

Transcending the "Clash of Civilizations"

By *Iokibe Makoto*

The clash of civilizations is not a new problem. The war between the ancient Greek and Persian Empires can be viewed as a drama of civilizations in conflict. So can the Crusades. Above all, modern Western civilization's global hegemony can be seen as such, as well as the Mongols' conquest of the Eurasian continent.

When two civilizations clash, what kind of problems arise? A work that discusses historical encounters between civilizations far more broadly than the recently popular Samuel Huntington is Arnold Toynbee's *A Study of History*.

When a civilization is challenged by a powerful external civilization, how does it respond? Citing the example of the ancient Jews' response to the Roman civilization, Toynbee identifies two responses typical to the challenged civilization: "zealotry" and "Herodism."

A "zealot" will eagerly fight to the death against hopeless odds, carried away by fanatical ethnic pride. Jewish "zealots" barricaded themselves in Fort Masada near the Dead Sea and continued to resist unyieldingly for three years after the Romans had conquered Jerusalem. The stand-off culminated in the mass suicide of several hundred soldiers and their families. In modern Japanese history, examples of "zealotry" include the "exclusionists" who were opposed to the opening of Japan's borders in the latter days of the Tokugawa Shogunate and advocated expulsion of foreigners, and the "die-hard nationalists" or "militarists" who died a sacrificial death rather than surrender during the World War II era. In any age, the "demon of zealotry" exists more or less everywhere, as exemplified by the occasional eruption even today of "anti-U.S. nationalism" directed against the superpower that represents

Western civilization. The zealot's rationale for "zealotry" is the extremism triggered by the appearance of the "demon," a headlong dash to self-destruction beyond the reach of rational control.

Herod the Great realized that physically resisting the Romans would lead to Judaic tragedy. He opened Judea and endured Roman domination. However, he remained king under the ultimate authority of Rome and held on to indirect rule. His intention was to preserve the Jewish race, learn the secrets of the powerful foreign civilization from the inside, and vanquish the foreign civilization in the long run. Toynbee lauds modern Japan as an "example of successful Herodism", in that Japan suppressed the "exclusionists" in the process of opening its borders, achieved modernization by swiftly studying Western civilization, and won the Russo-Japanese war with its newly acquired capabilities.

Japan had a precedent for intercourse with foreign civilization. In ancient times, Japan experienced an overwhelmingly powerful impact from Chinese civilization. Although Japan dispatched envoys to Sui and Tang Dynasty China and learned many things from Chinese civilization, it avoided losing its independence by capitalizing on the geographic advantage of being an insular country surrounded by a natural moat - the sea. Japan utilized Chinese civilization as an impetus for its own development. We can thus say that a distinctive Japanese approach to involvement with foreign civilizations had already been conceived.

In the modern era, after acquiring the power of Western civilization, Meiji Japan defeated a Western military superpower without losing its independence, by capitalizing on the geographic advantage of being a far-

eastern insular nation. This feat can be called an even greater "Herodistic success story" than that of Herod the Great himself. From 1871 to 1873, Okubo Toshimichi accompanied ambassador plenipotentiary Iwakura Tomomi on a diplomatic mission to the U.S. and Europe. On this journey, Okubo discerned the reality of the powerful foreign civilization of the Occident. After returning home, he fomented the "Coup d'Etat of 1873" in opposition to the absentee government's "*Seikan-Ron* (Plan to Invade Korea)." Okubo established a domestic modernization policy that placed "precedence on domestic affairs."



Photo : Kyodo News

Okubo Toshimichi : one of the key founders of Meiji Japan

In his "Opinion Regarding the Proposed Invasion of Korea," Okubo explained how difficult it is for a country to protect its territory and people. With the words, "Endure any humiliation you may feel. Refrain from taking action, even in the name

of righteousness," he cautioned against the danger of inviting destruction by getting swept away by ethnic pride. With its assertion that political leaders must be willing to "weigh the importance of matters, take cognizance of the times, and cherish great hopes," Okubo's Opinion might be called the blueprint for modern Japan's emergence as "a successful example of Herodism." It was a realistic anti-war argument, as well as an exhortation to place "precedence on domestic affairs based on an understanding of the world."

