

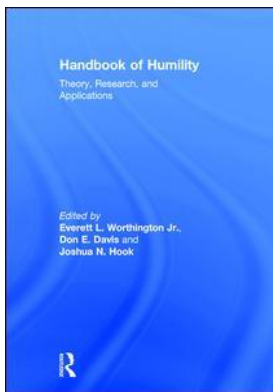
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## **Handbook of Humility Theory, Research, and Applications**

Everett L. Worthington, Don E. Davis, Joshua N. Hook

### **Cultural Humility**

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David K. Mosher, Joshua N. Hook, Jennifer E. Farrell, C. Edward Watkins,  
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## CULTURAL HUMILITY

*David K. Mosher, Joshua N. Hook, Jennifer E. Farrell,  
C. Edward Watkins, Jr., and Don E. Davis*

With the rise of positive psychology near the turn of the twenty-first century (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), the study of virtues has flourished and rapidly expanded. Due to definition and measurement problems, the study of humility got off to a slow start relative to other virtues (Davis, Worthington, & Hook, 2010); however, this appears to be changing, and researchers have begun to study humility in a variety of settings and situations.

The role of humility in the context of cultural factors that might strain a relationship, called *cultural humility* (Hook, Davis, Owen, Worthington, & Utsey, 2013), is one important area that has received increased attention in recent years. Cultural humility involves both intrapersonal and interpersonal components. Intrapersonally, cultural humility involves an awareness of (a) limitations of one's own cultural worldview and (b) limitations in one's ability to understand the cultural background and experiences of others. Interpersonally, cultural humility involves a stance that is other-oriented toward (or open to) another individual's or group's cultural background and worldview (Hook et al., 2013). Cultural humility prioritizes developing mutual respect and partnerships with others.

Because individuals and groups can be highly invested in their own cultural worldview, beliefs, and values, meaningfully infusing humility into dialogues about cultural differences can be difficult. Cross-cultural research supports the idea that culture and conflict are inextricably intertwined (Berry, 2002). Cross-cultural conflicts, often inspired by group belief and value differences, appear in varied contexts (e.g., politics, interfaith dialogue, academia, etc.) and take varied forms (e.g., ruptured relationship bond or group competition over limited resources). In our current cultural context, examples abound of cultural differences being linked with disagreement and conflict between groups (e.g., the Black Lives Matter movement and resistance toward it, attitudes toward immigration and illegal immigrants, attitudes toward Muslims, conflicts about abortion and LGBT issues, etc.). Cultural humility can be essential to working through such conflicts.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a comprehensive literature review about cultural humility. We (a) consolidate definitions of cultural humility and distinguish it from other related concepts such as cultural competence, (b) consider the theoretical foundation of cultural humility, and (c) summarize the current empirical literature. By summarizing the current knowledge base, we hope to galvanize and chart direction for further work in this area.

## **Method**

### ***Inclusion Criteria***

We included all publications from the present literature that explicitly focused on measuring, defining, or describing cultural humility (e.g., articles that contained the words “cultural humility” in the title or included cultural humility as a measured variable). We included both theoretical and empirical articles, published and unpublished. We excluded studies that involved only brief reflections about cultural humility.

### ***Literature Search***

First, we conducted our literature search by using the following computer databases: PsycINFO, PsycARTICLES, PubMed, Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection, Academic Search Complete, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, and Google Scholar, up to February 5, 2016. The search included the following key terms: “cultural” and “humility.” Second, we searched the reference lists of the articles to identify any missed studies. Overall, a total of 65 studies were identified using our search criteria. Eleven articles did not focus specifically on cultural humility and were excluded, leaving 54 reviewable studies.

## **Results**

Of the 54 reviewed studies, 33 were theoretical papers and 21 were empirical studies. A table and reference list of the included studies is available from the first author. The literature review is organized into two sections: (a) theoretical/conceptual papers and (b) empirical studies.

### ***Theoretical/Conceptual Papers***

Most cultural humility publications have been theoretical in nature. These theoretical papers were categorized into three main themes: (a) work that sought to spur research by defining and providing a conceptual framework for cultural humility; (b) work that sought to distinguish or differentiate cultural humility from other relevant terms (e.g., cultural competence); and (c) work that stressed the importance of cultural humility across a wide range of fields and domains.

