

# Culture-Ethical System and Global Information Ethics

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# Information ethics

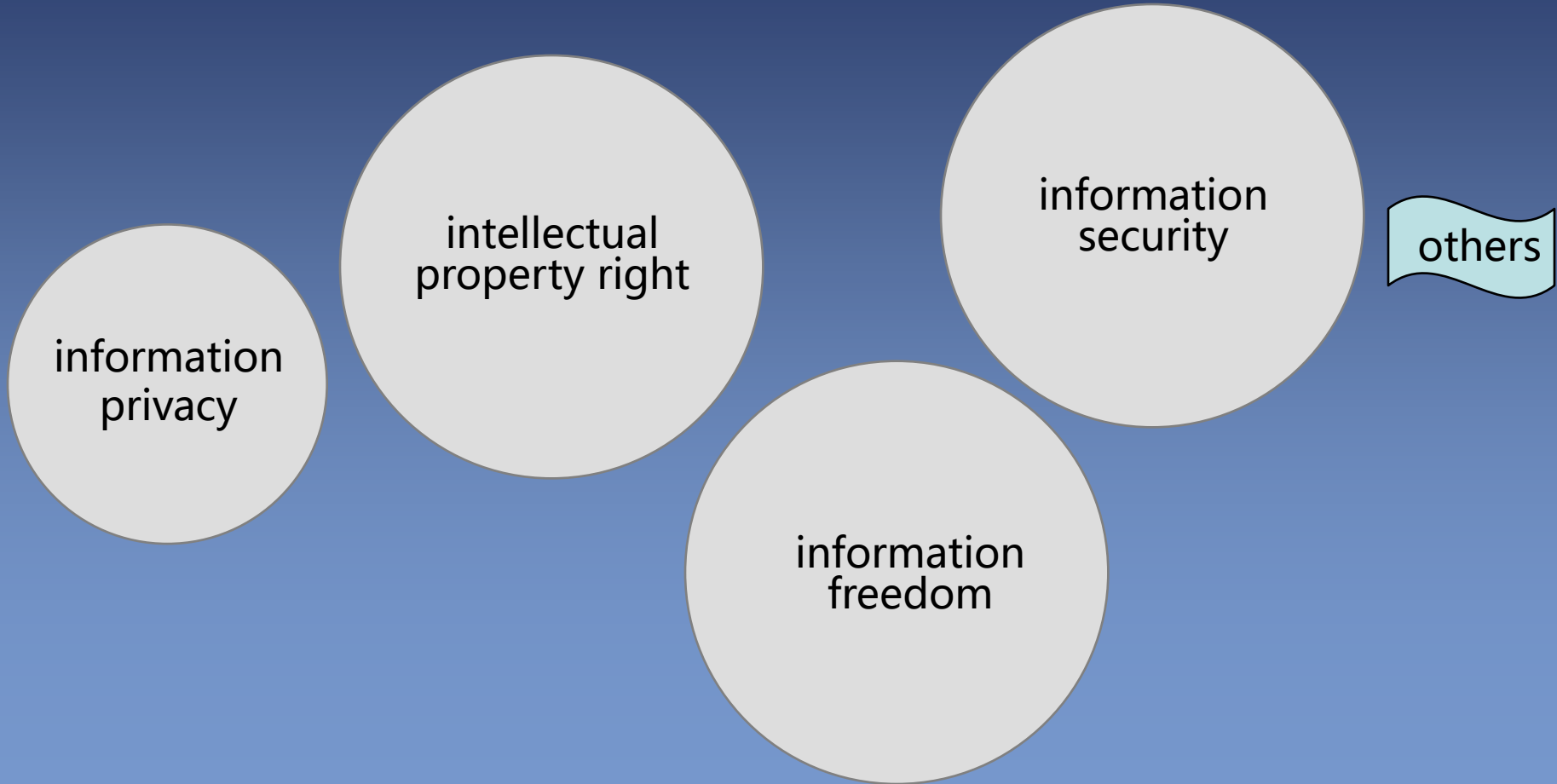
information  
privacy

intellectual  
property right

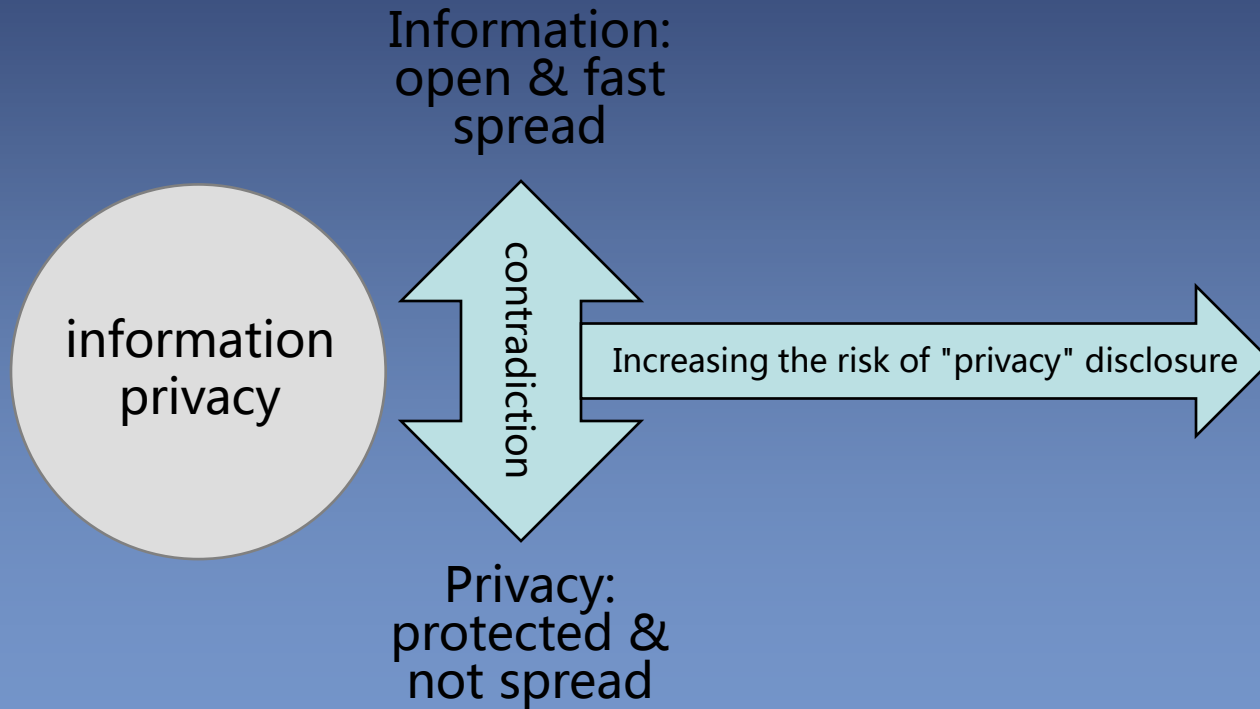
information  
security

others

information  
freedom



# Information ethics



# Information ethics

information  
privacy

Western scholars:

legal, technical, cultural  
and other perspectives

Chinese scholars: rarely

Prof. Yao-huai Lü

"Ethical Reflection on Information Privacy"



# Reasons

➤ In China, information ethics research started late. ( 1997 )

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In USA , information ethics research started from 1970s.

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➤ Chinese people do not attach importance to "privacy protection".

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➤ **Cultural difference**

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Charles Ess

Professor in Media Studies,  
Department of Media and  
Communication, University of Oslo

President of the Association of  
Internet Researchers (AoIR), and  
President of the International Society  
for Ethics in Information Technology  
(INSEIT)

## the different of data privacy protection in laws

utilitarian (US) approaches

deontological (EU) approaches

“In ethical terms, it is the contrast between more utilitarian (US) approaches (e.g., as these are more likely to allow **cost-benefit** analyses to override concerns regarding primary rights and responsibilities) and more deontological (EU) approaches (as these lay greater stress on **protecting individual rights** - first of all, the right to privacy - even at the cost of thereby losing what might be research that promises to benefit the larger whole).”

