The Vistas of the Comparative Study of Civilizations

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I

It is a good time for us now, in the Janus years from the second to the third millennium, to reflect on some theoretical possibilities of the comparative study of civilizations by analyzing distinguished achievements of former scholars and by exploring future possibilities in this field of study.

There may be various approaches to the comparative study of civilizations. Each has some meaning if it has the comparative point of view and if it studies a number of aspects of civilizations. In my case I first studied Arnold J. Toynbee in his life and work; then I gradually expanded my field of study to other civilizationists. I stand now on the Janus ground: what the comparative study of civilizations was, is, and could be.

Herman Melville, the author of *Moby-Dick*, displayed the following penetrating insight about the nature of America in his autobiographical novel, *Redburn* (1849):

> For who was our father and our mother? Or can we point to any Romulus and Remus for our founders? Our ancestry is lost in the universal paternity; and Caesar and Alfred, St. Paul and Luther, and Homer and Shakspeare [sic] are as much ours as Washington, who is as much the world’s as our own. We are the heirs of all time, and with all nations we divide our inheritance. (1)

As its later history demonstrates, America presents a rich soil for the growing comparative study of civilizations. Since the seeds and saplings of comparative civilizations were transplanted from European soil to America in the beginning of the 1970s, a series of intellectual giants have made significant contributions: for instance, Pitirim Sorokin (integralism and altruism), Alfred Kroeber (comparison becomes possible by adding the concept of style to Toynbee’s civilizational change), Philip Bagby (peripheral civilizations), Caroll Quigley (scientific methodology with clarity), William H. McNeill (world history), Matthew Melko (whole nature of comparative civilizations), Michael
Palencia-Roth (comparative literature with fresh ideas on the relevance of cartography and dialogics), David Richardson (comparative worldviews), Roger Williams Wescott (his *Comparing Civilizations* and linguistics), David Wilkinson (the idea of Central Civilization). We have also witnessed debates between civilizationists and world systemists in *Comparative Civilizations Review*, No. 30 and Stephen K. Sanderson, ed., *Civilizations and World Systems* (2).

In comparison to these contributions of Western scholars, Japan has had the unique good fortune of being a place into which aspects of both Eastern and Western civilizations have flowed. She has japenized them in her rich soil. Since the Meiji Restoration, we have had a series of distinguished civilizationists such as Yukichi Fukuzawa (the civilizationist in modern Japan), Tadao Umesao (the ecological view of civilizations), Shin Yamamoto (the nature of peripheral civilizations), Shuntaro Ito (six stages of civilizations based on erudition of the East and the West), and Masahiko Kamikawa (a turning point of the axis of co-ordinates in the history of methodology). Is there room for further developments in the comparative study of civilizations? My contribution is a modest but possible answer to this question.

II

The comparative study of civilizations in itself implies a global perspective, covering the past, present, and future. It is something like a great sea into which many rivers of thought, philosophy, religion, language and culture flow for many years and even centuries, ever widening and increasing in volume. Since the establishment of ISCSC in 1961, a river of research mainly by great Western scholars has been added to our reservoir of knowledge. In 1998 we had for the first time the "Dialogue between ISCSC and JSCSC"(3) at Reitaku University in Japan, but it was just a beginning. It is likely that there are many more works of civilizationists in a broad sense in various countries and civilizations, done separately, independently, and unknown to each other because of time, space and language barriers.

In the ISCSC the works of Western scholars have been mostly discussed; it seems to me, therefore, that there may be some neglected areas or civilizations, particular emphases, biases, and even blind spots. Our past president Michael Palencia-Roth (4) enriches our view of civilizations by mentioning often neglected names and learning in Latin America. In this context, it is laudable some civilizationists and world
system theorists such as David Wilkinson(5), William McNeill(6), and Andre Gunder Frank(7) have attempted to restore a view of world history based on Eurocentrism to a more well-balanced view. But they are exceptional. I presume that the main causes are the lack of available Eastern sources and the language barrier for Western scholars.

Professor William Eckhardt points out that the available sources for Western civilisationists are inevitably Eurocentric, for example, he writes:

Sorokin (1937-41, Vol. 4, pp. 328-29) also provided a measure of cultural values going back to 4000 BC, but the data were rather sketchy until the 11th century BC, and they were more Eurocentric than Kroeber's geniuses, since Europeans constituted 85 percent of the total. These data represented historical persons who were mentioned in the 9th edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, which was published in 1875-89, as having made a notable contribution to one or more fields of culture, including statesmanship, philosophy, religion, literature, fine arts, miscellaneous scholarship, science, music, and business.(8) Needless to say, Sorokin is a great scholar, but perhaps if he had used a different encyclopaedia in different civilizations, he might have seen a different picture of the world civilizations.

