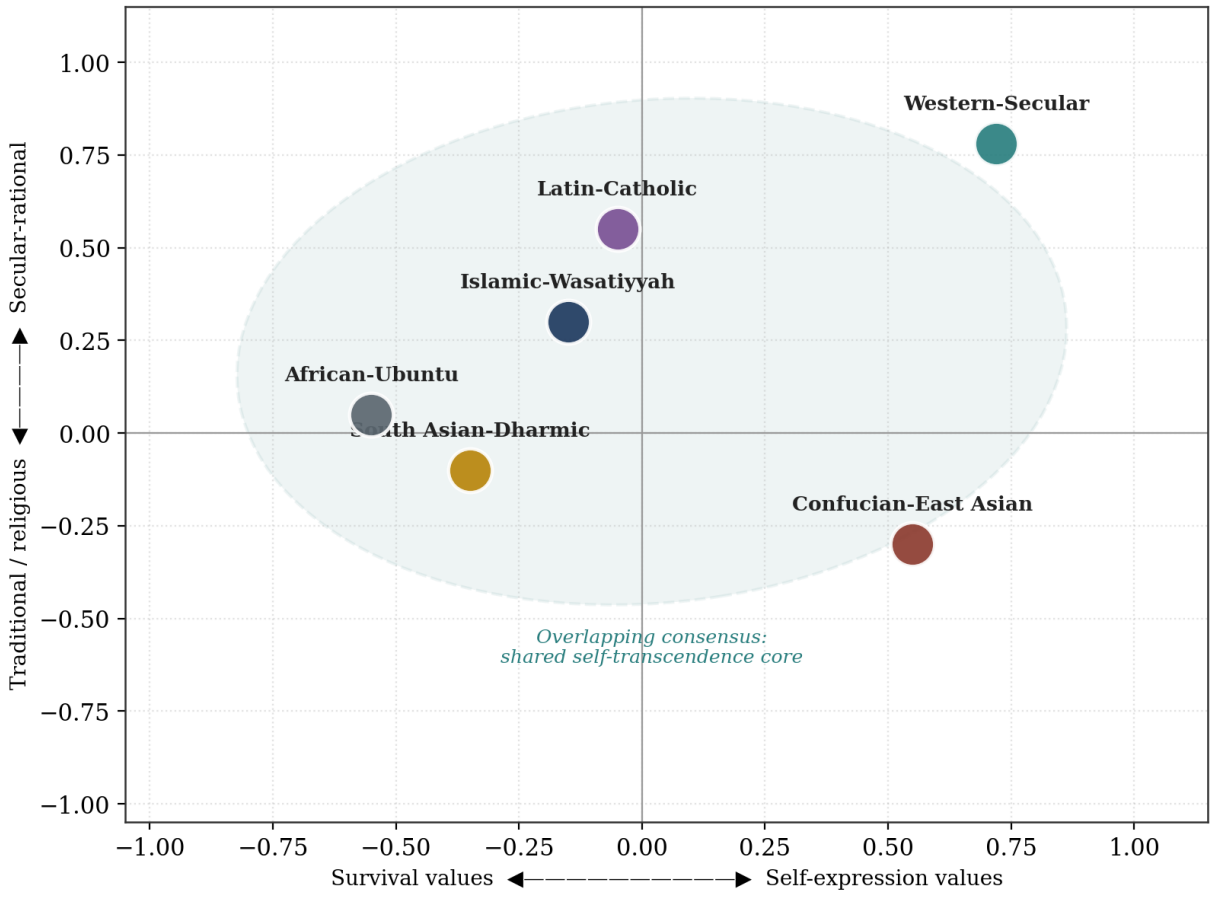



**Figure 2.** Schematic value-space of civilizational clusters (illustrative, not survey coordinates). Axes adapted from Inglehart and Welzel (2005). The dashed ellipse marks the shared self-transcendence core.

**Figure 3.** renders the same intuition as higher-order emphasis profiles and provides the inputs for an illustrative CVCI computation. Again, the values are conceptual placeholders that make the index concrete, not measured scores.

