

# The onto-geographical Structure of World-Culture and the position, Opportunity and task of Africa

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## **Introduction**

**A**ny development of Africa demands a creative cooperation with other continental cultures. Therefore, the specific opportunity and task of Africa within the modern world depends on its position in the geographical structure of world-culture, which we now have to analyze.

In this context, as relevant basic cultures we will take in consideration primarily the extensive cultural areas of the continents Europe, Africa and Asia. Also the cultures of America and Latin-America seem to be founded in an amalgamation of these great basic cultures; so we will confine our analysis to them.

Our consideration shall be divided into the following steps:

In the first place, we put up the hypothesis that the regions of culture differ due to their natural basis.

In a second part, this hypothesis has to be substantiated and differentiated by pointing at corresponding cultural phenomena.

Thirdly we will ask, how the cultural differentiation of mankind has to be understood ontologically, i. e. in the deeper character of its being.

Finally, we have to summarize the practical result of our analysis for a creative encounter of the world cultures and for the opportunity and task of Africa.

## **I. The relation culture-nature and the opposition between the spheres of Europe, Africa and Asia**

Every culture, every expression of human spiritual life depends on physical-material conditions, i.e. basically: on the structure of the surface of the earth and on the climate. In this sense, culture means the human mind's re-sponse to the demandings and provoking challenges given by nature. In this re-action and re-sponse, man articulates himself, forming and determining nature and objectivating his ideas and his will. That means: Culture results as a dialogue between nature and human spirit, in which also happens self-determination of man in freedom and responsibility, at least up to a certain degree. So, man is not totally determined by nature, but he is disposed and provoked by it.

From this point of view, the extensive main areas of the earth, the continents, inasmuch they show significant differences regarding their natural disposition, correspondingly have brought about different "re-actions" and "re-sponses" of human mind.

Let us at first take a look at the *afro-asiatic* area: It appears to be a giant bulk of mainland, filled with oppositions which have no less gigantic dimensions, and determined by a transcontinental far-reaching climate rich in contrasts; just think of the monsoons and the trade-winds which cover enormous regions of Asia and Africa.

In contrary opposition to this, the continent of Europe shows the face of a delicately differentiated landscape, interrupted and marked by many oceans and middle-sized seas and determined by a moderate climate.

Therefore it might be no surprise if in Africa and Asia reality was understood as an unlimited unity of strong contrasts and man there developed an according sensitive, intuitive ability and basic habit. Hereby, in the formation of its surface the continent of Africa shows more including transitions and less sharp oppositions as does the continent of Asia. Thus Africa invites man to live immediately out of nature, to chose the "vital identification" with nature as his way of life. The continent of Asia, however, rather provokes an "intellectual with-drawal", a way of life shaped by introverted "spiritually keeping distance" against nature by balancing calmness.

In Europe, nevertheless, according to the mentioned geographicalclimatic conditions of life, the consciousness primarily inclines to differentiate and to structure reality rationally; there is the typical tendency of setting demarcations and of reaching and articulating clarity.

The more intuitive disposition of the african and asiatic consciousness seems to have a more immediate and original relationship to reality; the European disposition, the stronger inclination to rational differentiation, demands more clearly an objectivation, which puts the empirical reality into distance, a re-flection turned outside.

The immediate-intuitive afro-asiatic and the abstract-rational *European* disposition appear to form a contrary opposition, as we will elaborate first, and between the african and the asiatic capacity again a sub-contrary opposition can be realized, which we will reflect in a second step.

## **II. The geographical structure of world-culture**

### *II. 1. The contrary opposition between the European and the afro-asiatic area of culture*

The term: “contrary opposition” shall mean in our context, that the concerned cultures are in their fundamental anthropological disposition at maximum distance to each other. But this does not exclude, that in concrete realisation of both types, there are many continuous transitions.

Now this is to be explained by some examples for the relationship to nature and to man which differs according to specific cultural features.

#### *a) Relation to nature*

The relationship to nature in the occident, especially since modern times, typically is marked by the quantifying natural science and technology. Science, according to its modern understanding, intends to analyze the empirical connection of reality rationally, i.e. to resolve the immediately given “unity of experienced reality” into its elements and elementary functions. These components are picked out, in order to construct out of them – according to mathematic possibilities– in a technical-creative way new complex unities which serve the human purposes better than did the structures of reality as given by nature. This happens in physics, chemistry and biology, as well as in psychology and sociology. Such a transformation of all accessible reality through the disposing mind of man is to be understood as the manifestation of a spiritual intention to dominate the reality, which is typical to modern times. This habit originated in Europe and spread all over the world in a determining manner.

