


# Ecuadorian Intercultural Education: a conceptual review

## *Educación Intercultural Bilingüe en Ecuador: Una revisión conceptual*

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### Abstract

The article explores the challenges of Intercultural Bilingual Education in Ecuador (EIB). For this, it reviews the theoretical background and the history of the institutionalization of the EIB. It considers the history of the struggles and resistances found by indigenous movements for educating themselves in an ancestral language from its beginnings up to the institutionalization of the Bilingual Intercultural Education System (SEIB) in 1988. the problem of this study is: which are the principal conceptualization of interculturality that allows us to reflect around the EIB in Ecuador, for developing and public policies. As a general objective there is an analysis of the EIB in the order of the relationship between cultures and how these can be strengthened or have as simply interchange. The preliminary hypothesis is that the Ecuadorian country it is allowed a more multicultural education rather than the intercultural education and that affects local developing, son it's a fundamental to implement cultural public policies that also allows the interculturality as a political an ethic project in Ecuador.

**Keywords:** Interculturality, cultural policy, indigenous, communication, cultural development, decolonization.

### Resumen

El artículo explora los desafíos de la Educación Intercultural Bilingüe (EIB) en Ecuador. Para ello, se analizan los antecedentes teóricos e históricos del proceso de institucionalización de la EIB. Toma en cuenta las resistencias de los movimientos indígenas por educarse en una lengua ancestral desde sus inicios hasta llegar a la institucionalización del Sistema de Educación Intercultural Bilingüe (SEIB) en el año 1988. El problema que se plantea el presente estudio es: ¿cuáles son las principales conceptualizaciones de la interculturalidad que permiten reflexionar alrededor de la EIB en Ecuador a favor del desarrollo y las políticas públicas? Como objetivo general se analiza el devenir de la EIB, los conceptos y marcos legales que la sitúan. El ensayo se adhiere al estudio crítico de la EIB en el marco de las relaciones entre culturas y cómo estas podrían fortalecerse o simplemente intercambiarse. Se presenta como hipótesis preliminar que en el país ecuatoriano se avala una educación más multicultural que intercultural y esto incide en el desarrollo social, por lo tanto, es fundamental la implementación de políticas públicas culturales que también impulsen la interculturalidad como proyecto político y ético en Ecuador.

**Descriptor:** Interculturalidad, políticas públicas, desarrollo social, cultura, educación.

## 1. Introduction

It is neuralgic to review the consequences of colonial capitalism in Latin America. The historical conditions that allowed languages like the Kichwa to be considered worthless, but at the same time, have been strategically used by the Spanish colonizers at different times to dominate. Those who came to America learned the language to communicate with the Indians and teach the prevailing Christian religion (while the original ancestral beliefs were discredited), later, during modernity, international support was received to promote the education of the indigenous peoples and they did so in the indigenous language because from the struggle of indigenous movements there was a need to be included in education projects, which subsequently gave rise to Bilingual Intercultural Education. Therefore, it is taken into consideration that the itineraries of multiculturalism and intercultural projects in Ecuador will always refer, especially, to the history of education and the struggles of indigenous movements.

It is recognized that in Ecuador happens the same that did for the Australian indigenous Nakata:

(...) “the language of a people and the history of their development are still secondary and remain a subordinate consideration to linguists’ interpretations of how grammar determines meaning (...)” (Nakata, 2014, p.84).

This has brought disastrous consequences such as the linguistic and social discrediting of ancestral languages when they are not analyzed and considered by their contexts of struggle, resignification and the needs of education itself, under the great umbrella offered by the analysis of multiculturalism and interculturality from a critical and functional perspective for the indigenous peoples and nationalities of Ecuador.

In this framework, it has been fundamental to reflect on the urgency of an epistemological and critical turn in indigenous and intercultural education in Ecuador, as defined by authors of

the field of studies of culture and communication in an interdisciplinary key.

Therefore, this essay analyzes what Intercultural Bilingual Education is and what has been the theoretical and historical context that affected its institutionalization, going through the processes of resistance as the struggles of the indigenous movement, until arriving at the routes for international aid and the participation of religion and a model of hegemonic modernity.