*Defining Cultural Humility*

To identify core features and consolidate definitions of cultural humility, it is important to review definitional commonalities and differences. Some core aspects of cultural humility were found across almost all definitions. First, cultural humility has been viewed as a lifelong learning experience rather than an end point. For example, in Borkan, Culhane-Pera, and Goldman's (2008) model, the "L" in the Acronym H.U.M.B.L.E. stands for lifelong learner. (The other letters in the acronym are H—Be Humble about the assumptions you make about knowing the world from your patients' shoes; U—Understand how your own background and culture can affect your care of patients; M—Motivate yourself to learn more about the patient's background, culture, health beliefs, and practices, as well as the unique points of view of their families and communities; B—Begin to incorporate this knowledge into your care; and E—Emphasize respect and negotiate treatment plans.) Similarly, Chang, Simon, and Dong (2012) suggested that cultural humility involves a lifelong process of learning by fully engaging patients through active listening. This focus on lifelong learning is especially important when contrasting cultural humility and other related constructs such as cultural competence, which implies that people will get to a certain place after training and experience where they are deemed "competent." Cultural humility, in contrast, is often conceptualized as a virtue or value that shapes one's worldview, mind-set, or way of being across the lifespan.

Second, most cultural humility definitions include a focus on cultural self-awareness and the importance of checking one's cultural assumptions and biases via intrapersonal reflection. Cultural humility is considered to be anti-ethnocentric, emphasizing development of understanding others through exploration, active listening, and being mindful of one's own assumptions and biases (Cruess, Cruess, & Steinert, 2010; Fahey et al., 2013; Foronda, Baptiste, Reinholdt, & Ousman, 2016; Foronda & MacWilliams, 2015; Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998). For example, Foronda et al. (2016) describe cultural humility as follows: "In a multicultural world where power imbalances exist, cultural humility is a process of openness, self-awareness, being egoless, and incorporating self-reflection and critique after willingly interacting with diverse individuals" (p. 4).

Third, most definitions of cultural humility include a focus on interpersonal respect in cross-cultural interactions. Although respecting others is not necessarily unique to cultural humility, it is an important component that helps individuals develop and maintain positive cross-cultural interactions and relationships. For example, Miller (2009) demonstrated the importance of cultural humility in fostering long-term partnerships of nurses from different countries.

Similarly, Chang, Dong, and Simon (2011) theorized that culturally humble people engage others in conversations that foster mutual respect.

In addition to lifelong learning, cultural self-awareness, and interpersonal respect, some writers incorporated other constructs into their cultural humility definition. These are constructs that are not yet widely accepted as core to the definition of cultural humility, but they merit future thought and research. For example, cultural humility has been theorized to incorporate a fluid-thinking framework that requires personal accountability in navigating power differentials (Fisher-Borne, Cain, & Martin, 2015). Researchers who focus on constructs such as fluid thinking aim to explore the underlying cognitive processes of culturally humble people that set them apart from culturally arrogant or ethnocentric individuals. This focus aligns well with other humility research, which theorizes that humility is a governing force of internal processes that often leads to more positive social interactions (Lavelock et al., 2014). In other cases, cultural humility has been defined as involving vulnerable authenticity *and* a willingness to adopt a nonexpert stance. As Issacson indicated (2014), not being an expert requires the courage to be vulnerable, and vulnerable authenticity helps foster key elements of cultural humility (e.g., mutual respect, lifelong learning).

Thus, most researchers agree that cultural humility involves a lifelong process that involves self-awareness, intrapersonal reflection, and interpersonal respect in cross-cultural interactions. The core components of this definition are similar to those of humility in general, which has been defined as including both intrapersonal (i.e., self-awareness) and interpersonal (i.e., other-oriented) components (Davis et al., 2011). Other components (e.g., fluid thinking, vulnerable authenticity) have been proposed by some researchers as important aspects of cultural humility, but more research is necessary to determine whether these constructs are constitutive to the definition of cultural humility, or simply associated with cultural humility (but not core to its definition).