As an example might serve the European-occidental understanding of medicine which is different from the afro-asiatic tradition in a culturally specific way. For instance, in a disease of the liver or of the heart, the Western science of medicine primarily pays attention to the physical organ. It tries by analysis of the causes to determine the single elements of the defective structure and function, in order to put them into another, more desirable proportion, influencing it by drugs or attacking it surgically, i.e. through a rationally planned measure centred on the organ.

It is obvious: In occidental culture, mind aims at confronting the contents of experience through active determination and alteration. By objectivation and domination of the world, the own power and master-ship of man is to be experienced and actively more and more actualized; constituting the world as object that can be determined and dominated, man aims at his self-constitution as determining and dominating "subject".

In a totally other, contrarily opposed way the spiritual attitude manifests itself in the tradition of the afro-asiatic culture. There it is tending less towards "objectivation" and "domination" but rather towards "participation" and "integration"; man experiences and understands himself as part of a preceeding meaningful structure of reality. Appreciating this structure, he doesn't try so much to dispose of it, but rather to be at its disposal in order to let it "come" and "happen" ever more.

The example of "science of medicine" again provides an illuminating example for this. An organ being diseased, the african doctor doesn't see the cause primarily in the organ itself (in order to fix it there by analysis of factors). Rather he understands the disease "holistically" as a decrease in the vital force of the whole organism, wherein the affected organ only participates in a special manner. The vital force, however, steadily flows into the organism from the spiritual-divine source of life which is immanent to the organism.

This source of life doesn't inhabit the affected individual organism as a peculiar part, but through the organism's being the member of a more comprehensive community of life. Therefore the disease basically is produced by vital force flowing only insufficiently into the individual as part of a greater connection of Being, caused by a pollution of "channels", which include the contact to crystals, plants and animals, the fellow men of the own tribe, and also the deceased, the ancestors and the spirits; for only through these "mediators for the transmission of life" life can flow in steadily from the creative divine fundamental source. Hence therapy has the primary task to make conscious of disturbances in the relationship to nature, to the fellow men and to the invisible (but highly active) "spiritual background". Such disturbances can be: an egocentric or egoistic habit, so that others are hurt; lack of thankfulness, reverence and love. Only through according moral purification the receptivity for the life from God can be disclosed anew; in this sense to african "science of medicine" it is essential to check the social relationship to the whole.

Similar features can be observed in asiatic "science of medicine" and art of healing of which recently also in Europe more and more notice is taken: According to the indian medical tradition (as in Ayurveda), the external nature possesses special healing powers, e.g. certain crystals and herbs, while, according to the chinese tradition (think of the method of acupuncture) more emphasis is laid on the harmonical relations within man himself.

It is to be seen: The european view fixes more the parts of the whole, the African and Asian focusses more the whole as such; and: The european looks more at the visible "outside of reality", which one can grasp rationally, the African and Asiatic more at the invisible "inside" and the „creative center of reality". So, both points of view are primordially in disposition to complete each other in their methodological access and in their understanding of reality.

*b) Relation to man*

This contrary-complementary attitude reveals itself as in relation to nature as perhaps even more clearly in relation to man. So, the tendency towards laying emphasis on the individual person, in the western culture has favored a humanly dignuous development of the social life. For example, it conduced to the proclamation of “human rights”, including also the right of self-determination for every individual in a democratic political system, or to the claim of “freedom of conscience” demanding respect for the individual decision of moral conscience even in the case of its contradiction to the collective opinion. All these historical phenomena are typical products of occidental culture.

But that is true, this tendency implicates not only positive, but also negative aspects, when it is exaggerated so in economics, when the trade is determined by an unlimited capitalist principle of maximilisation of individual profit, not hindering social exploitation and injustice.

In contrary opposition to this strife for differentiation and accentuation of the individual against the unity of the whole, the afro-asiatic area of culture shows the inclination towards highlighting and preferring the unity of the whole against the peculiar identity of the manifold and different members. There is a deep feeling and consciousness of a belonging together of all parts of the whole, which is understood like a great family-system.

So, according to african cultural tradition the individual is defined by its very relations to his tribal fellow men and has the opportunity to develop its individuality through realizing these relations. Mutatis mutandis, also in the asiatic traditions the beeing and behavior of the individuals is determined by their place and role in the unity of the whole.