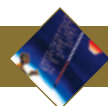
Special attention is paid to the national and international legal and regulatory framework that protects and promotes rights for an IBE. The official documents and the academic literature place IBE in Ecuador in context to recognize which are the points of tension that problematize the situation of the Peoples and Nationals that receive an IBE and what is the situation of the hegemonic population in Ecuador as it is the white-mestizo society.

It is thought about constructing decolonizing changes taking into account four dimensions posed by De Souza Silva (2013): epistemological, ontological, methodological and axiological. In the first place, epistemological, in reference to Walsh when he reflects on the incidence of the phenomenon of knowledge and the processes that construct it; ontological to the extent that specific capitalist realities are determined; methodological because it is based on the processes of inquiry from methods, and axiological from the type of intervention and ethical and aesthetic values for the recognition of reality.

Finally, it is recommended that Ecuador’s Public Policies consolidate plans, programs and projects that support a more equal relationship in terms of reaching an intercultural dialogue for socio-cultural development.

## 2. Method

The applied method is a bibliographic review with a grounded theory that will be contrasted with the main contributions of interculturality understood in a more complex way



than a simple relationship between cultures. Therefore, within the selection of the bibliography, the studies carried out by authors belonging to the social sciences and communication under a critical perspective of capitalist modernity, to establish radically different relationships with forms of power and new life, stand out. It involves disciplining and regulating racialized and excluded thoughts and situations. Therefore, the disciplines with which the theme will mainly be carried out are: education, studies of culture and communication.

### 3. Analysis and results

When studying the history of colonization we are led to what Rodríguez (2017) explains through various authors (Mariátegui, 1928; Cueva, 1980), that the situation of indigenous education from the consolidation of the nation-state in America Latina was affected by capitalism and the rejection of the indigenous because they considered it socially, politically and culturally inferior.

Such is the case, that for Vera Candau, from the colony to the 20th century, a stage is consolidated that has as its mark “an explicit ethnocentric violence of imposition of the hegemonic culture on the indigenous populations. Eliminating the ‘other’ was the tone of the colonial period” (Vera, 2013, p.146). However, according to the author, in the first stage of the 20th century, the modern nation-state project that became an assimilationist trend, that is, in the standardization and cultural homogenization, and under this view, the first indigenous bilingual educational institutions were built.

Meanwhile, in the field of social development in America, prior to the 1950s, due to the influences of Occidentalism and current capitalism, development was sought as a fundamental goal, that is, as a point of arrival. However, at that time it was tried to be from the initiative of non-hegemonic groups where countries like Ecuador needed to “grow out” through exports to find ways of economic and social prosperity. This

refers to the notion that the indigenous peoples at first had to revitalize their culture (multiculturalism) motivated by public policies that wanted to maintain social, political, cultural and economic inequalities and then the indigenous peoples had to integrate with the rest of society for dialogue (interculturality), what is currently seen from a critical and functional perspective is conceived as an ethical and political project under construction.

With this background, the legal frameworks established for the analysis have been substantiated. At the national level, the basis is found in the Political Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador (2008) while internationally it is Convention 169 of the ILO and the Human Rights of Indigenous Peoples of the United Nations. Several documents on intercultural education, such as the national development plans that were published at different times, emerge from the national document. The last one (2017-2023) corresponds to the current president, Lic. Lenín Moreno Garcés, among other official documents that as we will see, in Ecuador they take action from the multicultural and not so much from the intercultural.

The Constitution of Ecuador (2008) went through a series of reforms, among the changes was added a reinforcement of the rights of indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian peoples. Article 68 (chapter 4, section eight) states that “the national education system will include education programs that conform to the diversity of the country. It will incorporate administrative, financial and pedagogical decentralization and de-concentration strategies into its management”.

This article allows to take into account several things. First, that the education system must include, by right, specific programs structured according to each culture. Second, these programs must be managed and executed by people from the communities corresponding to each culture, since they are the ones who know their context and needs, which is why Article 68 obliges the education system to develop decentralization and



de-concentration strategies. Third, this article obliges indirectly that educational programs are developed in the language of each community, since this is an essential cultural axis.

According to Bastidas, quoting Ferrão, from the 70s to the 80s, EIB began to be talked about in Latin America and specifically in Ecuador it is linked to issues of the State, so that from a verticality one wants to define the ethnic, subjecting it to be inalienable to the Ecuadorian and not only as a matter that only affects the indigenous (Bastidas, 2015).