However, a quarter century after the Russo-Japanese War, the Japan of the 1930s had shifted from cooperative learning from foreign civilization to the practice of independent diplomacy. To borrow an expression from Konoe Fumimaro, Japan had "discarded Anglo-American pacifism ... and reverted back to itself." Japan then proceeded to pursue a course of blatant militaristic jingoism under the banner of "the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere." In the summer of 1945, Japan's defeat in the war had become inevitable. Over the 77 years since the Meiji Reformation, modern Japanese history had completed a full cycle, moving from learning from foreign civilization, to self-reform and rapid development, to reversion to Japan and destruction. At this point, the Japanese Army advocated continuing to fight until all of Japan was annihilated in a so-called "*Hondo-Kessen* (decisive battle on Japanese territory)." The most powerful domestic organization had become possessed by the "demon of zealotry."

This zealotry was suppressed by Emperor Hirohito's government, which accepted defeat and foreign occupation. Through indirect rule, Hirohito averted domination by foreign civilization while awaiting "Japan's eventual glorious reconstruction." Hirohito's government was truly the revival of the tradition of Herod the Great. Having re-embraced "Herodism," post-war Japan learned from the U.S. while under its control and was reborn as an economic power. Economically, Japan ultimately caught up with and even surpassed the U.S. for a while in the 1980s.

As explained above, we Japanese have experienced the hardship and the glory, the success and the failure, of one challenged by the behemoth of Western civilization. As Okubo Toshimichi realized, the only viable response to such a challenge is to vanquish the challenger by learning from its powerful foreign civilization, and not to allow festering feelings of humiliation to erupt into zealotry. By experiencing such an eruption, the Japanese have poignantly realized this point once again.

Incidentally, how has that bastion of Western civilization, the United States, fared? What kind of problems and mind-set does it have? Although there is a tendency to infer that the U.S. is doing just fine, it is clear that it went through a difficult period following the 70s and 80s when it experienced a deepening sense of loss, having been scarred by the Vietnam War and then overtaken economically by Japan. In sum, once Japan and other non-Western nations successfully modernized by adroitly practicing "Herodism," the U.S. was writhing in the chagrin of being pursued and overtaken by the upstarts.

Even before Huntington, such irritation was articulated by Theodore H. White in his essay "*Danger from Japan*" (1985). White denounced the fact that Japan, the country that surrendered to the U.S. aboard the U.S.S. Missouri in 1945 and was subsequently taken under the wing of the U.S., was now flaunting its economic superiority, having arrogantly conquered the U.S. from coast to coast with its products.

At its peak, the Japanese economy accounted for 15% of global GNP (although in hindsight it was at the height of its bubble). This peak coincided with the end of the Cold War. At that time, some Americans were saying that the real winner of the Cold War was not the U.S., but Japan and West Germany. Moreover, an opinion poll revealed that Japan was considered more of a future threat to the U.S. than the Soviet Union. White's warning apparently increased the perceived realism of the Japanese threat. In the first post-Cold War presidency, President Clinton created an Economic Security Council in

accord with the priority he places on the economy. Towards Japan, the Clinton Administration adopted a hard-nosed policy of setting "numerical targets" and placing the "utmost priority on results." During its first term, the Clinton Administration was on the verge of aggressively retaliating against the Japanese economy. Although Japan's bubble had already burst, the Clinton Administration was under the misconception that the Japanese economy was as powerful as ever. This was back in 1993, the year that Huntington wrote, "*The Clash of Civilizations and Remaking of World Order*."

Huntington is a traditional realist whose primary orientation is geopolitical. As such, he has no economic bias. Accordingly, he did not consider Japan to be the dangerous rival of the U.S. He classified Japan as an original civilization that has emerged from Confucian civilization and has been Westernized. This classification is fine, but his theory of civilizational clash is rough-hewn.

The following is a recapitulation of what Huntington says. In the Western-centric history of the world to date, the main problems have been ideological conflict and economic conflict. Political and economic systems and stages of economic development have been the standards by which countries are grouped together. This will change once non-Western civilization achieves parity with Western civilization. Cultural differences will differentiate people. Constellations of countries grouped together by civilization will become the basic unit. Civilizational conflict will become the main problem. In particular, the ultimate conflict will be a face-off between Western and non-Western civilizations.

With the Cold War now won, Western civilization is presently in its prime, seemingly destined to envelop the entire globe. This state concurrently marks the start of Western civilization's decline. The Western world is confronting the emergence of non-Western civilizations with hopes, ideas, and resources that delineate the world by non-Western methods. Huntington fears that retaliation by

non-Western civilizations will become the primary theme in the future. Of the world's seven or eight civilizations, the ones that are most notably anti-Western are Islamic civilization and Confucian civilization.