Scholars like Sorokin build their theories based on the sources available to them. If their sources are imbalanced, their theories based on such sources must also inevitably be imbalanced. For the past century, both Eastern and Western scholars have applied Western theories to the interpretation of things Eastern. In the field of the natural sciences, say, in the principle of electricity, it can work universally. But in the social sciences and humanities, theories based on Western sources are not always applicable to things Eastern.

I will give but one example. Most Japanese archaeologists have been spellbound by “the Neolithic Revolution” of Gordon V. Childe (1892-1957), who maintains that wheat agriculture started about 10,000 years ago in Mesopotamia, while rice agriculture was believed to have begun 3,000 years later in the East. Because agriculture is the momentum for civilizations, his theory led us to the lineal and Eurocentric view of civilization from Mesopotamia—Egypt, Greek and
Rome and then medieval Europe and modern West—and inevitably supported modern European world dominance. Recently, however, a number of important discoveries have been made about the origin of rice agriculture. For example, Professor Yan Wenming (9) of Beijing University, using C14 dating, discovered that rice agriculture started 15,000-14,000 years ago along the middle and the lower reaches of Chang Jiang River in China. He also reported the discovery of earthenware of 15,000 years ago. Japanese scholar Takashi Tsutsumi (10) writes that earthenware of 16,000 years ago was uncovered at Shimomouchi, Nagano prefecture, Japan. Professor Yoshinori Yasuda maintains that the theory based on the West Wheat Crescent cannot be applied uncritically to the interpretation of the whole history of mankind.(11)

III

Let me introduce two Japanese comparativists, the first is Kukai or Kobo-Daishi(774-835), the other is Jiun Sonja (1718-1804). Kukai, founder of the Shingon Sect of Buddhism, is considered to be the first man to have formulated a systematic Comparative Thought in his Sango Shiiki, 3 volumes (797)(12), which is a comparative study of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism in the form of drama, and Himitu Mandala Jujushinron, 10 volumes (c 830), which is a comparative study of various religions and philosophical traditions in India, China, and Japan, as well as a detailed exploration of the ten stages of religious and moral minds. That is, “(1) Isho-teiyo-shin, an unenlightened man absorbed in satisfying desires; (2) gudo-jisai-shin, a foolish child trying to keep precepts; (3) yo-do-muishin, the boldness of a child, seeking rebirth in heaven while turning his back on this world; (4) yuiun-muga-shin one who believes that there are only shandhas (aggregates) and no atman(self); (5) batsugo-inshu-shin, one who seeks to pull out the seeds of karma (destiny); (6) taen-daijo-shin, the Mahayanist who contemplates the various causes of seeking enlightenment; (7) kakushin-fusho-shin, one who meditates on mind and understands the principle of sunyata (relativity, or emptiness); (8) ichido-muishin, one who walks the single path; (9) gokumujisho-shin, one who fathoms the mujisho (having on peculiar nature of its own) doctrine; and (10) himitsu-shogon-shin, one who has attained the secret teaching.” (13) The above ten stages are a result of Kukai’s comparative religions. To put it briefly, for example, the fourth stage refers to the Hinayana stage. The tenth and
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highest stage is Kukai’s Shingon mysticism, the state of the soul which has awakened to glories of cosmic mysteries and lives the Buddha-life here on earth. (14) Kukai’s Esoteric Buddhism is sometimes associated with magical powers, incantations, the lighting of holy fire for invocation, and some believe that he has been living in meditation in Mt. Koya, waiting for the coming of the Maitreya Bodhisattva 5.67 billion years in the future. (15)

He seems to be very mystical. But when the esoteric mist is cleared away from Kukai, his figure appears more realistic to us, though still great. He worked very hard for the betterment of people by building bridges, digging wells, making ponds for agriculture, and founding the first private university in Japan. His writing style is superb. The above mentioned Sangou Shiiki, for example, sparkles with gems of the classical works of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism. If we have some classical (Chinese) knowledge, it is not impossible to understand it, because its style is very clear, and full of familiar names, phrases, and events in the classical world. It even demonstrates a modernist sensibility not unlike that of Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot. We share a common classical heritage with Kukai. He is the first systematic comparativist in Japan.