In fact, during the first stage of indigenous education, in the context of the struggles of social movements are Dolores Cacuango (1881-1971), Nela Martinez (1912-2004), Maria Luisa Gomez de la Torre (1887-1976), Transito Amaguaña (1909-2009). Also, due to the “Ecuadorian Federation of Indians” (FEI) and through other groups sponsored by the “Ecuadorian Women’s Alliance”, Kichwa-Spanish schools are created in Cayambe. Being an initiative that displeased the landowners, the education of the children took place at night and in secret.

Subsequently, educational programs were created with the support of the Judeo-Christian church, such as that of the “Lauritas” missionaries of 1940 who were in charge of religious women from Colombia who lived in Ecuador. And so, in the following years, the religious takes initiative in conjunction with the Ministry of Education. Later in 1963 with the “Summer Linguistic Institute” (SIL), the indigenous languages were promoted in exchange for spreading the Protestant religion to the Kichwa, Shuar, Secoyas, Siona, Huao, Chachis and Tsachis indigenous groups (Yáñez, sf).

In the year 1979 during the Government of former President Jaime Roldós Aguilera, intercultural bilingual education was institutionalized with economic and human difficulties, where the struggle of the indigenous movements of Ecuador began to stand out (Vélez, 2008; Moya, 1998).

In 1988, the “National Direction of Intercultural Bilingual Education” (DINEIB) was created. This constituted legitimacy from the institutionalization, however in addition to the problems mentioned above, it takes into account the excessive bureaucracy and uninational and vertical view from the State and cultural assimilation (CONAIE, 1994, p.44, Guerra, 2003).

In 1990, the indigenous movement and in particular the “Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador” (CONAIE) demanded that the Ecuadorian State take into account their rights and interests in the education of indigenous children (Abram, 2013; Moya, S.f). It is then that they begin to work for a system of their own IBE, although not conclusive or propitiating interculturality. This multiculturalist education tried to revitalize the culture itself, however, many times teachers, students and parents disagreed with the type of education (Abram, 2013, pp. 2-3).

One could review how the IBE from its beginnings to the nineties of the twentieth century sought the development of public policies entrenched in multiculturalism, by strengthening its own culture, especially from linguistics. It was part of the public agenda, due to the pressure of the indigenous movements, as well as the religious participation of foreign private organizations and the State.

Despite the great efforts of the Government of Ecuador to highlight and empower the indigenous community through the Constitution with emphasis on intercultural bilingual education, the last census of 2010 showed that 20.4% of the indigenous population self identifies as illiterate. Although during said year it was shown that there was an increase in the education level of basic education and high school of men and women, the indigenous population remained marginalized (INEC, 2010).

For this reason, in 2011 the Ministry of Education officiated the “Project for the strengthening of intercultural bilingual education” with a duration of four years. This project was aimed at



fourteen nationalities in twenty-two provinces of Ecuador and aimed to improve the quality of the Intercultural Bilingual Education program (Ministry of Education, 2010). However, the Ministry indicated that the main problem related to the project was “the low quality of the educational services of the peoples and nationalities that guarantees the permanence of languages and cultures” (2010). Due to this, the Ministry of Education trained teachers in pedagogical techniques, didactic material for students who have not acquired kichwa as their mother tongue and validation by incorporating the needs of each indigenous nationality in the curricula.

The National Plan for Good Living (2009-2013) was created during the government of the former president, economist Rafael Correa Delgado, and derived from the ancestral principle of Sumak Kawsay, which conceptualizes and promises for Ecuador in terms of development, improvements in the political, economic, social, cultural and ecological. An instrument to combine public policies with government administration and public investment.

In the National Plan for Good Living (2013-2017) of the twelve objectives, 2 and 4 supported the Bilingual Intercultural Education System. Objective 2 guarantees equality through access to quality health and education services to individuals and groups that need special attention due to permanent inequality, exclusion and discrimination. Among its objectives is to “strengthen and concentrate the literacy and post-literacy programs for those with unfinished schooling, from a point of view in which the gaps are closed, based on gender, cultural and territorial identity.” Goal 2.5 of this objective aims to encourage inclusion and social cohesion, peaceful coexistence and a culture of peace, eliminating all forms of discrimination and violence. Specifically, “create communication and educational mechanisms that promote respect and recognition of diversity and affirm intercultural dialogue and the exercise of the collective rights of nationalities and indigenous peoples.” For

its part, objective 4 of Good Living 2013-2017 is focused on strengthening the capacities and potentials of citizens, which seeks to guarantee all citizens their right to education, under the precept of equity and sustainability. All the goals of this objective revolve around education.