#### *Cultural Humility versus Cultural Competence*

Many studies have compared and contrasted cultural humility with cultural competence. The first main point of comparison has been whether cultural humility is a separate model from the cultural competence model or an important addition to the cultural competence model. Some authors argued that cultural humility is a completely separate concept, a different viewpoint, approach, or way of life that has not been included in cultural competence models. One example is Yeager and Bauer-Wu's (2013) distinction that cultural humility is not defined by the end result of knowledge/skills acquisition, but rather as a lifelong commitment to value others culturally and reflect on one's own cultural background.

Others have suggested that cultural humility is actually an expansion of the original cultural competence focus on cultural knowledge, awareness, and skills. For instance, Ross (2010) conceptualized cultural humility as a strand within cultural competence that expands knowledge, attitude, and skills (e.g., knowledge of health disparities in treatment, recognition of privilege, and non-authoritarian communication skills).

The second main point of comparison between cultural humility and cultural competence has been on the extent to which the models focus on attitudes versus a set of skills. In general, cultural humility is viewed more as an attitude, value, or way of being, whereas cultural competence has focused on skills or ways of doing. For example, Butler et al. (2011) suggested rebranding cultural competence as cultural humility for medical multicultural education, emphasizing lifelong learning rather than knowledge/skills acquisition. Most discussion has centered on cultural humility as a mind-set, with far less attention being given to cultural humility “skills” (cf., active listening; Ortega & Faller, 2011).

It remains to be seen whether cultural humility will be viewed as an independent model or be subsumed as part of the existing cultural competence framework. What appears to be clear is that the focus on cultural humility does offer something new and important that was perhaps not given adequate attention in existing models of cultural competence. There may be conceptual advantages to the cultural humility framework relative to the cultural competence framework, especially for training purposes. For example, it may be important to frame cultural training as a process rather than an end goal, which fits with the cultural humility framework. Also, models of cultural competence may imply that there is an agreed-upon knowledge base and set of skills that must be mastered by trainees, which may not be true for all fields. Finally, cultural humility draws from pre-existing theory and research on humility as a character strength or virtue that promotes social bonds and facilitates the self-regulation of behavior, which may support the idea of cultural humility being key in buffering against cross-cultural conflicts (Davis et al., 2013).

#### *Importance of Cultural Humility Across Domains*

The third major theme to emerge is that the theoretical literature about cultural humility is quite diverse and spread across many fields and disciplines. Cultural humility appears to be highly important for the helping disciplines, such as medicine, psychology, and social work, but it could arguably apply to any profession that involves cross-cultural engagement (Cruess et al., 2010). For example, Groll (2014) contended that cultural humility, because it contributes to respect, understanding, and partnership, is important for engineering practice.

Moreover, cultural humility goes beyond occupational benefits. It is often seen as a way of life that enhances all relationships (Foronda et al., 2016). Humility may be the underlying variable that draws people closer together, buffers against relationship disruptions, and helps repair damaged relationships (Davis et al., 2013; Farrell et al., 2015). Cultural humility seemingly functions similarly in matters of cultural conflict and likely applies to myriad cross-cultural relationships. For example, cultural humility could help improve relationships in a business setting, where individuals or groups from different cultures compete over limited resources. If culture can be a major source of relational conflict, perhaps cultural humility is its antidote. Although most existing research on cultural humility has been focused in the counseling and helping professions, it is clear that cultural humility may have applications across a wide variety of domains.

### *Empirical Studies*

In this section, we first summarize the methods used in the reviewed empirical studies and, second, summarize the main empirical findings.

#### *Methods Used in Empirical Studies*

##### RESEARCH DESIGN

Of the 21 reviewed empirical studies, the majority ( $N = 11$ ) were qualitative, with fewer studies using quantitative ( $N = 5$ ) or mixed-methods designs ( $N = 5$ ). This qualitative emphasis is likely because cultural humility is a relatively new research area. Studies of new concepts often describe and explore first before testing specific hypotheses. For example, one qualitative study was a cross-sectional life history study of physical therapists; the primary research method was one-on-one semistructured interviews about practicing cultural humility (Hilliard, 2011). Most reviewed studies used cross-sectional research designs ( $N = 18$ ) (e.g., involving interviews, ethnographies, or surveys). However, two studies used a longitudinal research design (Schuessler, Wilder, & Byrd, 2012; Sheridan, Bennett, & Blome, 2013) and one used an experimental design (Kutob et al., 2013). One of the longitudinal studies examined 200 journal entries from 50 nursing students across two years of study (Schuessler et al., 2012). The second longitudinal study examined the effects of a cultural humility training program in three cohorts of social work students ( $N = 100$ ) across four years that were transitioning from working in Western countries to another cultural context (Sheridan et al., 2013).

