

From the Clash of Civilizations to a Dialogue between Civilizations

- A Review of the 20th Century and a Preview of the 21st Century -

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I. The Concept of "Civilization" in World History

As we approach the twenty-first century, the two paradigms of the Islamic and the American civilizations have become the subject of discussion. These paradigms are engaged in the "clash of civilizations" posited by Samuel P. Huntington and in the "dialogue between civilizations" proposed by Iranian President Khatami. As we look back on the path that Japan has followed in the 20th century, these seem to be useful concepts, not just for Japanese history, but also for considering the unique characteristics of European, American, Chinese and Islamic "civilizations" in world history.

The concept of "civilization" was originally a unit of historical focus. Arnold Toynbee, the author of *A Study of History*, referred to a civilization as a sphere that can be understood in and of itself without reference to other areas of the world - a sphere where the links in a causal sequence are contained within their own time and space. The innovation of Huntington's argument is the application of the concept of civilization to the study of politics. "Civilizations" for Huntington are political units created by a shared civilization. If we understand his argument in this way, then his intention would be better understood.

Toynbee's concept allows for "encounters" and "clashes" between societies that exist within the same space and have contact. Therefore, while each civilization is unique, it is natural that there be a causal sequence between them. However, a criticism of this thought is that, in terms of time, it links all civilizations in history in one sequence. Consequently, this means that the characteristics of civilizations occurring in different places can only

be identified in the same era. Therefore, Huntington's theory is a positive experiment for looking into the "future" and forecasting changes.

However, two major problems remain in using the concept of civilization in political analysis.

However, there are differences between Toynbee and Huntington. Toynbee considered that Russian / Soviet society and American society both fundamentally belong to Western civilization. In contrast, Huntington isolated Russian civilization as the



Photo: AP/WWP

A dialogue between Iranian President Khatami (left) and Pope John Paul II (right), which could lay the ground for better relations between Christians and Muslims

The first problem is that both Toynbee and Huntington consider Western society to be one continuously linked civilization since Charlemagne in the 8th or 9th century. However, as the late Murakami Yasusuke emphasized, Western society was clearly transformed by the birth of modern science and industrialization, and should be conceived as having become a separate civilization from that time onward. The idea that Western society was the same before and after industrialization easily leads to the conclusion that industrialization equals Westernization.

Eastern Orthodox Church, and lumped Western Europe and America together as Western civilization. However, Huntington may have underestimated the expansion of tension and conflict in the 21st century relations between America and the EU, especially France and Germany, which differ from Anglo-Saxon Britain, although this will not be as great as tension with Japan and China. It seems better to think of America and Russia after Toynbee as sub-civilizations formed as a result of responses to external challenges or civilizations formed by adaptations to different natural environments.

Secondly, as the clash of civilizations is an extreme form of encounter between civilizations, it is natural that the result should be political or military. However, if we suppose that an encounter between civilizations results in some kind of combination of the characteristics of each civilization, a clash of civilizations is but a one-way street of conquest and conquered, victory and annihilation. In this sense, Huntington's theory is philosophically related to historicism and a materialist developmental view of history such as that espoused by Hegel and Marx. However, there are plenty of examples where military victory has not led to cultural conquest. These include the relationship between the Mongols and Iran/the Islamic world and the relationship between the European Crusades and the Byzantine Empire.

As a Japanese, I would like to stress that there is also a unique Japanese way, which has basically succeeded in a compromise that combines Western industrial civilization and its own distinctive civilization. The issue in the 21st century will be whether it is possible for China and India and Islamic nations, such as Iran, to adopt the Japanese way. Huntington rejected this possibility. The position of President Khatami is not yet clear. In any case, what makes dialogue between civilizations possible is the fundamental "equality" of the various civilizations, from Mesopotamia to the New World Society, as propounded by Spengler and Toynbee. The concept of locating each civilization on a single line and classifying them into "Asian-type," "Classical-type" or "German-type" according to their stage of development, as was done by Hegel and Marx, is unlikely to be accepted by the people of the world's leading non-Western civilizations, such as Islam.