Following these objectives, 46,588 students have registered in the Bilingual Intercultural Education System and 4406 teachers have been trained in 2012 (Buen Vivir, 2013). According to data from the National Secretariat for Planning and Development, the Development Plan has had a positive impact during the first year, since in the higher basic education there was an increase of three percentage points between 2012 and 2013, as well as that of high school which went up in two points within the same period. Another positive indicator shows that illiteracy in the indigenous population (15 to 49 years old) increased from 11% in 2012 to 7.6% in 2013. However, in secondary school, there was a dropout rate of 8.7%. One of the main reasons for dropping out of school at this stage shows that 41% acquire economic responsibilities from a very young age, therefore they must work at an early age, 18% for lack of economic resources, 13% for attending the household chores, and 11% because he/she was not interested.

In the current Government of Lenín Moreno Garcés, it is considered in the last National Development Plan (2017-2023) that the State has three neuralgic obligations that are decisive for its proper functioning: respect, protect and perform. Respect: that the State does not violate the rights and protects to prevent that from happening (and in case it happens to demand the reparations of the case) and finally, realize that the State must be proactive to guarantee the rights, with emphasis on groups of priority attention. In this sense, the Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador (2008) in article 57, no. 14 states that in Higher Education the Model of the Bilingual Intercultural Education System (MOSEIB) should be promoted, made official in 1993, with the last edition of the document pre-





sented in 2013, and that the main social actors of the IBE System must be from the same people and historically oppressed nationalities.

Finally, it can be pointed out that this Development Plan, prepared during the Government of the current president of the Republic of Ecuador, like the previous two documents, points out the importance of adjusting Intercultural Bilingual Education with:

Cultural, linguistic and environmental relevance that meets the specific educational needs of peoples and nationalities. This implies revaluing bilingual intercultural education as a historical conquest of peoples and nationalities, and highlighting their intergenerational claim by resisting processes of homogenization and assimilation.

Thus, intercultural bilingual education and ethno-education encapsulate and remain with the current government, as well as with the former president of the economist Rafael Correa Delgado, at least in discursive terms, as permanent priorities in the country's education, from early stimulation up to higher education.

International organizations have also influenced government decisions for the development of the indigenous population. In 1989, Ecuador signed the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Agreement with the World Labor Organization (ILO). This agreement has four main axes: the right of indigenous peoples to maintain their customs, strengthen their cultures, defend their different ways of life and their right to participate actively in the decisions that concern them (ILO, 1989). The aforementioned establishes the bases on which the provisions of the agreement must be interpreted.

In the fifth part of social security, article 27 establishes that:

Educational programs and services for the peoples concerned should be developed and implemented in cooperation with them in order to respond to their particular needs, and should cover their history, knowledge

and skills, value systems and all other social, economic and cultural aspirations. (ILO, 1989)

Through this article, Ecuador promises once again, autonomy to indigenous communities to develop their own educational programs with the support of the state. In literal 2 of the same article it is established that the authority (...) "shall ensure the formation of members of these peoples and their participation in the formulation and execution of education programs, with a view to gradually transferring to these peoples the responsibility of the realization of these programs, when they take place" (ILO, 1989). This literal requires the state to prepare members of these communities in educational matters so that in the future these communities, in total autonomy, develop their own educational programs. In addition, article 27 suggests that public institutions relate and integrate with communities to learn about social, cultural, linguistic reality and develop the educational programs concerned (Rabbit Arellano, 2008).

For its part, the "Program for Development and Cultural Diversity for Poverty Reduction and Social Inclusion" (PDC) was carried out through the fulfillment of the Sustainable Development Goals, proposed by the United Nations. Of the seventeen objectives, the fourth seeks to "guarantee inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" (United Nations, 2016). Therefore, it is intended that the entire population have full and decent access to work, education and health.