“In this light, it is clear that E.U. citizens enjoy a priority on individual privacy vis-a-vis business interests  
- i.e., a deontological emphasis on respect for persons in the form of privacy protections vs. U.S. favoring business interests over individual privacy.”

References: Ess, Charles. "Ethical decision-making and Internet research: Recommendations from the aoir ethics working committee." *Readings in virtual research ethics: Issues and controversies* (2002): 27-44.

a bigger difference between Western and Eastern cultures and traditions, especially in privacy: “irreducible differences”

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“To begin with, what may be characterized as a more **collective** understanding of the human being in Confucian thought generally and in China in particular contrasts sharply with modern Western understandings of the **individual** – first of all, as an atomistic reality, one possessed of the rational capacity for self-rule or autonomy (so Kant).”

References: Ess, Charles. "Ethical pluralism and global information ethics." *Ethics and Information Technology* 8.4 (2006): 215-226.

## Theoretical inspiration : Ethical pluralism

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➤ **Plato**- “This complementary pluralism begins in the analogy of the line in The Republic, as part of Plato’s (putative) theory of ideas: just as a single object may cast multiple shadows as it is illuminated by different sources of light – so the singular Ideas, including the Ideas of the Good, Justice, etc., allow for diverse instantiations and applications in the material world.”

➤ **Aristotle**- “Aristotle makes this contrast between interpretive pluralism and insistence on connection by way of identity especially clear in his systematic account of language and of the pros hen equivocal. The pros hen – “towards one” – equivocal demarcate a middle ground between homogenous univocation (a term can have one and only one meaning) and pure equivocation (a term holds multiple meanings entirely unrelated, sheerly different from one another).”

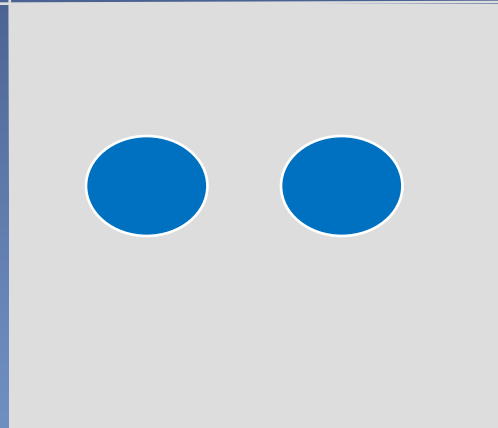
➤ **Confucius** (仁=克己复礼 (deny self and return to propriety) ) - “Insofar as the framework of ren [authoritative humanity or co-humanity] and rites remains unchallenged, Confucians are often ready to accept a plurality of diverse or contradicting ethical judgments.” “If after careful and conscientious deliberation, two persons equipped with ren come up with two different or contradictory judgments and courses of action, Confucians would tell us to respect both of the judgments.” quote from Joseph Chan

References: Ess, Charles. "Ethical pluralism and global information ethics." *Ethics and Information Technology* 8.4 (2006): 215-226.

# Ethical pluralism

Compatibility  
framework for  
different cultures

Irreducible  
differences



## Ethical pluralism



“This interpretive pluralism thus meets the requirements of a global information ethics as it preserves distinctive cultures, histories, and traditions of both East and West – while articulating shared (but not always identical) points of ethical agreement required by an interconnected and interdependent global society.”

References: Ess, Charles. "Ethical pluralism and global information ethics." *Ethics and Information Technology* 8.4 (2006): 215-226.

**Rafael Capurro:** “Charles Ess’ “global information ethics” seeks to avoid imperialistic homogenization while simultaneously preserving the irreducible differences between cultures and peoples (Ess 2006). He analyzes the connections of such an ethical pluralism between contemporary Western ethics and Confucian thought. Both traditions invoke notions of resonance and harmony to articulate pluralistic structures of connection alongside irreducible differences. Ess explores such a pros hen pluralism in Eastern and Western conceptions of privacy and data privacy protection. This kind of pluralism is the opposite to a purely modus vivendi pluralism that leaves tensions and conflicts unresolved and giving thus rise to a cycle of violence. Another more robust form of pluralism presupposes a shared set of ethical norms and standards but without overcoming deeply contradictions. An even stronger form of pluralism does not search identity but only some kind of coherence or, as Ess suggests, complementarity between two irreducible different entities.