But also this principle can be exaggerated and conduce to negative phenomena, hindering a free and adequate evolution of individual identities. Therefore, mankind's opportunity and task lies in a "creative encounter" of the different cultures.

*II.2. The sub-contrary opposition between the african and the asiatic area of culture*

As may result from the data offered above, the African and the Asiatic spheres of culture originally have not developed a primarily analyzing and abstracting rationality. There, rationality seems more included and embodied in the concrete spiritual experience; in so far, it is another type of rationality. For sure, also African and Asian culture show the rational capacity to objectify and to master nature. However, here this ability does not enjoy such a preeminent position concerning the basic attitude towards reality, like it has in European culture. In contrast to their European counterpart, the African and the Asian culture put emphasis on a consciousness which works not so much in an isolating and explicating manner, but rather in a holistic, complicating way and which stays closely linked to experiencing and acting in the harmony and unity of Being, as it becomes manifest for instance in the proverbs and riddles and in the so called "wisdom of people".

Within these common features, however, there seem to exist also significant differences between the large cultural areas of both continents. These differences can be represented by the concept of "subcontrary opposition", the members of which are closer to each other than in the case of a contrary opposition. They are two modes of mediation and balance between mind and nature. Let's explain this again in regard of the double aspect of the relationship to nature and to man.



*a) Relationship to nature*

African spirituality expresses itself as being-in-motion, which basically is rhythmical: Music, dance and drama permeate the whole life and determine all regions and references of existence. The being of material nature is experienced as thoroughly “rhythmical”, as “rhythmical event”. This being in motion is transferred by “eidetic identity” into the sphere of the intellectual and spiritual, and it gains complete expression in the products of culture.

Asiatic mind, on the other hand, shows a more contemplative attitude which can be deepened to a philosophical mysticism, as in buddhism. The unity, harmony and balance with nature here consists in “standing-in-oneself” in the spirit of partnership against nature: “letting it come” and “letting it happen” in serenity. This is neither an “antithetical” grasping of nature (as in Europe) nor a “syn-ergetical” penetrating flow of the being of nature (as in Africa); rather a “synthetical adjustment” to nature and equilibrium characterizes the asiatic mind.

In African culture, so to speak, mind effuses into the material nature, joining its vibrations and entering into it, “incarnating” in it and completing it. In asiatic culture mind transcends the material nature and tries to overcome it, to break free from it and any “material dependency and limitation”, as in Hinduism.

Correspondingly, african culture discovers the unity of spiritual being in and together with the plurality of the material beings, in their own midst, as immanent to them. In asiatic culture, on the other hand, unity is searched for beyond and above the material beings, as transcendent to them. “african harmony” of being and consciousness is derived from being; it consists in the immediate vital complex of motion. “asiatic harmony” of being and consciousness is derived from consciousness; it consists in the tranquil, de-

tached calmness of the mind, in the habit of “letting the beings happen”, in the disposition of “lettedness” and serenity.

In both cases mind doesn't primarily try to subdue nature scientifically-technologically, but rather to live in consonance with it. This relation to nature is continued in the relation to man.

*b) Relationship to man*

As mentioned above: While in european-occidental culture the human individual determines itself by creating sharp limits against the fellow man (through rational definition of one's own rights and competences), according to african understanding human individuality consists exactly in its relationships to the fellow men, to the whole group and to nature, in “being there for them”. In this sense, the actualization of human individuality is considered to be the highest value of life.

However: According to asiatic understanding, for example in Hinduism, individuality means a limited status of being, because it is conditioned by the immersion of mind into matter, whereby mind suffers its spatial-temporal multiplication and a decline of its unity. So in asiatic spirituality the strife for unlimited unity and harmony tends to overcome material nature and, through it, human individuality.

This different relation to the human individual is continued, so to speak, beyond death. According to traditional understanding of african culture, the souls of the dead keep on living in the community of their families, supporting them, inspiring them, protecting them as their “good spirits”. According to asiatic understanding, e.g. in hinduism and buddhism, it means an evil, a sign of wrong attachment and still ungained freedom, when deceased souls keep on affecting the living persons in time and space. It fits into this scheme that in african culture bodies after death are buried (and so

given back to the immediate unity with material nature), while in hinduism they are burnt (in order to complete the overcoming of matter and the detachment from it).