**Figure 3. Illustrative higher-order value-emphasis profiles across civilizational clusters**

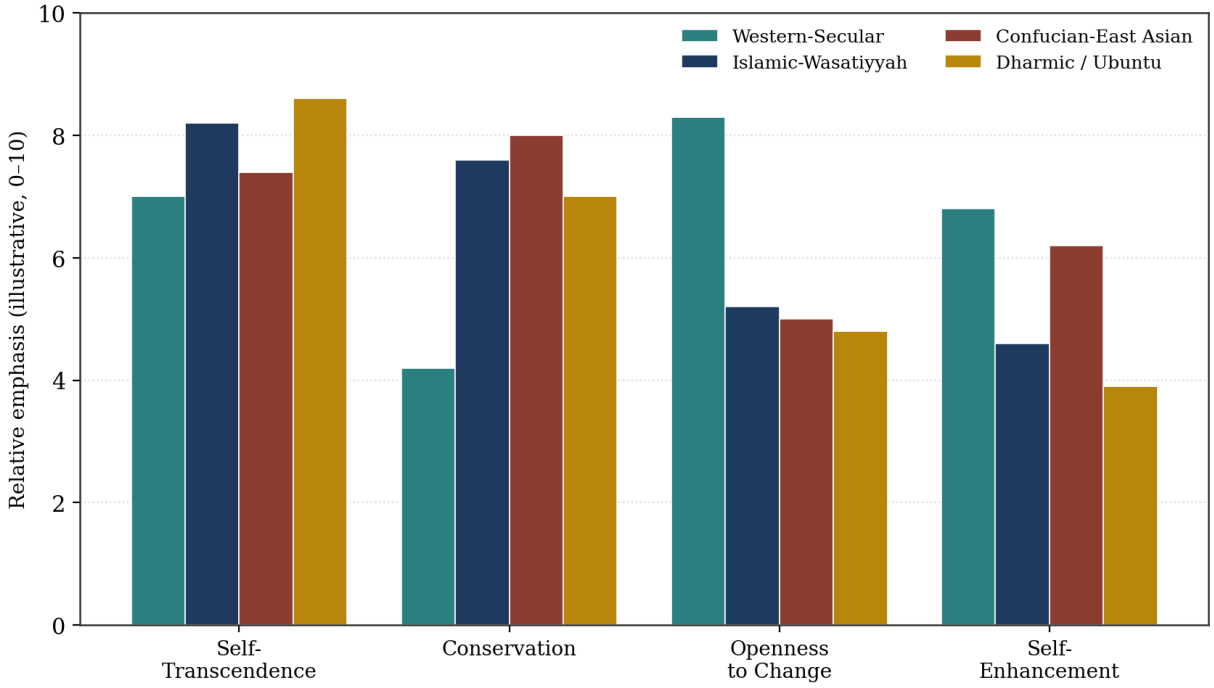


**Figure 3.** Illustrative higher-order value-emphasis profiles used to demonstrate the CVCI. Scores are conceptual, on a 0–10 scale rescaled to [0, 1] for the index.

Applying the unweighted CVCI to the four profiles in Figure 3 (rescaled to [0, 1]) yields the pairwise convergence scores in Table 2. Even on these illustrative inputs, every pair scores well above 0.6, and the mean system convergence $\bar{C}$ is high, quantifying the paper's core claim: the traditions are considerably closer in their overall value structure than the clash framing implies, with the largest gaps concentrated on the openness–conservation contrast rather than on self-transcendence.

| Pair of clusters | \|Δ\| Self-Transc. | \|Δ\| Conserv. | \|Δ\| Openness | \|Δ\| Self-Enh. | CVCI |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Western ↔ Islamic | 0.12 | 0.34 | 0.31 | 0.22 | 0.75 |
| Western ↔ Confucian | 0.04 | 0.38 | 0.33 | 0.06 | 0.80 |
| Western ↔ Dharmic/Ubuntu | 0.16 | 0.28 | 0.35 | 0.29 | 0.73 |
| Islamic ↔ Confucian | 0.08 | 0.04 | 0.02 | 0.16 | 0.93 |
| Islamic ↔ Dharmic/Ubuntu | 0.04 | 0.06 | 0.04 | 0.07 | 0.95 |
| Confucian ↔ Dharmic/Ubuntu | 0.12 | 0.10 | 0.02 | 0.23 | 0.88 |
| System mean ($\bar{C}$) | — | — | — | — | 0.84 |

**Table 2.** Illustrative pairwise CVCI scores derived from the profiles in Figure 3. Per-dimension absolute differences are shown; the CVCI is one minus their mean. Values demonstrate the instrument and are not empirical measurements.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1 A convergent moral core

The analysis supports an affirmative answer to RQ1. Across the clusters examined, three elements recur with striking regularity: a reciprocity norm, a strong self-transcendence orientation toward the welfare of others, and an ideal of justice tempered by benevolence. This is not a merged creed but an overlapping consensus in Küng and Kuschel's (1993) sense—a shared minimum reached from within different traditions rather than imposed upon them. The recurrence of the golden rule across the reciprocity column of Table 1 is the clearest single marker of this core.