II. Will the 21st Century also be the "American Century"?

Liberal democracy and its vitality have thus far been the main foundation of the world order and its political ideology. It was this principle that underpinned Japan's post-war reconstruction and led to its

prosperity. However, this principle has not thoroughly received support in the Islamic world and in China. There has been a subtle contradiction between President Woodrow Wilson's principle of the self-determination of peoples (and the consequent pluralization of the world) and the liberal internationalist attempt to spread traditional American liberalism as a universal concept (the anticipated spread of the American way of life as a result of the progress of history). The mechanical application of Wilsonian self-determination in Eastern and Central Europe and the artificial division of the Middle East region in the wake of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire have been at the root of major disputes right up to the present day, in which we witness the frequent outbreak of ethnic disputes.

In addition, even if America had continued its involvement in Europe between the two world wars, there is no certainty that the politics of Central and Eastern Europe would have been stable and that the nation states created would have achieved peace and stability. Further, even if America had received mandates over the Middle East instead of Britain and Germany, there is no guarantee that the present Palestinian problem would not have occurred. However, it appears that America has no alternative but to selectively engage in the world's regional problems in the 21st century. Accordingly, the "American century" is certain to continue for some time in the 21st century. This is because there is no other country or civilization that can take responsibility for the world order, covering issues from economy to security. Certainly, President Bill Clinton possesses a weaker streak of the traditional Democratic Party's sense of mission towards international politics and liberal internationalism which are inherited from President Wilson. This is not by chance. At heart, President Clinton may understand the world as a co-existence of a number of "civilization blocks," or types of "empires".

(This is not part of the main thread, so I'll defer to the judgment of Noda Nobuo, but the concepts of Progressivism and Manifest Destiny,

Giddings' theory of democratic empire, and Walter Lipman's theory of undeveloped nations led by American imperialism are worth discussing. The American identity proposed by contemporary American multi-culturalists and Ronald Takaki's *A Different Mirror* should be considered from many angles in terms of the relationship between the problem of Japanese immigration at the beginning of the 20th century and racial discrimination. For example, the conversion of Japan and Germany into democratic nation states was seen as a victory for American liberal internationalism. However, when Japan became an economic power, the theory of Japanese heterogeneity became popular in America.)

However, for the 21st century to become the "American century," the challenges presented by China and Islam must be overcome. Here, the "clashes" that Huntington refers to can be better understood as clashes between "empires" rather than "civilizations". This brings to mind the differences in the understanding of 1918 between Spengler and President Wilson. Spengler's theory, emphasizing the decline of Western civilization since the 19th century, made sense amidst the defeat and ruin in Europe. On the other hand, America was overflowing with optimism due to the promotion of the sense of mission represented by President Wilson. Are Spengler's proposition of the emergence of an empire with a Julius Caesar-type character at the end of civilization and Huntington's concept of a core state the same? If there are empires at the core of civilizations, China and America seem to be candidates. In the 21st century, even more than in the 20th century, the Islamic *Umma* (a spiritual community that transcends national boundaries) will have the possibility and basis to challenge American liberal internationalism as far as its pride in universalism is concerned.

III. Tradition and Modernity in Islam

Islamic civilization was not a mutation that sprang suddenly from

the desert. It was a derivative civilization that emerged together with Byzantine civilization and Western civilization after the early demise of Roman civilization. However, Byzantine civilization diminished in the process of accepting Christianity and lost its tolerance and flexibility as a major civilization. Islam had the potential to be in opposition to Western society from its beginnings, but its major role was as the successor to the Greek and Latin classical civilizations, at least until the 14th and 15th centuries. It emerged from Christianity and Judaism and created the simplest form of monotheism in desert cities. Society based on Islam expanded into the vacuum left by the Roman Empire, which had already collapsed as a form of civilization. In particular, it was the successor of Greek-Hellenistic civilization from the time of the Abbasid dynasty and achieved rapid growth in terms of social organization and cultural creativity. The achievements of ibn Sina and ibn Rushd in the Greek philosophical tradition are ample evidence of this. An example of a non-Arabic Islamic dynasty was the Ottoman Empire, which at 500 years was the longest surviving dynasty. Following that, the Iranian Safavid dynasty is next.

By contrast, there was no substantial European civilization in the 16th century. In Europe, sub-categories of Latin civilization and Greek civilization functioned as the actual civilizations, thus it does not make sense to consider that there was one overall European civilization. In addition, if the Mediterranean world is considered as one integrated unit, the category of "Mediterranean civilization" is important, as Fernand Braudel argues. He refers to "Latin, Islam and Greece" as "the three great Mediterranean civilizations." This means that they are bound together by a common destiny.