It should be mentioned that according to the "Human Development Report" of 2016, indigenous peoples represent 5% of the world population, however, 15% are of limited economic resources (United Nations, 2017). Taking into account this problem, the PDC was created as a public policy to eradicate racial discrimination and ethnic and cultural exclusion on December 28, 2009. Part of this public policy sought to develop the initial indigenous education in which four dictionaries of the



Secoya, Cofanes, Wao and Shuar nationalities were drawn up. In turn, the Ministry of Health programmed a change in the health system to deliver an adequate service to the needs of the indigenous population (Ministry of Culture and Heritage, 2016).

Entrepreneurship was also an important pillar to advance the indigenous population, so a sustainability plan was created in several sectors, in favor of the recovery of ancestral knowledge (Ministry of Culture and Heritage, 2016). Due to the success of the project the Government carried out a second phase of the PDC whose objective was to help strengthen the intercultural society through reflection spaces, normative and institutional frameworks and the creation of public policies to enhance culture, intercultural dialogue, and decrease spaces of discrimination towards the peoples and nationalities that live in Ecuador (Ministry of Culture and Heritage, 2016). The results of this project (2013-2015) were positive as 16 of the 28 ventures of the indigenous community have business plans, which has helped them to position their products in local markets, promoting the economy in distant places, however the indigenous person is instrumentalized by inserting him into the capitalist market. Likewise, the offer of artisanal, tourist, agricultural and livestock products in the local and cantonal markets has been expanded (Ministry of Culture and Heritage, 2016). Finally, the project allowed to return and strengthen the customs, traditions and ancestral knowledge of indigenous communities, but not necessarily to build a hegemony.

On the other hand, it is imperative to evidence the Agreement of the Ministry of Education which establishes that the curricula of "Basic General Education" for the processes of "Family Child Community Education" (EIFC), contemplate a cultural assimilation from the "Insertion into the Semiotics Processes (IPS), Cognitive, Affective and Psychomotor Strengthening (FCAP), Development of Skills and Study Techniques (DDTE) and Investigative

Learning Process (PAI)" (article 2). This, without the necessary direction could be assumed in verticality and the lack articulation of a dialogue that allows the horizontal communication between the peoples and nationalities of Ecuador. However, the logic is the application of models provided by Western systems in the educational field, this despite the fact that the agreement between the general provisions of the sixth section, states that the State must "hold teachers and authorities of bilingual intercultural educational establishments accountable, of the generation of permanent research mechanisms, collective construction of educational resources with cultural and linguistic relevance" all this with relevance to the relationships between cultures (MinEdu, 2017, p.5).

The field of relations between cultures has been complex to define, since it is loaded with a series of representations and meanings. The concept of interculturality is taken into account from the reflections of Catherine Walsh (2001, 2005, 2008), who pointed out that this notion is based on the need for the radical transformation of the structures, institutions and relationships of society. The author points out that *interculturality* is the central axis of an alternative historical project. Walsh will go further and explain that *interculturality* -understood as a necessary tool and project for the transcendental transformation of the State and society- needs to break with the uni-national framework, emphasizing the plura-national not as a division, but as the most appropriate structure to unify and integrate.

Therefore, it is stated that the field of relations between cultures has been complex to define. Moreover, the problem lies in translating it in terms of a transformative public policy. It should be borne in mind that the difficulty begins when in a particular society there predominates a class that, under the halo of cultural supremacy, has better living conditions in its context; such a disjunctive predisposes to the recognition and valuation of cultural minorities



that will end up being marginalized under the manipulations of the implicit hegemonic order.

That is why it is worth specifying the differences between multiculturalism and interculturality. On the one hand, multiculturalism responds to the 'essence' of cultures, interculturalism emphasizes interaction or dynamics between at least two cultures, without ignoring the scenarios of power disputes, links, negotiations, cooperation and conflict (González, 2005).

In this sense, it will be useful to take into account the reflections that Virgilio Alvarado has developed within the framework of interculturality and public policies. Said author points out that the proposal of interculturality aspires to an intercultural society protected by a political project that allows establishing a dialogue between cultures. This dialogue, says the author, should start with the acceptance of one's own identity and self-esteem (Alvarado, 2002).

