

BALANCED GLOBAL AND CONTEXTUAL ETHICAL VALUES - A COMPARISON OF OFFICIAL NATIONAL VALUE SYSTEMS AND PROPOSALS FOR THE NEW CONTEXT

Christoph Stueckelberger^(*)

***Abstract:** Globalisation strengthened international common values, as agreed by the community of nations in the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2015-2030. However, new polarizations and signs of new Cold War lead many countries to reformulate their own national values in the new context. Nations often formulate their national values in the preambles of their constitutions. This contribution analyses national values of selected seven countries (Asia: Viet Nam, China, Bhutan. Europe/US: US, Switzerland, France, Africa: South Africa) and compares them with the UN SDGs.*

The paper calls for a balanced ethical system of global and contextual values, strengthening the unity of humanity and the diversity of cultures, religions and economic-social systems. It shows the interconnectivity of values such as community and freedom, justice/equality and peace, sovereignty and solidarity. It also calls for a balance of virtues such as self-confidence and humility, respect and courage, reliability and integrity¹.

This article concludes with a number of questions and recommendations for the development of national value systems in the new context.

Keywords: *global ethical values, contextual ethical values, official national value systems, new context.*

1. Introduction: Current polarization as new context

Modern Globalisation with global trade and cooperation accelerated with the end of the bipolar world after 1989. It strengthened international common

values, as agreed by the community of nations in the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2015-2030. But it also led to a dominance

^(*) Prof. Dr., President and Founder of Globethics Foundation, Geneva, Switzerland.

of a Western World Order. With the global financial crisis of 2007-2009, globalization was more and more replaced by regionalization and even nationalism in order to become less vulnerable through internationally connected markets and supply chains. The further rise of China and South East Asia and South Asia - the 21st century is perceived as the Asia Century - with the US for fight to remain the main superpower, leads to a new polarizations and signs of new Cold War. It leads many countries to reformulate their own national values in the new context. Many countries are challenged to position themselves as allies of USA or China. Europe tries to be friends of both superpowers, but is to some extent divided on this. Russia lost its credibility as superpower because of the Ukraine war. The majority of countries in Asia, Africa and South America are searching for a new position in the new geopolitical context. The majority of all countries in the world are members of the Non-aligned movement (NAM), 125 of 200, which represents 60 percent of all countries. I prefer to call them multi-aligned (MAM), because they do not want to be isolated-autarkic, but in good relation with US and China, with all nations where it fits their interests and is in line with their national values. Viet Nam is a leading country in this

Multi-Aligned alliance of countries! We will come back to it.

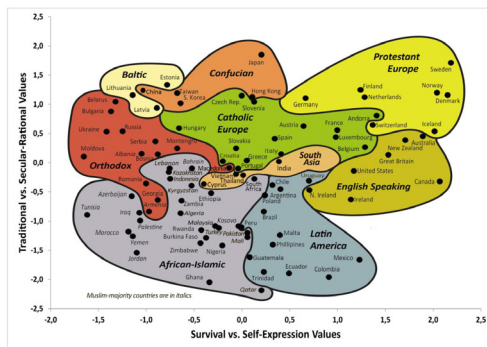
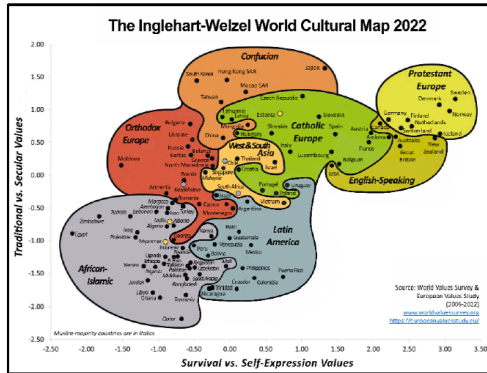
In this text, especially in the second part, I often refer to my new book “Globalance towards a New world Order. Ethics Matters and Motivates”².