##### PARTICIPANTS

Sample size was reported in 18 studies. The total number of participants was 2,129. Only 11 of the 18 studies reported sample demographic characteristics;

the majority of participants were female (60.9%). About half of the participants (50.2%) identified as White, with the rest identified as a racial/ethnic minority. Only eight studies reported participants' mean age; the mean age was 31.7 years.

#### MEASURES

Three quantitative studies measured cultural humility using the Cultural Humility Scale (CHS; Hook et al., 2013). The CHS is a 12-item other-report measure of the extent to which a therapist was culturally humble toward the most important aspects of a client's cultural background. It includes both positive (i.e., "Is open to explore") and negative (i.e., "Makes assumptions about me") items. Items on the CHS had strong factor loadings, and the scale showed evidence of internal consistency and construct validity, being significantly correlated with measures of cultural competence, working alliance, and client improvement. The CHS is a relatively recent scale, and more research on the CHS is needed. However, it appears to be a promising instrument for research on cultural humility moving forward.

A fourth quantitative study used the Cultural Competence Assessment Tool (CCAT; Kutob et al., 2013) to assess cultural competence and cultural humility. The CCAT is a 68-item self-report measure that was modified to include items specifically pertaining to American Indian and Asian racial groups, which resulted in a total of 81 items. There are six subscales, including (a) Cultural Self-Awareness, (b) Nonjudgmental Thinking, (c) Cultural Knowledge, (d) Nonverbal Communication, (e) Empowerment, and (f) Explanatory Model Elicitation. Although the CCAT was used in one study to assess cultural competence and cultural humility, the original purpose of the scale was to be a self-assessment tool for doctors in training courses on cultural competency, and the majority of items are focused on competency rather than humility.

One mixed-methods study used the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI; Hammer, Bennett, & Wiseman, 2003) and the Miville-Guzman Universality-Diversity Scale—Short (M-GUDS-s; Fuertes, Miville, Mohr, Sedlacek, & Gretchen, 2000) to assess cultural humility. The IDI was based on Bennett's developmental model of intercultural sensitivity and consists of a 50-item questionnaire that is administered and scored electronically. The IDI provides individual and group scores referred to as developmental orientation (DO) and perceived orientation (PO). The DO score indicates the primary orientation toward cultural difference, whereas the PO score represents how people rate their own capabilities in adapting to cultural differences. The M-GUDS-s is a 15-item questionnaire that was developed based on a theoretical, holistic notion of a Universal-Diverse Orientation (UDO). The



measure has three subscales: diversity of contact, relativistic appreciation, and comfort with differences. Together, these two measures were a part of an assessment of first-year engineering students' cultural humility.

None of the qualitative studies used the same method for assessing cultural humility. One study used home ethnography to assess cultural humility through stories told by participants. Four studies used various methods of interviews (e.g., semistructured, life history method), and two studies created quantitative Likert-scale, self-report measures. Another four studies used various coding methods (e.g., hermeneutic phenomenology) of journals, videotapes, or observations. One exploratory study drew from a combination of theories and a post-modern form of inquiry associated with Narrative Therapy and Collaborative Therapy. One study did not report any measurements or observation methods.

Overall, the research designs of most studies appeared to lack rigorous methodologies found in established fields. This may be due to cultural humility being a relatively new area of research. Several of the studies utilized convenience samples, untested measures of cultural humility, and some studies did not report the characteristics of their sample at all. Relatively few studies utilized more sophisticated research designs or sampling techniques. Moving forward, there is ample opportunity for researchers to explore the topic of cultural humility using more sophisticated research designs and sampling techniques, and there is also an opportunity to improve the measurement of cultural humility.