However, one of the major features of Islamic civilization is its history of internal division. The clash of civilizations is symbolized by the reluctance of the Byzantine Church, the descendent of Greek civilization that faced its death in the 16th century, to submit to the Latin Church, the descendent of Roman

civilization. There have been similar clashes within Islamic civilization. The conflict between Shia Iran and the rest of the Sunna Islamic world sometimes gives the impression that they belong to entirely different worlds in terms of civilization, without even considering the conflict between the Safavid dynasty and the Ottoman Empire. It was a fact that the Greek clerics surrendered to a general of the Ottoman Empire who was an obstinate opponent of Venice and the Latin Church. This may be unlikely. However, the reason is simple. According to Braudel, it was because the Turks were generally tolerant, did not engage in enthusiastic proselytizing, and did not oppose the promotion of belief in the Greek Orthodox Church.

However, compromise and harmony between many religions are extremely difficult, and may even be impossible. One person who dreamed of harmony and unification of many religions in Europe was Guillaume Postel (1510 ~ 1581), a 16th century French Orientalist. He learned Greek, Latin, Hebrew and Arabic and traveled in Turkey and Syria. Postel was the first French scholar with a strong awareness of the existence of non-Christian civilizations as seen in his *Koran Studies* (1543) and *Theory of World Harmony* (1544). The thoughts of Postel, who envisioned the achievement of world peace based on the fusion of a variety of religions with the French imperial system at the core, went far beyond the imagination of his contemporaries. Postel's spiritualist statements were not accepted by either the new or the old guard, and he was considered insane. If we view religious belief as the most intensely personal affair, then religion is the most resistant of any civilization's assets, powers or systems. Also, as Fernand Braudel argues, the road to religious integration lies far away in the distance.

However, dialogue between the West and Islam is not inconceivable. To achieve this, it is necessary to isolate and eliminate Islamic terrorism, which is viewed as a part of Islamic fundamentalism. Idealistically speaking, terrorism will be extinguished when ideas based on

right and justice are widespread throughout the world and an atmosphere exists for people to sympathize with ways of life that differ from their own, based on persuasion and understanding, and when the conditions exist for different ways of thinking to be expressed in peace. The only way to end terrorism is to work with perseverance on the creation of enclaves of the moderates in the Islamic world through such means as the achievement of a fair Middle Eastern peace, American monitoring and guarantee of compromises by both Israeli and Palestinian governments, the end of sanctions on Iran and efforts to respond positively to the overtures of President Khatami.

There is another important lesson to be drawn from 20th-century world history. This is how to seriously address Islamic cultural pride. Muslim society is not particularly fond of violence and conflict, and it does not make conflict with others its own objective. Muslim society must also be viewed as suffering from a dilemma, as are Japan and other Asian nations. This is the rivalry between the consumption-based lifestyle values, such as telecommunications and entertainment, which have arisen in the name of modernity and convenience, and cultural values that foster an individual spirituality rooted in history and tradition. This rivalry takes place in the context of instant financial transactions and transfer of economic information due to globalization and mutual dependence.

Consumption-oriented culture, which originated in America, poses no serious problems for the American people in and of itself. However, the backlash to the universal application of American standards as global standards that has accompanied the spread of globalization is unlikely to be limited to the Islamic world and China. Even within Europe, there have also been objections to the standards of America, the only superpower. These include the backlash against Hollywood movies in France and the Russian criticism of American-centered international security. In this context, it is interesting to observe the argument of the American historian Ronald Steel

that America is "the most revolutionary society" in the world. Armed with Coca Cola and Pepsi, McDonald's and Levi's jeans, Americans overturn the culture and traditions of every country they visit. It is easy for America to consign the cultures and traditions of other countries to the dustbin of history with an IBM laptop and Windows 98. However, can we say that this is the true global standard?