2. Typology of Values Systems and Cultures

The *World Values Survey* is a long term, profound and differentiated survey of value-developments around in different countries and cultures around the globe. It is based on large interviews in selected countries and exists since over 30 years, with a survey every five years. the last one 2017-2022 was published in 2023. It shows the cluster on the horizontal line from traditional to secular-rational values and on the horizontal line survival vers self-expression values. It distinguishes eight different cultural value-clusters: 1. African-Islamic, 2. Latin America, 3. Orthodox Europe, 4. Confucian, 5. West- and South Asia, 6. Catholic Europe, 7. Protestant Europe, 8. English-speaking, the following graphs shows the result of the 2022 map³:

If we compare the first map of 2022 with the second map of the World Values Survey 6, 2012-2017, we see substantial modifications., even the overall position of countries and between them remains similar. However, substantial changes in social relations, social capital and social

challenges arose over the last decades with its fast economic and societal development⁴.



3. National Value Systems. Seven Examples

3.1. National Values in Preambles of National Constitutions

Each group of people, from family to nations, need a set of common values and values for objectives and behavior in order to settle conflicts, build trust and finally live in peace. On family or group level, these are often unwritten rules, on the level of large institutions or nations, such common values are built by ideologies, languages, religions,

cultural heritage and narratives about the history of the community. Depending on the political system, national values are democratically agreed, by rulers declared or by dictators implemented by force. National value systems are on one hand stable and long term valid, but on the other hand also in constant transformation and adaptation, dependent on new challenges such as migration, natural or societal catastrophes or political revolutions. National value systems are also influenced by alliances of nations on regional, ideological, continental or international level and common agreed standards such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals SDGs.

Nations often formulate their national values in the preambles of their constitutions. They are then concretized in the articles of the constitution and manifold legislations and rules. In this contribution we analyse national values of selected seven countries and compare them. We cannot go into details. The effort only shows similarities and differences. We select from Asia Viet Nam, China and Bhutan, from Americas USA, from Europe Switzerland and France and from Africa South Africa. This selection is done based on following criteria: different continents, different size of country, different economic,

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cultural and religious systems and historical development of values.

We compare these values also with the UN SDGs as a globally agreed set of goals, based on values for humanity. The last column lists the 12 core values in my own concept as elaboration in extenso in the book *Globalance*.

3.2. National Values in the Preamble of the Constitution. Selected Countries. Sorted by Preamble

Vietnam	China	Bhutan	USA	France	Switzerland	South Africa	UN SDGs	Globalance
Independence	Overthrow oppression, feudalism and bureaucratic oppression	Sovereignty	Justice	Liberty	Responsibility towards creation	Justice	Life in dignity	Sustainability
Sovereignty	Independence	Liberty	Popular Sovereignty	Equality	Liberty	Freedom	Equality	Solidarity
Unity	Equality	Justice	Unity	Fraternity	Democracy	Respect	Responsibility	Community
Democracy	Unity	Tranquility	Domestic Tranquility	Democracy	Independence	Unity in diversity	Peace	Justice
Justice	Mutual assistance	Unity	Common Defense	Sovereignty	Peace	Democracy	Environment	Empowerment
Civilization	Harmony	Happiness	General Welfare	Pluralism	Solidarity	Open	Prosperity	Responsibility
People all-round development	Prosper	Well-being	Liberty	No death penalty	Openness	Equally protect every citizen	Partnerships	Participation
Equality of ethnicities	Strong	The King as Symbol of Kingdom and people	Responsibility towards future generations		Respect for diversity	Improve the quality of life		Freedom
People's Rights and Responsibilities	Socialism with Chinese Characteristics	Monarchy	Perfect		Responsibility towards future generations	Free the potential of each person		Security
	Harmonious Beautiful	Equal			Well-being of the weakest	Sovereign		Peace
	Great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation	Sustainable Society						

3.3. National Values in the Preamble of the Constitution. Selected Countries. Sorted by Values

Countries Values	Vietnam	China	Bhutan	USA	France	Switzerland
Freedom		No imperialism, feudalism	Liberty	Liberty	Liberty	Liberty
Justical Equality	Equality	Equality	Equality	Justice	Equality	Respect for diversity
Sovereignty	Independence	Independence	Sovereignty	Sovereignty	Sovereignty	Independence
Sustainability	Civilisation		Sustainable Society	Responsibility towards future generations		Responsibility towards creation and future generations
Community	Democracy	Socialism with Chinese Characteristics	Monarchy	Democracy	Democracy	Democracy
Participation	People's Rights/Responsibilities	Mutual assistance	Unity	Unity	Fraternity	Openness
Welfare	People's development	Prosperity	Happiness, Well-being	General Welfare		Well-being of the weakest
Security	Unity	Unity	Harmony	Common Defense	No death penalty	Solidarity
Peace		Harmony	Tranquility	Domestic Tranquility	Pluralism	Peace

3.4. Observations in the comparison of the selected National Value Systems

The selected, exemplary preambles show a good number of similarities in values. (second table by values).

