

## **Orientalism and Occidentalism:**

### **Cultural Prejudices as Global Civilizational Risks – an ecocultural perspective**

**Jean-Yves Heurtebise**

The concept of Risks most often entails reference to social and environmental risks. According to the editors of 2001 *Global Environmental Risk*, “Global environmental risk refers to threat (to human being and what they value) resulting from human-induced environmental change, either systemic or cumulative, on the global scale.” (Kasperson and Dow 2001) Moreover as said in *Global Catastrophic Risks*: “The most likely global catastrophic risks all seem to arise from human activities, especially industrial civilization and advanced technologies” (Bostrom and Cirkovic 2008). *Human beings are not only the victims of hazards that they try to prevent and manage but also the very producers of these hazards*. Indeed this is especially true of “Cultural and Civilizational Risks”. It must be reminded that the concept of Risk comes to the fore of social sciences with the works of Ulrich Beck (*Risikogesellschaft*) and Mary Douglas and that both of them contended that Risks are a social-cultural construct: “There could be no risks, illnesses, dangers, or any reality, knowledge of which is not construed” (Douglas 1997); “*it is cultural perception and definition that constitutes risks.*” (Beck 2000). In this lecture we would like to re-analyze the cultural concepts of Orientalism (Said 1977) and Occidentalism (Buruma & Avishai 2005) (Chen Xiaomei 2002) from the perspective of Global Risks. Orientalism and Occidentalism are different in terms of object (“the East” or “the West”) but similar in terms of methodology and anthropological categories: both of them relies of an essentialist conception of Western/Eastern anthropological-cultural differences. Huntington’s infamous “clash of civilization” (Huntington 1993) provides an example of self-fulfilling prophecies based on essentialist culturalism: it exemplifies the capacity of (geopolitical) nuisance of misconceived cultural categories. We aim to demonstrate that Orientalism and Occidentalism are the main drivers of Cultural Risks because they induce the notion that cultural differences are unbridgeable (because of mutually exclusive *Weltanschauungen*) which, in a context of globalization and continual exchanges, is source of numerous misunderstandings and potential conflicts. To provide a concrete case-study of our claim, inside the framework provided by Ursula K. Heise’ 2008 *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet* and her concept of eco-cosmopolitanism (Heise 2008, Mayer 2016), we will propose a critical analyze of the concept of Chinese ecological civilization and its culturalist perception of environmental risks.