#### SUMMARY OF EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

The empirical findings can be grouped into three areas. First, eight studies described what cultural humility looks like in the helping professions and how it develops over time. Four of these studies interviewed helping professionals who were regarded as being culturally humble in their professional work. For example, Hilliard (2011) explored the life experiences of eight culturally humble physical therapists and identified five common themes for how cultural humility evolved: (a) being open-minded, (b) responding to clients' emotions, (c) focusing on clients' goals, (d) engaging and teaching empowerment, and (e) being aware of the community's needs and assets. In two other studies, students engaged in a reflective journaling exercise so that their cultural humility development could be examined. Both studies concluded that cultural humility cannot be solely taught in classroom settings and that reflective journaling can be useful in stimulating cultural humility development. Another study explored cultural humility in engineering students using a mixed-methods approach that demonstrated a need for cultural humility training in first-year students due to

the high frequency of polarizing and minimizing language toward others' cultural identities (Groll, 2014).

Second, 10 studies implemented a training or education program to help participants improve their level of cultural humility. All studies found the programs contributed to the desired improvements. The improvements in cultural humility included both intrapersonal (e.g., increased self-awareness and confidence) and interpersonal characteristics (e.g., increased likelihood of eliciting client beliefs about treatment, enhanced client relationships). For example, Ross (2010) demonstrated that students could apply knowledge from cultural humility classroom lectures to a community practicum setting; graduate students reported higher levels of knowledge (e.g., underlying factors driving disparities), attitudes (e.g., awareness of bias), and skills (e.g., culturally humble communication) associated with cultural humility. Although most of these studies had promising findings, caution should be made when interpreting the effectiveness of these training programs. None of the studies were randomized controlled trials, and most of the studies utilized a single-group pre-test/post-test design. More research is needed for firm conclusions to be made about the efficacy and effectiveness of these programs for improving cultural humility.

Third, three quantitative studies explored the links between cultural humility and counseling outcomes. The first study (Hook et al., 2013) created a measure to assess cultural humility (Cultural Humility Scale); favorable client perceptions of a counselor's cultural humility were found to be positively related to a stronger working alliance and more improvement in counseling. The second study (Owen et al., 2014) explored cultural humility specifically in the context of a client's religious and spiritual beliefs. Although favorable client perceptions of a counselor's cultural humility toward religion related to stronger working alliance and better counseling outcomes, client religious commitment moderated that relationship. Associations between cultural humility toward religion and counseling outcomes were positive and significant for clients with high levels of religious commitment, but not for clients with low levels of religious commitment. The third study (Owen et al., 2016) examined the effects of therapists' cultural humility and their ability to create meaningful cultural dialogues in therapy on therapy outcomes. Therapists who missed opportunities to engage in cultural discussions with clients had worse therapy outcomes, but this negative relationship was buffered by therapist cultural humility. These studies point to an initial link between perceptions of cultural humility and positive counseling outcomes (e.g., working alliance, improvement). Again, caution is recommended when interpreting these findings. All of these studies were cross-sectional. Thus, causal conclusions should not be made. Longitudinal and experimental research would be a welcome addition to the field.

## Discussion

In this chapter, we conducted a literature review of theoretical and empirical cultural humility publications. Most papers were theoretical, with attempts being made to define and conceptualize cultural humility and lay the groundwork for future research. A smaller number of publications explored cultural humility empirically, mostly using qualitative research designs.

Overall, although this is a relatively recent topic of inquiry, there was quite a bit of consensus for how to define cultural humility. Definitions included key elements such as being a lifelong learner, accurate cultural self-awareness, and interpersonal respect in cross-cultural engagement. The core components of the definition of cultural humility were similar to that of general humility (Davis et al., 2011) and intellectual humility (McElroy et al., 2014), which have usually incorporated both intrapersonal and interpersonal components. In general, it appears that definitions are consolidating, which is a positive development and bodes well for the future of cultural humility research.

There was less consensus about the relationship between cultural humility and cultural competence. Some researchers viewed cultural humility as a separate, stand-alone construct, whereas others considered cultural humility to instead be an expansion of cultural competence. It is likely that both the cultural humility and cultural competence models have something to offer as we move forward to consider best practices in cross-cultural training and education. Regardless of how some of these conceptual issues resolve over time, cultural humility is clearly now seen as being important in a wide variety of disciplines.