### 5.2 Where divergence is real

Convergence on the core does not dissolve difference. The comparative mapping locates genuine divergence primarily on the openness–conservation dimension: traditions differ in how far the good life is defined by individual self-direction versus embeddedness in inherited order and relationship, and secondarily on self-enhancement, where attitudes to power and achievement diverge. Recognising that the fault line runs here, rather than through the moral core itself, is analytically clarifying and practically consequential. It means that most inter-civilizational friction concerns the institutional expression of shared goods—how authority, family, and community are ordered—rather than disagreement about whether those goods matter.

### 5.3 Moderation as an organising virtue

If divergence concentrates on the ordering of shared goods, then a virtue that governs proportion and balance becomes centrally important. This is the significance of wasatiyyah. Bochner (2026) argues that the UAE's governance operationalises moderation as an active ethical stance: the state neither withdraws from moral questions in the name of neutrality nor imposes a single comprehensive doctrine, but curates a balanced public ethic. In the vocabulary of this paper, moderation is the meta-virtue that manages the openness–conservation tension—precisely the axis on which traditions most diverge. It thereby offers a governance answer to RQ2 that is grounded in a specific civilizational resource yet generalisable in form.

### 5.4 Identity as an open project

A second answer to RQ2 concerns identity. The clash framing depends on treating identities as singular and closed. Sen (2006) rejects this on philosophical grounds; Habbal and Taha (2025) provide regional evidence that people themselves prefer a flexible, plural identity open to intercultural communication. An ethics of coexistence

built on a shared moral core is coherent only if identity can carry multiple affiliations without contradiction. Treating identity as an open project is therefore not a rhetorical flourish but a structural precondition for the framework: it is what allows an individual to stand fully within a particular tradition and within a shared moral horizon at once.

### 5.5 From neutrality to an engineered ecosystem of tolerance

Brankovic (2024) shows that tolerance, far from being a spontaneous by-product of diversity, can be deliberately engineered through policy, education, and partnership. This reframes the practical question. If a convergent moral core exists (Section 5.1), if divergence is bounded and locatable (5.2), if moderation can govern that divergence (5.3), and if identity is open (5.4), then coexistence becomes a design problem rather than a hope. The task is to build institutions that name and cultivate the shared core while protecting legitimate difference—an ethics-based rather than a value-neutral model.

### 5.6 From civilizations to organisations

The same structure that organises civilizational comparison operates, at smaller scale, inside multinational organisations, where individuals formed by different value traditions must cooperate daily. Hofstede's (2001) dimensions were developed precisely from such a setting, and the managerial literature has long treated cultural distance as a source of friction and cost. The framework proposed here suggests a reorientation: rather than treating cross-cultural cooperation as the management of incompatible values, managers can treat it as the management of divergence around a shared core. The practical corollaries mirror those at the civilizational level. First, cooperation is strengthened when the shared normative core—fairness, reciprocity, care for colleagues and stakeholders—is named explicitly and built into stated purpose, rather than left implicit. Second, the predictable site of friction is the conservation–openness axis: differing expectations about hierarchy, autonomy, deference, and the pace of change. Locating friction there, rather than attributing it to a diffuse "culture clash," makes it addressable through concrete practice and design. Third, moderation functions organisationally much as it does in governance: leaders who curate a balanced ethic—neither imposing a single home-country value set nor retreating into a hollow neutrality—are better placed to sustain trust across a plural workforce. In this way the civilizational argument and the concerns of international management converge on a single insight: durable cooperation among diverse actors rests on an identified moral core, honestly named, and a disciplined, respectful management of the differences that remain.

## 6. Implications and Recommendations

The framework carries concrete implications for three domains.