For a country such as Japan, which directly confronted America in the past in a struggle for supremacy and was forced to discard its structure of exclusive dependence on a distinctive spiritual culture, the lesson of defeat is to study American technology, productive capacity and the consumption-oriented culture which underpins it. However, the knowledge of Chinese literature and the classics, which had long formed the foundation for Japanese culture and action, was discarded like a pair of old shoes. The sham culture that has appeared in its place amounts to little more than a capacity to use computers and American colloquialisms. There is little likelihood that the Japanese will have the means to create a characteristic culture and resist America. However, in Islamic civilization, there is no actual feeling of having lost to Western or American civilization in a direct confrontation over the very fundamentals of the civilization, notwithstanding the bitter experiences of local colonization and territorial division since the time of the Crusades. Even the Gulf War cannot be understood as an "Arab-versus-the-West" schema. Furthermore, for the Islamic world underpinned by Arabic, which has a great capacity for coining words and can be adapted for artificial languages, and Persian, which has contributed outstanding works of classical literature, the adoption of the American consumption-oriented culture is painful. This is because the cultural message of Hollywood and McDonald's sometimes leads to the destruction of traditional culture.

IV. The Possibility of "Dialogue between Civilizations"

I will now refer to the example of

education at the University of Tokyo, although it may seem out of context. At the University of Tokyo, the curricula that places Chinese and Korean as introductory foreign languages, and third foreign languages from Asia and the Islamic world including Arabic, Persian, Hindi, Turkish, Indonesian and Vietnamese, and the selective of international communication, are considered important from the first and second years. This is based on a desire to overcome the problem of European- and American-centered knowledge in the educational arena. It is because we wanted to focus not only on courses based on technicalism, which have prioritized the subjective since the age of Descartes and can also be termed studies in Western "transcendentalism", but also on an interdisciplinary position that continuously attempts to return the subjective to the same level as the objective.

Courses that rely on hermeneutics are common in general education subjects since the millennium end reorganization of liberal arts at the University of Tokyo. The reason why I have mentioned the new experiment in liberal arts which connects specialist knowledge and cultural principles is that it shares an awareness of the problems involved in the dialogue between civilizations. Experiments in attempting to understand psychology and impulse, which cannot be completely grasped by the intellect, the connection between artistic sensibility and humanity, and Islam, Hinduism and Japanese Buddhism at the same time as Western thought, while returning the subjective to within the objective, will certainly not emerge from Cartesian transcendentalism. This is because, even in the 20th century, the Cartesian transcendent dualism, which forms the foundation of Western thought, is based on an ontological perspective which posits it impossible to ultimately resolve the mental and the physical. When we discuss the essential education for interacting with people and civilizations on a global scale in Japan, we must aim to combine the intellectual traditions of Asia and Japan with European and American principles while achieving a synchronous integration of both. In

the context of globalization in the 21st century, the foundations of education for Japanese people must remain Japanese, Chinese and Western cultures. However, my personal view, which might be subjective and idealistic, is the formation of a comprehensive education that also incorporates the tremendous wisdom of India and the Islamic world.

Indeed, I may go so far as to say that in order to develop a fertile world view, whether in America or in the Islamic world, it is important to reject the monotonous violence of the mass media, with which young people have been saturated in the name of the information age, and to remove the standardized framework of culture and thinking formed by television and the Internet from the young. This is another lesson to be drawn from the woeful state of affairs at the end of the 20th century. The development of industrialization has given rise to many evils, and it bears a large responsibility for the extreme standardization of humanity and human existence. While the development of the natural sciences and technology are truly wonderful, it is also a fact that they have given rise to a gargantuan mass media as their negative legacy. Information on television and the Internet broadcast day-in and day-out without end will result in people acting and thinking in accordance with a pre-planned program and a controlled message. The information provided lacks rigorous academic foundations and a broad cultural basis. In the 20th century, even the conversational language of young people around the world has become standardized. People have naturally been indoctrinated into a standardized manner of thinking and acting. Once a framework of standardization is established, it is natural for people to make judgments within the confines of that framework and even for emotions and feelings to become standardized and homogeneous. This is related to the concept that the late Izutsu Toshihiko, an Islamic philosopher, described as the "cultural universalist." When certain items, circumstances, concepts and values are shared by all or the majority of people belonging to a cultural group,

a standardized, uniform structure emerges. Izutsu called this the "cultural universalist."