Nations strive for wellbeing of its people, for peace, security, sovereignty, environmental sustainability, freedom and equal, fair treatment of its citizens and people.

However, the first table, sorted by Preambles, shows differences in the order and thus priorities of values. Also, the political system - democracy, monarchy etc. - make of course a difference. In fine-tuning, it is also important to look at cultural specificities of words. Whereas harmony and harmonious society are important terms in the Asian Confucian and Buddhist context, Western countries use more the terms peace or unity in diversity. Sovereignty and unity are important for each nation, but international solidarity is rarely emphasized in preambles, whereas the UN SDGs strongly call for it.

4. Balanced, Interconnected Values and Virtues

The new context of increased polarization can be seen just as a power struggle, a clash of civilizations, or an economic fight for access to resources. All these are obvious aspects. In addition, I analyze the conflicts from an ethical perspective as conflicts between values and their priorities: Freedom or equality? Security or people's democratic participation? Environmental sustainability or material prosperity? Etc. My core concept to

reduce and overcome polarization is Globalance, a global balance of values and also of virtues.

4.1. Definition and Characteristics

Globalance, the short form of global balance, in my definition means “a global balance of values and virtues, which are opposites or in tension to each other but belong together. Globalance is a worldview of the combination and reconciliation of opposites, the “and” instead of the “or”, based on the assumption of a living centre holding the opposites together. Globalance leads to a dynamic (not static) and innovative middle way in overcoming extremisms and fundamentalisms. Globalance has roots in the wisdom and beliefs of many world religions, cultures and philosophical traditions (more in the East than in the West). Globalance is a worldview and strategy which recognizes the connectivity and relationality (being in relation) of values, virtues and all phenomena. It recognizes the relativity of one’s own standpoint and therefore is self-critical. Globalance strives to be inclusive-holistic⁵.

13 core characteristics of Globalance of values and virtues are the “and” instead of the “or”⁶:

Opposites as the two sides of the same coin

Life from the centre of being

Dialectic, not dualistic

Monistic, not imperialistic

Dynamic, not static

Evolutionary and revolutionary

Inclusive, not exclusive

Balance in body and natural law

Values-driven, not values-denying.

Unity in diversity, diversity in unity

Religious and non-religious

Self-critical, not autocratic

Holistic, not fragmented.

4.2. Five Modes of Dealing with Opposites

As opposites and polarisation are a basic fact in life and in the new global context, how can we then deal with it? Five main modes can be distinguished⁷:

Destruction: One opposite tries to destroy the other in order to dominate with absolute power. This may lead to a short-term victory, but cannot be sustainable as the oppressed, denied, marginalized or “killed” opposite cannot be eradicated, it will return.

Fusion: The opposites merge, become one, and neutralize each other with the result of no energy or confused energy or productive energy.

Innovation: The opposites combine to create together something new, e.g. a child as “product” of a man and a woman, whereas the opposites remain and are at the same time also transformed.

Synthesis: Similar to innovation, the opposites sublimate, absorb from

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the other, integrate and transform in a dialectic way to a higher new reality.

Balance: The opposites are in a constant relation and interaction of dynamic balancing and thus creating and procreating life as an ongoing evolutionary (sometimes disruptive-revolutionary) process on material and spiritual, individual and structural level, step by step, without mortal risks of extremes, with caring mindfulness and with joy.

This typology can also be used to check how to deal with opposite values in the development of a National Value System in multi-cultural and transformative contexts. Is the system excluding some values or being inclusive, is it balancing or striving towards the purity of some values?