A further expression of the typical difference between african and asiatic spirituality regarding the relation to the fellow man and to the community can be seen in the different manners how culture is handed down: In africa, they prefer oral tradition; in asia, they prefer written tradition. Through oral narration the generation handing down its tradition in a vivid way gets involved into the contents of culture which are handed down; the current generation keeps on shaping these contents, thus living on with them. The written word, on the other hand, in a certain way is closed and independent against the people handing down a tradition. Herein the detachedness and distance of the “general spirit” against the many individuals in space and time which hand it down, is documented.

Clear, one has to speak not only about solely one african or asiatic culture, but about a plurality of african and asiatic cultures. However, belonging to the same continent doesn't mean an absolute historical contingency and essential irrelevancy, but -as we tried to show above- a being also ontologically related through the common rooting in “basic spiritual tendencies” typical to the continent.

But by the progress of technological culture (which originated in Europe) the continental borders of the cultures grow more and more relative. Today, the cultures are more and more spread all over the world, and are mixing and penetrating one another. So, on the one side there threatens the danger of blurring and levelling intercultural distinctions, but on the other side there offers the opportunity of a world-wide mutual cultural stimulation and completion.

### **III. Ontological interpretation of world-culture as a triadical being**

Now, we will try to comprehend the described geo-cultural structure of mankind ontologically in the deeper character of its being. At the first view there offers the dialectical understanding of being like thesis, antithesis and synthesis, as it explained Hegel.

So, as it could seem, european mind behaves against nature as antithesis, according to its tendency to confront and subject reality by means of science and technics.

In contrary opposition to it, afro-asiatic cultural tradition primarily accentuates harmony and unity, and that means synthesis.

But synthesis originates from a coming together of “thesis” and “antithesis”. When the synthetical harmony flows more strongly from the “thesis”, namely nature and the reference to nature, the type of the african culture seems to be characterized. Because here unity and balance, as elaborated above, result immediately from vital-natural Being. In asiatic culture, on the other hand, it results rather from a calm detachedness and “lettedness” against nature; so the emergence of the synthesis here seems to be accentuated by the “antithesis” (in a positive understanding of the word). So, african and asiatic culture represent two different types of “synthesis” and harmony between the human mind and nature, which are to each other, as we said, in a sub-contrary opposition.

But this conceptualisation of world-culture obviously is not perfectly adequate. Particularly, the confrontation of european mind with nature is not to be conceived in an exclusively aggressive sense, as it would suggest the hegelian understanding of the concept of antithesis, according to which all antithesis essentially aims at the negation of the thesis. For, as we already have explained, rationally facing nature also includes the opportunity of a responsible con-

version to nature, using it and working it up in concordance with its own senseful structure, to the benefit of the whole. And equally, the asian type of balance and harmony surely is not grounded in an aggressive antithesis to nature. So, we have to transcend the hegelian conceptualisation, and we are pointed to a more adequate understanding of the ontological fundament of world-culture. This can be seen in the idea of a triune archetype and source of all being, in the concept of a Trinitarian God, as it is presented by christian faith and its elaboration by christian philosophers as St. Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. There, the subsequence and structural position of the three divine persons show a certain correspondence and similarity with the three steps of the hegelian dialectics, but without any aggressivity or violence.

Then one could formulate: In so far as european culture is determined by a reality-confronting rationality, it represents in a certain way the second divine person, the logos. But when one looks at the rather perverted status of the european rationality, one has to say: It is more the logos in his being crucified.

In contrary to it, afro-asiatic cultures, by their original disposition for all-integrating unity, show a stronger relation to Holy Spirit. In this context, african spirituality, inasmuch it is more immediate to nature, which is the fundament of culture, accentuates more the emanation of Holy Spirit from God-father, who is the fundamental person in God, and so african spirituality represents creative energy and continuous movement.

Asiatic culture, in its different kind of spirituality, which is more detached from nature and is in front to it, seems to participate preferably in the emanation of Holy Spirit from the logos, and so it points out contemplative tranquility and internal enlightenment.

Thus, in the perspective of christian faith, which deepens and transcends philosophical interpretation, world-culture in its onto-

geographical structure appears as a certain participation in divine holy trinity, like a trace of it and pointing to it. In this context, african spiritual culture has an important and substantial position and an ineludible task in the development of mankind.

Now, let us to sum up the practical consequences of our analysis in an ultimate conclusion.