It seems to bode ill for the history of the 21st century that all races and peoples, not only the Japanese, should have the same opinion, think in a standardized way and act uniformly in a variety of cultural areas. There is little hope that innovative ideas will arise from a homogenized way of thinking and a uniform lifestyle. In addition, it must also be noted that the globalization at the end of the 20th century is in fact the universalization of the American standard. In other words, above all, we must take care that human life and thought does not become the "cultural universalist" both internally and externally. If human beings lose their individual cultural traditions and the uniqueness of their living environments, there is no doubt that the internal structure of human beings will also become standardized. If the young people of the world are raised in a standardized environment enforced by America, the loss for the world will be incalculable. Izutsu Toshihiko explained the internal standardization of human beings as alienation from the Jungian "Self" and a shift to the level of the ego disengaged from the "Self." According to Izutsu, the meaning of uniformity is not the connection of disparate fragments to restore one whole, or the formation of harmony. Rather uniformity merely plays the role of strengthening the imbalance and disharmony. This is because, in an environment where traditional cultures have lost their individuality and individual differences have been flattened to a minimum common denominator, human beings will unconsciously become separated from the "Self," which is the true center of their being, and will have no choice but to live in a world centered on the "Ego."

This observation is connected to Karl Popper's concept of the "framework." This "framework" can be thought of as the framework without which it is impossible for a culture to assert its individuality. Because this "framework" exists, respective cultures have predetermined and influenced the basic form of the thoughts, emotions and actions of the

people and students who belong to them. People do not consciously think, feel and act in accordance with the "framework." The important point is that, because the "framework" is a closed system with a rigid internal structure, clashes and conflict are unavoidable when there is some form of contact by means of which two or more different cultures interact. If there is a "clash of cultural frameworks," then overt cultural friction or cultural conflict will develop. The study of foreign languages in order to avoid that is certainly an idea with justification in terms of alleviating internal and external conflict.

However, if the energy generated from the collision of different cultures in the 21st century is guided into the proper channels, the contact and conflict between different cultures could become a significant opportunity that brings about a spirit of constructive criticism. This may seem optimistic. However, if we succeed in studying our own "framework" in the light of another's "framework," it will indicate an opportunity to overcome conflict and develop a wider intellectual perspective on a higher level. This idea should not be scorned.

Naturally, this experiment will not be easy. That is, the critique and transcendence of a number of cultures that are different in nature and conflict with each other from time to time is not to find compromise and agreement on the original terms but to move to a higher level. This can be called a "horizontal integration." Again according to Izutsu, a "horizontal integration" occurs when the "frameworks" of antagonistic cultures overcome the horizons of their own worlds and develop a wider, higher ground level. If this kind of cultural "horizontal integration" is realized among different cultures everywhere in the world in the 21st century, it will be the achievement of globalization in the true sense of the word. This does not mean the removal of differences between various cultures, the leveling of all and standardization. It should be, according to Izutsu's expression, a dynamic synthesis that recognizes the differences between the local cultures

and makes use of them as differences while it overcomes antagonism at the most basic level.

Naturally, no one can guarantee that a cultural dialectic that proved difficult enough in the 20th century will be possible, and even less, specify exactly how it can be used in the dialogue between cultures in the 21st century. However, as a person participating in education in a Japanese university, I consider that it is neither overly ambitious or strange to examine the problem not only in the Western context, but also to seek its relationship with the traditions of non-Western cultures such as China and India in Asia as well as the Islamic world. The discovery of the true "Self" and the pursuit of natural truth, which Japanese education has aimed for until now, have been significant issues in Eastern philosophy from ancient times, and this was reflected in the very lifestyles of the philosophers. Indeed, we must not forget their involvement in social and political criticism and participation. The "Self" was not merely a philosophical concept. Each philosopher searched independently for his or her true "Self" in the depths of his or her existence. Is it an exaggeration to say that, because the mind and body are not separate but rather in a liquid state of mutual dependence, the ancient philosophers have something in common with the modern natural sciences, which have discarded Cartesian dualism? The traditional method of dividing learning into Western and Eastern has been little more than an imperfect experiment in considering human intellectual activity and by extension the form that education should take. As the dialogue between civilizations in the 21st century will be an experiment in overcoming the differences in the thinking and culture of the East and the West, the ideals of the repeated trial-and-error educational reforms in 20th century Japan may find some resonance.

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