4.3. 'isms' as Threat to Balanced Value Systems

An ideology⁸ is a worldview of ideas, values and beliefs, which reduces the complexity of reality by giving priority to one main topic and value. Therefore, an ideology is interpreting all aspects of reality in a way, which fits into the one system and denies other parts of reality and values. Ideologies reduce complexity to a seemingly consistent system. Ideologies attract people by pretending to give simple solutions to complex situations. Most of the worldviews ending with "-ism"

represent such one-sided, ideological perspectives. Worldviews with the ending "-ism" often (not always) indicate ideologies with a totalitarian tendency. The core values of such ideologies are ethically speaking positive, but they turn into a negative, unethical system by maximizing and absolutizing one value and thus contributing to polarisation.

Examples of such "-isms" are *Terrorism, Extremism, Fundamentalism, Atheism, Cyberism, Dataism, Environmentalism, Nationalism, Populism, Protectionism, Absolutism, Sexism, Racism, Fascism, Conspirationism.*

4.4. Concepts of Global Balance in World Philosophies and Religions

Balancing values and virtues is a concept on all continents and throughout world history⁹. Asian ancient traditions, including from Viet Nam, have been especially strong:

in World Philosophies, the balance of values is expressed e.g. in Confucianism with its concept of the harmony and harmonious society, in ancient Greek philosophy by Aristotle with the profound concept of mesotes, the middle way (not as a static, but dynamic balancing of opposites), in traditional and indigenous cultures it is often expressed in the community orientation which has to balance the

interests of sectors or the population. It is expressed e.g. in the contemporary African Ubuntu philosophy.

in World Religions, already in ancient Egypt, the goddess Maat was the goddess of balance, of the right measure. Balance of values is expressed in Buddhism in mindfulness, in Daoism in the balance of Yin and Yang, in Judaism and Christianity in the love for the other as oneself, in Islam in respecting God's law etc.

in Contemporary World Views, balancing values is especially relevant in ecological issues, where the interests of human and of non-human beings have to be balanced and reconciled. In terms of economic concepts, the balance between socialism (with its priority on equality) and capitalism (with its priority on freedom) is highly relevant. Policies of socially and environmentally regulated market economies are an effort, to balance free markets and freedom of entrepreneurship with social justice and environmental sustainability, which often needs regulatory measures by the governments or international voluntary or legally binding standards.

The UN Sustainable Development Goals SDGs (2015-2030) are themselves an impressive effort of the world community of states to establish a balanced program of 17 goals which.

This short glimpse on concepts of balancing values and virtues (in detail developed in my book *Globalance*) shows that the search for a balanced, harmonious yet dynamic society exists throughout millennia, cultures¹⁰, religions and, economic and political systems. A national value system such as for Viet Nam can refer and be built on this vast historic sources, while at the same time transforming them to new contexts and new needs such as new technologies such as Artificial Intelligence and new challenges such as global climate warming.

Balancing opposites in order to reach stability, peace, security, fairness, progress, dignity, empowerment and fullness of life seems a truly global thirst and vision of humanity. Psychologists may call it archetypical setting of human psyche, philosophers may call it the solution for rational discourse on conflicting realities, environmentalists may call it the inherent mechanism of ecosystems and believers may call it the expression of the divine world order.

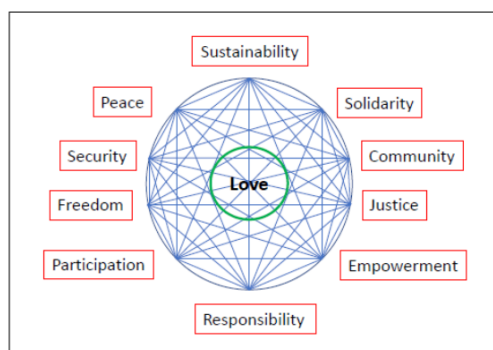
This concept of *Globalance* offers a way to overcome polarization and the various forms of -isms such as extremism, fundamentalism etc.

4.5. *Globalance: Interconnected, Relational Values*

The concept of *Globalance* puts all

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fundamental values in relation to each other. They are neither in a hierarchy like a pyramid nor free floating stars. They can be implemented in its full sense and in a harmonious way only by the holistic view of their interconnectivity. By the way, the similar interconnectivity is also true for the 17 SDGs and their values (graphs by the author):



5. Questions and Recommendations for National Values In this short presentation, I cannot dig deep into the details of the consequences of the concept of Globalance for national value systems. However, I

conclude with some questions and recommendations.

Questions:

How can national values be identified, strengthened and implemented?

How can priorities of values be set for specific contexts and regions while preserving the holistic view of the interconnectivity and relational character of the various values?