#### 4. Discussion and conclusions

Following a limited anthropological review of the education of the native peoples of Ecuador contrasted with other realities of America, in Bolivia and in the Ecuadorian country itself, the struggles of the indigenous movements and also the support of international organizations stand out. In Peru, on the other hand, support was possible thanks to the State and certain experimental projects that happened. Regardless of the processes that have been carried out in different countries, at present, it has been opted to strengthen relations with the community corresponding to each geography, in such a way that it interferes in intercultural projects (Zavala, 2007).

In Ecuador, multiple cultures converge and multiculturalism is a reality, but interculturality becomes a project to be built. That is, having multiculturalism does not mean that cultures live in harmony because the indigenous person is at a disadvantage due to historical cultural loss of prestige. Such is the case that in the Kichwa culture expressions such as "*runa shimi*"

and "*yanka shimi*" mean "the language that is not valid" (Abram, 2013). This transformation of the ancestral language demonstrates the need for a cultural revitalization, which deserves other decolonizing efforts, recognizing that interculturality is the fundamental motor for development and globalization could push us to apply a functional model to the realities and socio-cultural contexts.

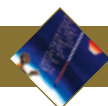
Therefore, it is proposed to follow the metaphor of the ecology of the media (Scolari, 2015) to make a communication proposal that allows to include the indigenous in a globalized world and thus build other representations of the indigenous. These transformations must happen in the field of analog and digital communication following communication strategies that allow the evolution and socio-cultural transformation of racialized beings, and, mainly from the field of education, these efforts can be carried out, otherwise and following the metaphor of Scolari (citing McLuhan), ancestral cultures could fall into danger of extinction.

Within the framework of the following proposal, the important thing is to recognize the cultural similarities (to communicate, to bring together, to commune) with coexisting realities of a multicultural country like Ecuador but taking concrete steps to build interculturality.

The reality always transcends a monologue to a dialogue and horizontal communication, engages in interculturality understanding this as public policies for dialogue between cultures and that requires the participation of racialized beings and the white-mestizo population.

Several authors agree, when they refer to interculturality as a project under construction, as it would be assumed that the only intercultural of this duality is the indigenous person and rarely the mestizo who would enter into attempts to dialogue with the other (socially assumed as opposite and different).

Thus, interculturality in Ecuador is not a given fact (as the concept of multiculturalism refers), but since it is a project, it must be carried





out through long-term planning that demarcates the effects of colonization over five hundred years, however, it has not been a priority on the Government's agenda in terms of public policies. It would be advisable to give support to the cultural revitalization of Ecuador, and that means betting on a change in the productive matrix and a hegemonic change, so that it is later considered a governmental priority, however, at the same time that Kichwa and Shuar begin to be considered among the official languages of the country, according to the Constitution (2008) then, this task of teaching these languages in public and private institutions to ensure that, once again, the only intercultural persons are not racialized beings is expected to begin. There must, therefore, coexist other forms of knowledge management, to learn and live in spaces of interculturality fostered by social and cultural miscegenation.

The arrival of the conquerors in America gave rise to a series of conflicts that marked the dichotomy and segregation of the indigenous groups of the country, so it is difficult to escape from these rationalization traps where the other is seen as underdeveloped or savage.

It is considered essential to develop and promote communication, a political and militant agenda for intercultural dialogue, so the media and advertising agencies have a fundamental role as producers of social meanings. In addition, it would not be a setback to highlight the proposal of multiculturalism to further extend the Kichwa language in Ecuador, knowing that with this learning one can understand, value and revitalize the culture Others.

It is recommended to look for new forms that, from the communication of social campaigns, people become aware of the social uses of terms in Kichwa as “runa” whose literal meaning is person, identity. In addition, it is convenient that whites-mestizos embrace their fragmented and minimized Ecuadorian culture that has historically suffered discrimination. New epistemological and empirical horizons must be sought for the construction of social identities.

The challenge lies in the equal recognition in a globalized context to enable social integration in an intercultural key.

In short, interculturality cannot - should not - be assumed as a category of analysis that omits the willingness to dialogue with cultural difference. Therefore, it is particularly important to consider public policies that define the participation of white-mestizos so that there is a communication and an integral dialogue, leaving aside the activities of cultural folklore and forms of monoculturalism of Western heritage.

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