### **Conclusion:**

### **The opportunity and task of world-cultural development and the role of Africa**

Mankind is to be culturally developed by a creative interplay of the world-cultures, in which all of them give and receive mutual influences. What are the corresponding perspectives?

1. The dynamic *europaean spirit* can receive –without losing its specific faculty of rational confronting, determining and transforming reality– something of afro-asian sensibility for spiritual harmony, which is nourished both by african-energetic immediacy and asian-removed calmness. Precisely through their mutual complementary relation, african and asian spirit are able to “compensate” the europaean-occidental disposition and to bring it into proper proportion again –overcoming its “lack of balance”, namently a head-lasting attitude in front of nature. Being balanced out, the rational confrontation does not lead to alienation from nature but to a deeper and creative approaching in respect and responsibility.

On the other hand, the “scientific-technical” dynamics of the occident can exert its influence on the “distantiated spiritual equilibrium” of the asiatic ori-

ent, and on the “spiritual vivacity immediate to nature” of Africa, thus promoting the development of a “*still more active*” calmness resp. a “*till more purposeful vivacity*”.

2. African spirit, living in immediate participation, even identification, can receive –without losing its energetic rootedness in unity!– some of the european-rational and of the asian-spiritual detachment from the material reality. By assimilating these influences, african life force could reach its fullest accomplishment and fertility and could find its indispensable shape in the concert of cultures.
3. Correspondingly, the asian spirit of detached unity and calm lettedness could develop to a more active and at aims directed attitude through reception and integration of european rational influences, and it could scoop from african sources virulent impulses to root and substantiate its act of life in the concrete nature.

So, the adventure of an essential opening toward the partner, for every culture bears the possibility to develop and realize the own identity more deeply.

An appropriate integration of science and technology, basic conditions of modern life, appears impossible to the African and Asian without a clear expression of the originally European momentum of rational-voluntative detachment. Human mastering and integration of technology, however, are preconditions for the survival of mankind and demand from the occidental spirit a deeper openness and receptivity for the spiritual dispositions towards unity, which come from Africa and Asia –not in order to assimilate or to subject to them (and so losing the own specific features) but to give birth, out of mutual contact, to new and necessary human capacities.

Obviously it could be only such a “creative interplay” of the world-cultures, that let us hope for a *new quality* of human being and behaviour which can sustain peace and open a better future.

Summing up, it may be said that the extensive continental areas of the earth, i.e. Europe-Africa-Asia, in a certain correspondence to the varying natural conditions, have brought forth different mental and cultural dispositions which are complementary to one another and can be understood more deeply in the perspective of a “triadic conception of reality”. So it becomes evident, how in the interplay of world-cultures Africa has a quite specific position, task and opportunity.

### **Endnotes:**

1. *With reference to the whole context* cf. the book: “Creative Peace Through Encounter of World Cultures”, ed. by Heinrich Beck and Gisela Schmirber. Indian Books Centre, Sri Satguru Publications, Delhi 1996, ISBN: 81-7030-486-5 (*German original version*: “Kreativer Friede durch Begegnung der Weltkulturen”, Schriften zur Triadik und Ontodynamik, Bd. 9, Europäischer Verlag der Wissenschaften Peter Lang, Frankfurt /Main, Berlin, Bern, New York, Paris, Wien 1995, ISBN: 3-631-48934-X; *Spanish version*: Maracaibo, Venezuela, 1996; *Chinese version*: Peking 1998). And equally cf. its continuation by the contribution of the author: “Europa – Afrika – Asien. Komplementarität der Weltkulturen” (Europe – Africa – Asia. Complementarity of the World Cultures), in the book: Ganzheitliches Denken (Festschr. Arnulf Rieber), Schriften zur Triadik und Ontodynamik, Bd. 10, ed. by Erwin Schadel, Frankfurt/M. etc., 1996, pp. 51 – 83; ISBN 3-631-49171-9

2. With reference to the european culture cf. by the author: “The relation of European Thought to the “Logos” and “Logic”. A Possible Contribution to Cultural World Integration?”, in: M. J. Jandl and K. Greiner (edd.): Science, Medicine and Culture (Festschr. Fritz G. Wallner), Peter Lang, Frankfurt/M., Berlin, Bern, Bruxelles, New York, Oxford, Wien, 2005; ISBN 3-631-53652-6