There are pitfalls of prima facie convergences, analogies and family resemblances that may be **oversimplified** by a pros hen strategy. In many cases we should try to **dig into deeper layers** in order to understand where these claims originate or simply accept the limits of human theoretical reason by celebrating the richness of human experience.”

References: Capurro, Rafael. "Intercultural information ethics: foundations and applications." *Signo y Pensamiento* 28.55 (2009): 66-79.

**Liang Wang:** Cultural differences lead to different approaches on information ethics, especially the larger cultural differences between the East and the West, and Charles reminds us that we have to consider the cultural premise when discussing ethical issues. Although Charles's pluralism contains both heterogeneity and compatibility, and he attempts to illustrate the compatibility of different cultures or ethical traditions through the theories of Plato, Aristotle and Confucius. After all, the theories of Plato, Aristotle and Confucius are only the inspiration in thought. Charles did not further explain why different cultures or ethical traditions can be compatible, how to be compatible?

Therefore, I will uphold Charles's cross-cultural tradition, but will use the culture - ethics system theory to replace his pluralism.

# culture - ethics system theory

## Method: General System Theory

“A system can be defined as a complex of interacting elements.”

-Bertalanffy, L. von. "General system theory: foundations, development, applications." (1968).

The diversity of culture - ethics depends on the diversity of understanding of human nature.

Mary I. Bockover:

[Western culture – Rationality](#)

Mencius:

[Chinese culture-Relationality](#)

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➤ Various cultures - ethics form a culture - ethical system

➤ System elements: Western culture (rational), Confucian culture (relationship), Buddhist culture (intuition or enlightenment) , etc.

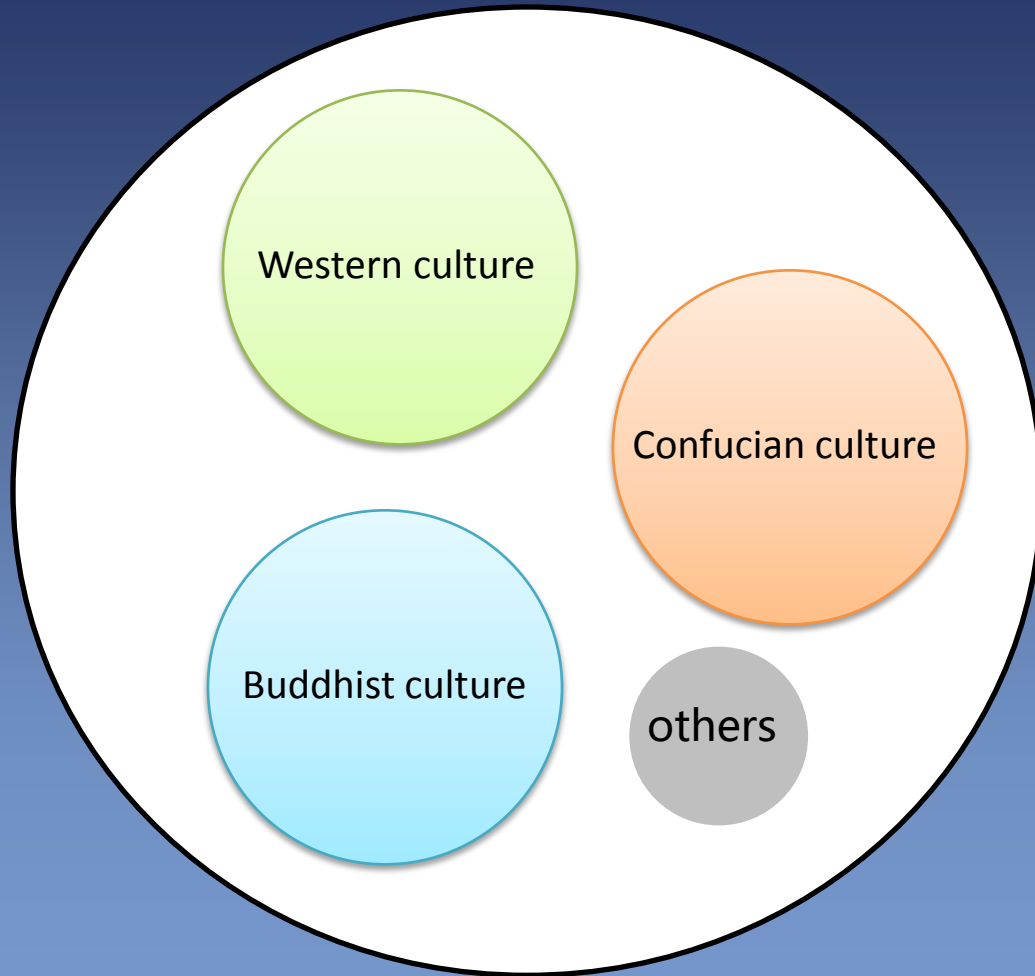
➤ The basis of interaction: intercommunity of human nature