Governance. An ethics-based, moderation-centred model suggests that public institutions should articulate shared goods explicitly—dignity, justice, reciprocity, care for the vulnerable—while deliberately leaving room for divergent institutional expressions of those goods. The measurable, multi-scalar approach to institutionalising moderation proposed by Bochner (2026) offers a template for tracing whether such articulation actually reaches law, diplomacy, public space, and education.

Education. If the moral core is genuinely shared, curricula can foreground it: comparative ethics taught not as a catalogue of incompatible systems but as variations on common goods. Cultivating the capacity to hold plural affiliations—identity as an open project—should be an explicit educational aim, consistent with the intercultural competence agenda in the tolerance literature (Brankovic, 2024; Habbal & Taha, 2025).

Inter-civilizational dialogue. Dialogue is more productive when it begins from mapped convergence and names divergence precisely. An instrument like the CVCI, even in heuristic form, can structure such dialogue by directing attention to the specific dimensions where traditions actually differ, rather than allowing disagreement about institutional forms to masquerade as disagreement about fundamental values.

For international management and organisational practice—domains in which value diversity is a daily operational reality—the same logic applies: durable cross-cultural cooperation rests on identifying a shared normative core and managing divergence at the level of practice, rather than either assuming uniform values or exaggerating incommensurability.

**Table 3.** consolidates these implications by translating each higher-order value category into a corresponding design principle for the three domains. The pattern it makes visible is deliberate: self-transcendence, the site of greatest convergence, is where institutions should build the shared, explicitly named core; the conservation–openness contrast, the site of greatest divergence, is where institutions should protect legitimate difference and cultivate moderation; and self-enhancement is where transparent, accountable limits matter most.

| Value dimension (Schwartz) | Governance design principle | Educational aim | Dialogue focus |
|---|---|---|---|
| Self-transcendence (shared core) | Name shared goods explicitly: dignity, justice, reciprocity, care for the vulnerable | Teach comparative ethics as variations on common goods | Begin from mapped convergence; affirm the reciprocity norm |
| Conservation (divergence axis) | Protect legitimate difference in ordering family, authority, community | Cultivate respect for inherited relationship and order | Distinguish disagreement over institutional form from disagreement over goods |
| Openness to change (divergence axis) | Allow plural institutional expressions; avoid imposed uniformity | Foster identity as an open project; intercultural competence | Name the openness–conservation tension precisely, not diffusely |
| Self-enhancement (power, achievement) | Set transparent, accountable limits on power; temper with iḥsān / benevolence | Frame achievement within responsibility to others | Surface asymmetries of power that distort dialogue |

**Table 3.** Translating higher-order value categories into design principles for governance, education, and inter-civilizational dialogue. The mapping applies the convergence–divergence pattern of Section 4 to institutional practice.

## 7. Limitations and Future Research

Three limitations bound these claims. First, the civilizational clusters are heuristic simplifications of internally plural traditions; the framework should be read as a scaffold for finer-grained analysis, not a substitute for it. Second, the quantitative figures and the CVCI computation are illustrative: they demonstrate the instrument's logic but are not empirical measurements, and the index awaits validation against primary value data. Third, the analysis is synthetic rather than field-based, and inherits the assumptions of the value theories it integrates. Future research should populate the CVCI with World Values Survey and European Social Survey data, test its convergence estimates empirically, and examine whether measured convergence predicts real-world indicators of coexistence such as inter-group trust. Comparative case studies of moderation-based governance across several plural societies would further test the generalisability of the ethics-based model.

## 8. Conclusion

The study of civilizations is inseparable from the study of values and ethics, and the prevailing pessimism about civilizational difference rests on an overstated premise of incompatible moral cores. Mapping the ethical vocabularies of five traditions onto a validated structure of basic human values reveals a robust convergent core—reciprocity and a shared orientation toward the welfare of others—alongside genuine but bounded divergence concentrated on the ordering of inherited relationship against individual self-direction. Locating divergence precisely turns coexistence from a residual hope into a design problem. Its solution, this paper has argued, lies not in value-neutrality but in an ethics-based model organised around moderation as a governing virtue, tolerance as an engineered ecosystem, and identity as an open project. Such a model names shared goods explicitly while protecting difference. In a plural world, this is not a diminished aspiration but a demanding and constructive one—and, on the evidence of the traditions themselves, a well-founded one.

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