Huntington concludes that collusion between the two has already begun in the form of arms exports from China and North Korea to Pakistan, Iran, and other such countries.

Is such a view of international politics sound?

If countries were to group together by civilization to fight against each other as blocs, Saddam Hussein's Iraq would theoretically form an alliance with all Arab and Islamic countries. In reality, Iraq's client states do not include even one country in the same civilizational bloc. Rather, most Arab countries are allied with the United States. Moreover, would the Confucian countries of South Korea, China, and Japan form a block revolving around North Korea's brandishing of nuclear and Teopodong missiles? These peripheral nations that have threatened the vital interest of national security have found no allies. Similarly, the Japanese Empire during World War II, which advocated liberation of Asia from Caucasian domination, should have befriended all Asian countries (or countries of "Confucian civilization," in Huntington's parlance). The reality was of course different. Japan invaded China. China subsequently fought back while seeking assistance from the United States.

Huntington postulates that, unlike the past, the future will be an era of primarily inter-civilizational conflict. But how will national governments, which are charged with the actual duty of protecting their people and national interests, be able to fight for the sake of the elusive abstraction "civilization?" Huntington's failure to draw a conceptual distinction between civilization and culture was pointed out as follows by Yamazaki Masakazu in *"The Birth of East Asian Civilization."*

"Culture is a mode of living half-rooted in the subconscious. It denotes an order that is learned physically and adopted as convention. In contrast, civilization is a completely conscious

mode of living. It is an order that is understood conceptually. While there is a gray zone between culture and civilization, they are not at opposite poles of a continuum. As an example, England's parliamentary system and machine industry are civilization, but the MP's oratory style and the subtle physical know-how for operating a machine are culture."

"It is particularly important to be mindful of this distinction in rectifying the errors in Huntington's book. Huntington fails to clearly differentiate between civilization and culture. And attributes of both are included in what he considers to be civilization. Consequently, he is plagued by nightmares of "clashes" between civilizations. At times, his book considers civilization to have fatalistic attributes for ethnic races, just like culture does. At other times, the book considers culture to have universality and the power to expand, just like civilization. The result is a glimpse of the danger of something inexorable and irrational like culture colliding with political self-assertion masquerading as civilization."

In addition to such conceptual problems, the deficiency in Huntington's book is its inelegant, one-dimensional historical view of conflict. As stated above, Huntington believes that the tide of inter-civilizational conflict is shifting from the zenith of Western civilization to retaliation by non-Western civilizations. This issue was first raised by Huntington's book. Seized with anxiety about an impending assault, Huntington sounds the alarm out of a sense of mission to protect the U.S. and Western civilization. What the book depicts is not a boundlessly self-confident and optimistic United States, but a world where men carrying guns roam the streets at night, out to spot and blow the heads off of the villains that they are convinced are conspiring against them.

From a different perspective, perhaps such coarseness was intentional on the part of Huntington. One should probably assume that Huntington has an ulterior agenda. What is this agenda? In the U.S., the total population of people of color - blacks, Hispanics, Asians - is

becoming the majority, outnumbering whites. Meanwhile, around the world, the power of non-Western civilization is becoming predominant. In the face of such trends, perhaps Huntington intended to galvanize America to regain once more its former grandeur and resume its role as world leader, enabling the American people to overcome the humiliation of the 70s and 80s.

To awaken Americans from slumber, nothing is more effective than a sense of crisis. That is, proclaiming the advent of an enemy. In the process of successfully dealing with the crises of the 20th century, Americans have become sensitized to surprise attacks from enemies. John F. Kennedy, in his Harvard University graduation thesis, *"Appeasement at Munich?"* pointed out the error of placating Hitler in Munich.

I once attended a conference with James Reston of The New York Times, a journalist who personifies the 20th century. "Every nationality has a nightmare," Reston said. "When conditions become alarming, they frantically take action to avert their nightmare. For instance, Germans' nightmare is inflation. For the British, it's unemployment. What is the nightmare for Japanese and Americans?" He answered the question himself regarding America: "Pearl Harbor. The fear of a surprise attack from an unanticipated enemy is most Americans' concept of a threat. This concept spawned McCarthyism and the Domino Theory during the Cold War, leading the U.S. into the Vietnam War."

Following the end of the Cold War, Americans were being liberated from their concept of a threat. Just then, Huntington stirred them up, saying, "No, Don't relax. There is still an enemy out there. It's Islam. It's Confucianism. It's the clash of civilizations." If this was Huntington's intent, it explains the coarseness of his book.