➤ The form of interaction: communication, film, text, etc.

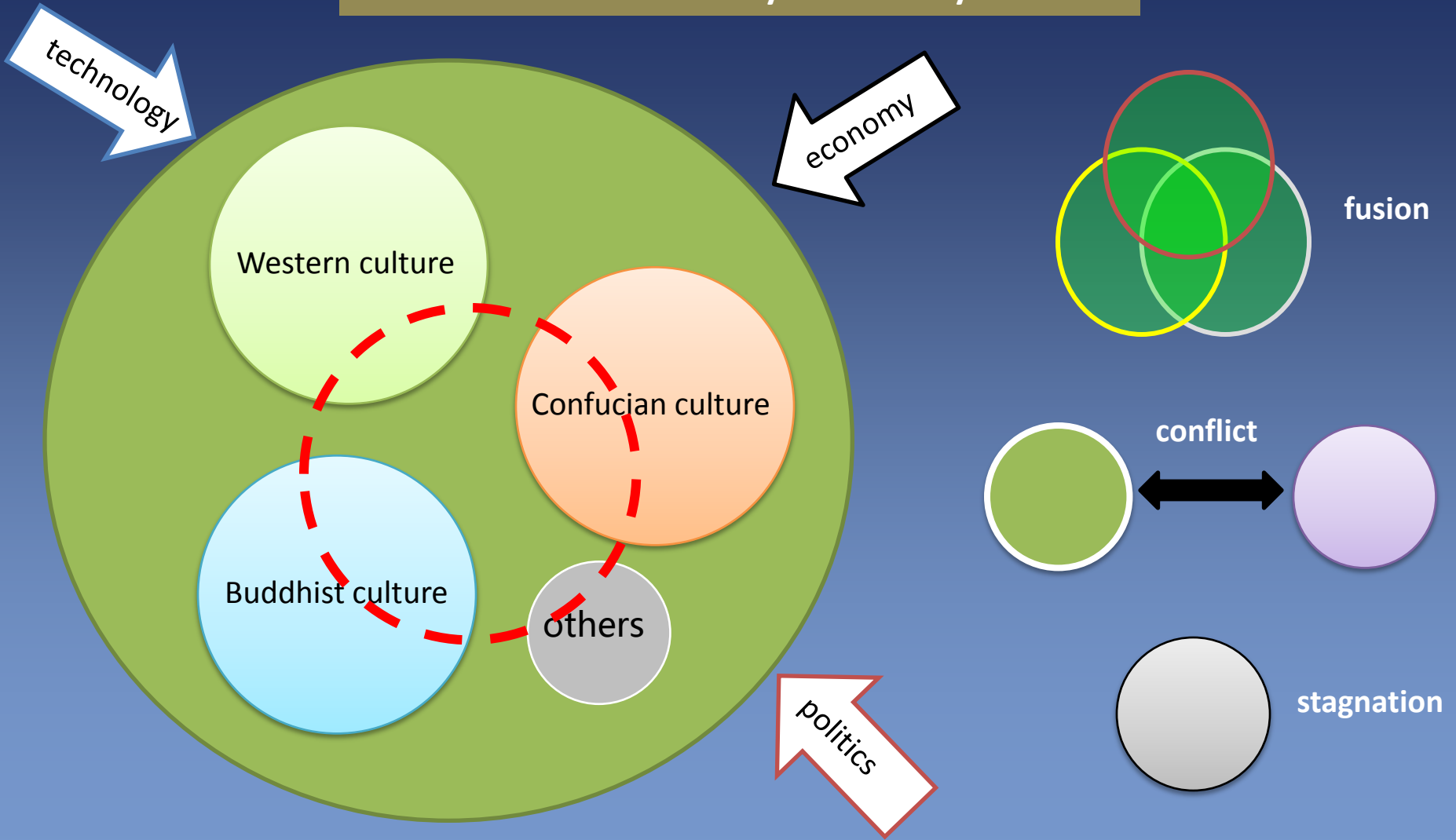
➤ Other effecting factors: external environment (politics, economy, technology, etc) .