3. With reference to the african culture cf. e.g. the according explanations of the Dutch physician, philosopher and theologian *Joseph Gerard Donders*, who spent decades in different countries of Africa, investigating and practising: 'Einfluß der christlichen Kultur auf das afrikanische Menschenbild' ['The influence of Christian culture on the african understanding of man']. In: Kultur als christlicher Auftrag heute, im Auftrag des Direktoriums der Salzburger Hochschulwochen hrsg. von Ansgar Paus, Kevelaer und Graz-Wien-Köln s.d., esp. 369 and 379; *John S. Mbiti*, Afrikanische Religion und Weltanschauung, Berlin-New York 1974; *Joseph M. Nyasani* (ed. on instruction of the Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation), Philosophical focus on culture and traditional thought systems in development [Nairobi 1994]. [Proceedings of a congress of African scholars and philosophers held 1988 at Mombassa/Kenya]; esp. for the understanding of the community of life wherein also the deceased, the ancestors and the spirits are included: *id.*, Unity in traditional African Society and the Status of the Individual. In: E. Schadel/U. Voigt (edd.), Sein-Erkennen-Handeln. Interkulturelle, ontologische und ethische Perspektiven. Festschrift für Heinrich Beck zum 65. Geb., Frankf./M.-Berlin-Bern-New York-Paris-Wien 1994, pp. 75-82; *Clement M. P. Oniang'o*, The relation of nature, time and individuality as the fundament of the african concept of harmony and peace. In: H. Beck/G. Schmirber (edd.), Creative peace through encounter of world cultures [endn. 4], pp. 175-197; Jameson Kurasha, Der Stellenwert des Personbegriffes in afrikanischer Philosophie [The value of the concept of person in African philosophy; translated and commented by U. Voigt]. In: Symbolon. Jahrbuch der Gesellschaft für Symbolforschung N.F. 12 (1995) 185-195; see also Heinz Kimmerle, Philosophie in Afrika. Annäherung an einen interkulturellen Philosophiebegriff [Philosophy in Africa. Approach to an intercultural concept of philosophy], Frankf./M. 1991; *id.*, Die Dimension des Interkulturellen: Philosophie in Afrika - afrikanische Philosophie. 2. Teil: Supplemente und Verallgemeinerungsschritte [The dimension of the inter-cultural: philosophy in Africa - African philosophy. Second part: supplements and steps towards generalization], Amsterdam-Atlanta, 1994.

4. With reference to the asiatic culture cf. the explanations of the doctor, philosopher and theologian Cyril v. Korvin-Krasinski who for a long

time lived in different countries of Asia and in dialogue with Govinda-Yoga: Tibetische Medizinphilosophie [Tibetan medical philosophy], Zürich <sup>2</sup>1964; *id.*, Mikrokosmos und Makrokosmos in religionsgeschichtlicher Sicht [Microcosm and macro-cosm seen from the perspective of history of religions], Düsseldorf 1960; *id.*, Trina Mundi Machina. Die Signatur des alten Eurasien [The triadic structure of the world. The signature of Ancient Eurasia], Mainz 1986 [an attempt of comprehensive interpretation of meaning, pointing to analogies of a triadic-trinitarian principle of understanding reality which are expressed by the ancient traditions]; on the view of reality diverging in a mode typical to the single cultures as given in the science of medicine and especially in philosophy, cf. Ram Adhar Mall, Die drei Geburtsorte der Philosophie: China-Indien-Europa [The three places where philosophy was born: China-India-Europe], Mainz 1989; further: Hans-Peter Hasenfratz, Der indische Weg. Die Spiritualität eines Kontinents [The Indian way. The spirituality of a continent], Freiburg 1994.

5. With reference to the question of typical differences between African and Asiatic culture an interesting remark has been made by Arnulf Rieber during a discussion in our mutually organized cultural-philosophical research colloquium at Bamberg University in the summer term 1992: "The triangle of cultures - Europe, Africa, Asia": In African as well as in Asiatic cultural tradition there is the conviction that in nature, e.g. on mountains or on trees, spirits are dwelling (deities or souls of the ancestors). According to African understanding, the spirit is located in the centre of the tree; it forms the "heart" of the tree, its life in a deeper sense of the word. According to Asiatic understanding, the spirit is sending effects into the tree "from above"; it forms the "head" of the tree, dominating it. From the African perspective, the spirit is living in the midst of material nature; from the Asiatic perspective, it is tending towards domination, overcoming and liberation. (Of course, the expressions: "from above", "midst" resp. "head" and "heart" aren't primarily to be understood in a properly spatial sense, rather in a symbolical and ontological sense.)