The book was written in 1993, just as U.S. predominance was becoming bona fide. The U.S. had won the Cold War. It won the Gulf War. And there was mounting evidence that it had come from behind to win the economic war against Japan, the



Photo: Kyodo News

Chinese military exercises in the Taiwan Strait raised concerns among Asian countries

former thorn in its side. Perhaps Huntington was rousing America to action toward overwhelming predominance with the message, "We are now at our peak, but don't relax. A hellacious attack is coming from behind from the non-Western world."

Subsequent developments in Asia have continued to contradict the theory of the clash of civilizations. Support from other Confucian or Asian countries failed to materialize not only during the aforementioned North Korean nuclear missile crisis, but also when China fired missiles into the Taiwan Straits in March 1996. Without exception, Asian countries were glad and relieved that the U.S. restrained China by dispatching two aircraft carriers to the region. Asian countries determine their future course based on their national security and national interests, not the civilization to which they belong.

Arguments that attach utmost importance to grouping countries by civilizational archetype or origin based primarily on religions such as Christianity, Islam, Confucianism, and Hinduism are irrational. These are great currents in history, but not necessarily the be-all and end-all.

In contrast, the common ground among developed nations is much stronger. Advanced societies that share a free economic order and democracy are in effect building a community, developing not only a borderless economy but also a borderless culture and even a borderless

security. Since Europe and the Americas constitute a Western civilization bloc with the same origins, it is not surprising that they would form a Western community. Yet Japan's interests and values have also increasingly converged with those of the West as its market economy and democratic government have matured, despite its different cultural origins.

Although Japan and Korea share common roots, they were bitter enemies until recently. As this century draws to a close, they have finally achieved a historic reconciliation. However, this reconciliation was not the result of revitalization of their common Confucian roots. Rather, it was due to the common ground of economic development and democratization. South Korean President Kim Dae Jung once said that postwar Japan had two commendable points: democratization and aid to developing nations. Most importantly, Korea's economic progress has spawned a middle class and given rise to societal pluralism and democratization. It has also brought about intellectual maturation. Common ground and cooperation are growing throughout East Asia. However, this trend is likewise due to participation in modern civilization, not Confucian or Buddhist roots. Instead of "one Asia," the region has heretofore been nothing but "individual countries." However, as Aoki Tamotsu pointed out long ago, a commonality that transcends nationality has begun to emerge in East Asia, making the face of "one Asia" more visible. By virtue of sharing a modern civilization centered on the market economy and democracy, countries rich in cultural diversity are developing amicable relations for the first time in history. It is not inconceivable for them to even create a kind of a community. Huntington's book fears that non-Western civilizations will commence a

backlash against Western civilization at this very moment when Western values and institutions are enjoying unprecedented worldwide acceptance. In modern history, isn't Western civilization very confident that it has brought about more good than harm? Huntington seems to personally think that civilizational relations are too enmeshed in a power-struggle phase and that non-Western civilizations will surely retaliate as long as they have the ability to do so. This is nonsense. Freedom, human rights, democracy, scientific technology, and affluent lifestyles are all wonderful assets that Western civilization has brought into the world. We cannot live without Western-made economic life, though we adapt it to suit our own tastes.

In this sense, Western civilization has decisively won. And this (here is an important point, one that Huntington fails to grasp) is a victory for us as well. The fruits of Western civilization have spread to the non-Western world and dominate us. Conversely, this also signifies that we have succeeded in learning Western civilization's universal values and the secrets of its power. In the lexicon used above, this is nothing other than a Herodistic success.

What will happen to the world order when not only Japan, but other East Asian nations, Mexico, Chile, and many other countries around the world have mastered and triumphed over Western civilization by successfully practicing Herodism?

Modern civilization will likely become a common entity overlaid atop each country's unique culture - that is, cultural diversity. As Yamazaki Masakazu points out in the passage quoted above, Europe and America are no exception. They too have built the modern era by dying to the traditional society of the past. Modern civilization is not the exclusive possession of Western Europe. In the 20th century, its champion was the United States. It comprises universal values that anyone can learn and create.