➤ Possible trend of the system: fusion, conflict or stagnation

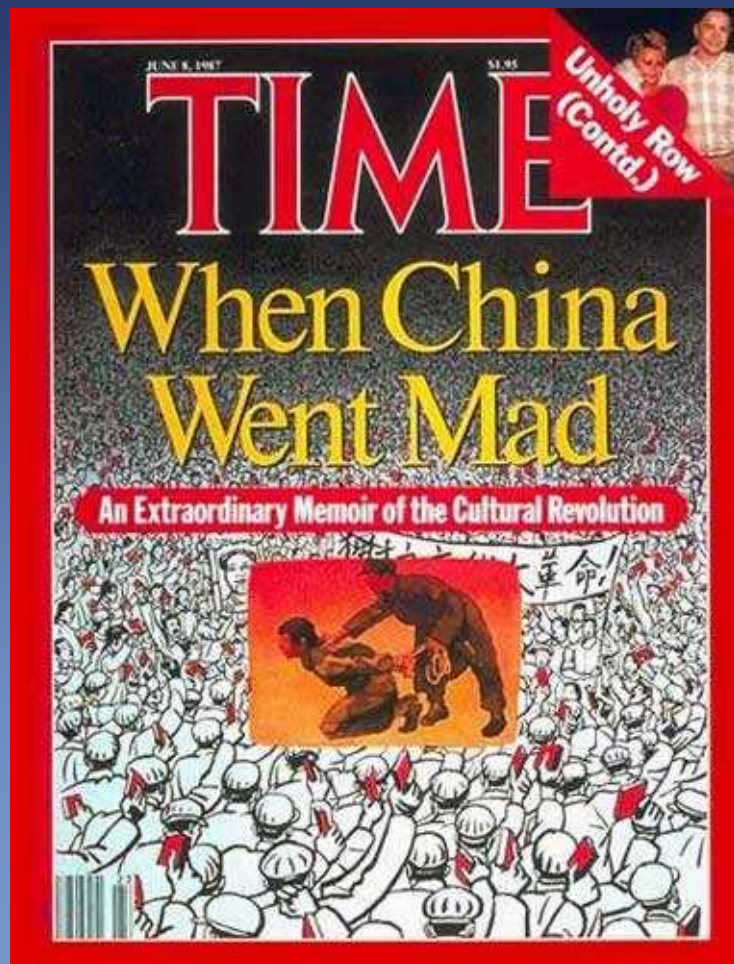
## culture - ethics system theory



# culture - ethics system theory



## Chinese Cultural Revolution



# Dunhuang frescoes: Prince sacrifice himself to save tiger



### **Advantages:**

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Inheritance of Charles cross-cultural perspective

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Pointing out the common ground of culture and the basis of its integration

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### **Disadvantages:**

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The theory is rough and the evidence

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is not enough.

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Thanks!