Which political mechanisms are most appropriate, efficient, sustainable and peaceful to solve conflicts between competing values and virtues?

How can Viet Nam in its national values reject and overcome negative values from colonial and postcolonial periods and integrate positive values from the own cultures and cultures brought from outside and which are now part of Viet Namese identity?

How can Viet Nam keep and strengthen its identity while being a pluralist society with competing values and economic, political, social and religious value systems? (Balancing national identity and international openness)

How can National Values of Viet Nam be in line with and express the UN Sustainable Development Goals? Even though these are goals for 2015-2030, the topics remain long term objectives of national developments and can therefore serve as inspiration

and benchmark also beyond 2030.

For centuries, Viet Nam has been humiliated by many powers. At the same time, Viet Nameese cultures developed and maintained a strong identity with its values and virtues.

In the above - mentioned World Values Survey, Viet Nam was in horizontal and vertical lines almost in the middle, balanced between tradition and modernity, existential survival and individualistic self-expression. How can Viet Nam in its national values emphasize this virtue of the harmonious, peaceful middle way?

Viet Nam is one of the prominent members of the non-aligned movement NAM (I prefer the term multi-aligned Movement MAM). It tries to be cooperative with the big neighbour and cultural allie China and at the same time have the freedom to cooperate with the US and many other countries of mutual benefit. How can Viet Nam contribute with its national values to strengthen and renew the MAM countries as a bridge in a polarized world?

Recommendations:

With deep respect for the people, government and culture of Viet Nam as a jewel among the nations on this globe, and in all modesty, I dare to propose some recommendations on National Values of Viet Nam, for discussion. I do it from the perspective of global ethics

as value discipline, based in the global UN city of Geneva and at the same time being a Swiss where neutrality and peaceful compromises are in our DNA:

Recommendation 1

As National Values of Viet Nam to

- Strive for and balance the values of freedom and social justice

- Strive for and balance the values of free, but socially and environmentally regulated markets

- Strive for and balance the values of individual rights and community building

- Strive for and balance the values of national sovereignty and international solidarity

- Strive for and balance the values of environmental sustainability and technological innovation

- Strive for and balance the values of cultural and religious diversity and national unity.

Recommendation 2

To have a multi-year common search for common national values, where the process of debate is as important as the result. The public, open-minded and fair debate strengthens and renews national values. Each generation has to renew and confirm them. As Viet Nam has a young population, 15-30year old people should be especially invited to be engaged in the debate.

Recommendation 3

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A National Values System has to be by nature rather general. Fundamental values are principles, which have to be concretized. The articles in the constitution, the manifold laws in the legislation, the non-binding rules and voluntary standards and personal commitments together should be a living, dynamic expression of the fundamental values. National values can become sterile and not convincing if they are repeated in a dogmatic and top-down manner. They should express life and life is in constant change. This means to stick to fundamental national values while giving room for interpretation, adaptation, contextualisation and innovation.

Recommendation 4

To deeply study and consider the positive relation between socialism and religions. Viet Nam as a socialist country with deep religious cultural roots has a great potential to unfold the ethical synergies between religious and socialist values, as the tradition of religious socialism has shown since over a century. Religions include the variety of religions such as Buddhism, Daoism, Christianity, Islam, Caode etc. Confucianism remains a core value-basis.

Recommendation 5

Materialism, consumerism and

agnosticism seem to become a predominant value-setting in Viet Nam as in many parts of the world. These values are often leading to individualism and lack of community-orientation and solidarity. Strong values for the community of the people are needed in order to have national identity and coherence. At the same time, this community-orientation should not be abused for nationalist exclusion, superiority-attitudes or lack of international solidarity.

Recommendation 6

Viet Nam with its painful history of colonialism and humiliation by aggressors maintained an impressive capacity of forgiving, reconciliation and renewal. With this gift of values, Vietnamese people and Viet Nam as a nation can play a pro-active role as mediator in cultural, religious, social and geo - political conflicts in Asia and beyond.

Recommendation 7

National Values of Viet Nam should renew the commitment for a Multi-Aligned Movement (MAM) as a community of states, which want to cooperate with East and West, North and South and all nations, which are committed to the UN SDGs and a life in dignity for all human and non-human creatures.

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