Since around 1993, when Huntington wrote *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, the U.S. has been earnestly pursuing revitalization in a manner completely

different from the civilizational conflict called for by Huntington. Namely, it has embarked upon the information technology (IT) revolution. At the beginning of the 1990s, the U.S. economy was only growing at slightly over 1% per year. Today, it is growing at 3.5%. Nearly all of the difference is attributed to the IT revolution. In the U.S. of the 1990s, bold new industries have blossomed in the soil laid by the new liberalized economies of the Reagan, Thatcher, and Nakasone era of the 1980s. Moreover, against the backdrop of the global victory of market economies and liberal democracy resulting from the end of the Cold War, the United States armed with the Internet as a new weapon are proceeding with globalization, a worldwide emanation of the principles of freedom.

The IT revolution converged with financial markets shortly after its inception, unleashing an inexorable advance. Through the East Asian economic crisis and hedge fund crisis, IT proved that it is neither a god nor an angel. Like all new powers throughout history, it has the potential to turn into a beast that wreaks havoc on humans and society, unless it is properly tamed. During the East Asian economic crisis, Japan proposed establishing an Asian Monetary Fund (AMF), but the proposal was thwarted by opposition from the U.S., China, and the IMF. Once the contagion had spread from the hedge funds to Brazil, the U.S. exhibited a willingness to undertake reform of the international financial system. "Once the storm subsequently passed, however, it became a case of putting off the roof repairs due to sunny weather."

However, another storm will definitely come. In preparation for that eventuality, perhaps Japan should bring this issue up for discussion within the framework of the ASEAN 10 + 3 (Japan, South Korea, China) East Asian summit. Although East Asia exists within the global order and cooperative system (modern civilization), it must cultivate the capability to deal with its own problems itself as much as possible. This was a lesson of the East Asian economic crisis.

Globalization is a worldwide extension of the principles of freedom. It accordingly encompasses the freedoms to succeed and fail. The flip side of Bill Gates' success story is the proliferation of impoverished countries from sub-Saharan Africa to central Asia. In other words, marginalization. Amid the freedom to fail that is inherent in globalization, the people of impoverished countries are plagued by deeply rooted despair, having lost what little wealth they possessed. Among people slowly starving to death, some take up arms and become terrorists burning with righteous indignation. This is a *jihad* (holy war) rooted in despair. They discover a universal orthodoxy in Islamic fundamentalism. Islam is not bad. Nor does it lead to terrorism. Socio-economic despair calls forth dogmatic extremism. This is the role that new schools of Christianity have repeatedly played throughout history. In Japan, this societal role has been played by the new *Nichiren* sects, among others. This is not a problem that will be resolved by bashing Islamic fundamentalism or bombing terrorists. Rather, the problem is caused by the very process of globalization based on fundamental liberalism. Globalization is separating the global economy's winners from losers and sharply exacerbating the international gap between rich and poor. Since the system is spawning hopeless poverty, the problem can never be resolved by bombing or humanitarian aid.

Japan's response to globalization must be two-pronged. On one hand, Japan must not be overwhelmed by this *tsunami*. This is a new revolution of modernization. We therefore must subjugate it through a new Herodism. We should become acquainted with the Internet and English as an international language beginning in elementary school and make IT an everyday necessity on a mass scale.

On the other hand, we must work toward reforming and rebuilding international systems. Although the free economic order is an indispensable public asset, the beast of tyrannical globalization must be corralled and tamed.

Otherwise, we invite pronounced wealth disparities and the indictment

of international society itself. We should regard the architecture of international systems as important work. At the same time, we should effectively capitalize on the unrivaled ODA (Official Development Assistance) capabilities that Japan has developed. ODA has been the central instrument of postwar Japan's open national interest. Through ODA, Japan has supported the development and stability of international society while enhancing its own interests and prestige on a long-term basis. ODA is the activity that has contributed most to developing nations and international society. It is also the activity that has done the most to boost Japan's international esteem. We must not discard it, deluded by myopic domestic opposition and cold-hearted words by other developed nations weary of aiding others. We cannot reduce the poverty rate in developing countries with humanitarian aid and soft social aid. The only way to help cure poverty is cooperation that helps to elevate the recipient society's overall economy through comprehensive aid packages, including yen loans and grant aid for technical assistance like that provided by Japan to East Asian countries. At the same time, we must rebuild the international economic system itself to enable international society to become not only vital, but stable as well.

If international society fails to undertake such great tasks, resulting in a situation where the cries of despair of marginalized, impoverished countries resound all over the globe, Huntington's prediction will likely end up being right on target. Islamic or Confucian civilization may or may not be the instigator, but a destructive backlash against U.S. and Western civilization will erupt and spread to every corner of the globe. We must not lead the 21st century into a world-destroying itself from within. **UJI**

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