The empirical articles were mostly qualitative and covered three main areas. First, several studies painted a more detailed picture of what cultural humility looks like in practice and how it might develop over time. Second, several studies tested educational intervention programs that were designed to increase cultural humility; the initial results were promising, suggesting that training interventions can positively affect both intrapersonal (e.g., increased self-awareness) and interpersonal (e.g., enhanced client relationships) components of cultural humility. Finally, the few quantitative studies mainly focused on the relationship between client perceptions of cultural humility and client outcomes; the results again were promising, suggesting that favorable client perceptions of cultural humility relate to better counseling outcomes (e.g., stronger working alliances). Caution is suggested when interpreting the empirical findings, as most studies utilized cross-sectional designs.

### *Limitations and Directions for Future Research*

There were several limitations in this literature review. First, most articles were theoretical. If cultural humility theories are to be supported, more empirical research, both quantitative and qualitative, is sorely needed. Specifically, there

needs to be more longitudinal and experimental research exploring cultural humility. In regard to training or educational programs designed to promote cultural humility, future research should employ randomized controlled trials to measure the efficacy and effectiveness of these programs. Also, relatively little research has worked to provide reliable and valid measures of cultural humility. With only one quantitative measure specifically measuring cultural humility, more research is needed to explore multiple methods (e.g., self-report, other-report, behavioral observation measures, semistructured interviewing) of accurately assessing cultural humility.

Second, most studies focused on racial/ethnic cross-cultural exchanges, with little attention given to other aspects of culture. Future research ideally will continue to include participants from various racial/ethnic groups, as well as consider other important aspects of cross-cultural exchanges (e.g., religion, sexual orientation, politics, etc.).

Third, more research could explore the internal processes that occur when individuals are more or less culturally humble. Some researchers have begun to consider these internal processes, even noting characteristics such as fluid thinking as being part of the definition of cultural humility. It would be interesting to describe and assess the cognitive processes that occur when individuals are behaving in a culturally humble manner versus a culturally arrogant manner.

Fourth, applied research has begun to explore cultural humility in the context of counseling and psychotherapy with diverse clients. Other applied settings could be excellent settings for research on cultural humility. For example, research could describe culturally humble hospitals and doctors, culturally humble teachers and professors, or culturally humble religious leaders.

### *Practical Lessons*

Instead of being the cultural “expert,” or taking a cultural training and viewing oneself as “competent,” cultural humility advocates for viewing positive cultural engagement as a lifelong learning process, where cultural self-awareness and mutual respect are privileged (cf. Gallardo, 2014). Intrapersonally, cultural humility involves honest self-appraisal and self-examination and being open and vulnerable about the limitations of one’s own cultural worldview and perspective.

Interpersonally, cultural humility involves being open-minded, actively listening, and responding with respect to culturally different individuals and groups. For example, cultural humility could help an individual build a positive working relationship with another person who might come from a different cultural background and disagree about important attitudes, beliefs, and values (e.g., religion, politics, racial views, sexual values, etc.). In these

cross-cultural relationships, people are often strongly invested in their own cultural worldview and perspective and may have strong emotions or reactions when their beliefs are disagreed with or challenged. Cultural humility can help an individual be more comfortable and open to differences when they occur, rather than needing to withdraw or end the relationship. As our population grows increasingly culturally diverse, cultural humility may well be an increasing necessity for meaningfully engaging culturally diverse others (Hook & Watkins, 2015).

Research suggests that cultural humility can be developed and worked on over time. For example, exercises in which a person self-reflects on his or her own cultural perspectives, beliefs, values, and attitudes could lead to a more honest appraisal of the limitations of one's cultural worldview. Reflecting on historical instances where one's cultural group has made grave mistakes (e.g., slavery, discrimination against women or LGBT individuals, etc.) may likewise instill an acknowledgement that all cultural perspectives have limitations, including one's own.

Purposefully putting oneself in situations where it is necessary to engage and try to understand the perspective of culturally different others could lead to increased openness to different cultural perspectives. Asking for feedback in one's relationship with culturally different individuals and groups could also help increase understanding for how one can work on becoming more culturally humble. In one's quest to become more culturally humble, it is important to remember that cultural humility is neither an endpoint nor a destination: It is a lifelong process that, in our view, makes possible and substantively contributes to true cross-cultural encounters, engagement, and exchange.

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