Before Western science and technology were brought into Japan, learning in Japan was required to combine intellectual pursuit and one’s own moral perfection. Jiun was exemplar in this goal: a great scholar with a fine character. He was called the present-day Sakyamuni (Buddha). The two aspects of his lifework were first to understand Buddha not through translation but through Buddha’s original language, which led him to his study of Siddham (Sanskrit), and second to restore Buddha’s precepts which led him to the writing of Righteous Precepts. In both of his tasks his effort was thorough and his method was scientific: for example, he wrote Bongaku Shinryou (An Introduction to Sanskrit Studies), 1,000 volumes: 1) Honsen, 250 vols.: thoroughly collecting fundamental sources of 361 parts including documents on pattra leaves, 2) Massen, 100 vols.: his own and his disciples’ interpretations of comparative study of Sanskrit and Chinese translations of Honsen, 3) Tsusen, 100 vols.: Sanskrit grammar, 4) Bessen, 85 vols.: Japanese, Chinese, and Siddham documents, 5) Ryakusen, 33 vols.: making full-fledged and concise dictionaries of Sanskrit, 6): Kosen, 350 vols.: Classified Sanskrit vocabulary, 7) Zassen, 82 vols.: Miscellaneous sources concerning India, Sanskrit, Siddham, Dutch, Mongolian, Tartar.(16)

Jiun was, at first, not acquainted with even a letter of Sanskrit. Then he
deciphered one letter by one letter, one word by one word, identifying a particular Sanskrit sutra with the corresponding Chinese translation, only with a clue, for example, Sanskrit “Shariputra” [famous Buddha’s disciple] with Chinese equivalent ‘Shelifu.’ This process of deciphering must have been unbelievably difficult. In his time there were left only a few guidebooks of pronunciation of each Sanskrit letter with their kana descriptions, which were Japanese transliterations of Chinese transliterations of Sanskrit pronunciations. With such pronunciation guidebooks, no one except Jiun could read or understand Sanskrit sentences.

His contemporary, Emperor Ch’ien Lung, (1711–1799, ruled 1736–96) of the Qing Dynasty in China, was a great patron, encouraging various learnings and compilation of books. The Qing was a multiracial, multicultural dynasty. The Han race, Mongolian, Tibetan, Turk, and others used their respective languages. Ch’ien Lung ordered Zhang jia, the Emperor’s Teacher, who knew something Sanskrit learning through Tibetan, to compile various Buddhist scriptures for thirty or forty years. This was an imperial enterprise, but the result was superficial in the comparative study of Sanskrit, Tibetan, and Chinese pronunciations and in a deeper understanding of Sanskrit sutras. In contrast, Jiun, living in a country temple in Japan, studied and expounded Sanskrit sutras with his hand-made Sanskrit dictionaries and grammar. His studies of Sanskrit surpassed any of the contemporary Chinese and Europeans including H. H. Wilson, a Sanskrit scholar at Oxford University. Later Max Müller (1823-1900) discovered how advanced Jiun’s study in Sanskrit was.(17)

Though at the age of 41 he retired to the secluded place of Mt. Ikoma, this philologist’s eye was open to the world, reading world maps and was interested in Mongolia, Manchuria, China, India, Holland, London, Paris, Napoleon, the Copernican theory, amongst others, and once in a while he went down to, then in his later years lived in, Kyoto to give lectures on Buddhism and Shintoism and had a great moral influence on many people. He did not stop writing until the age of 85 nor stopped lecturing until the time of his death at the age of 87. He left over one thousand and several hundred volumes in Japanese bookbinding, only about 300 volumes of which were published in Western bookbinding from 1921 to 1935.(18)

Though Jiun belonged to Kukai’s Shingon Sect, he had no interest in things magical. He was conspicuous in his scientific attitude toward truth, disregarding the differences among sects or religions(19) and devoted himself to education on how to become a true human being.(20)
Jiun's attitude was fair-minded and outspoken to any scholarly authorities; he was broad-minded about any denominations or sects of Buddhism, Shintoism, and Confucianism; he admitted or rejected doctrines and opinions from his unbiased view and erudition. Though he passed away two centuries ago, he is still a paragon of comparativists.

IV

As John William Draper (1811-1882) and Andrew Dickson White (1832-1918) wrote vividly from their respective points of view about the history of the conflicts between religion and science, the church and kings wielded dominant power over science in the medieval period. Nicolaus Copernicus (1473-1543), Giordano Bruno (1548-1600), and Galileo Galilei (1564-1642) were a few conspicuous examples whose scientific theories were oppressed by the Church. As time went on, science won the battle against the Church by its new discoveries and experiments: and in the academic world, the principle of Wertfreiheit has become a golden rule. Since the advent of the Atomic bombs at Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, the golden rule seems to become shaky. It remains, however, persistent in various fields of sciences including medical science. In addition, the deterioration and destruction of environments are caused by the results of insatiable pursuit for industrial and commercial profits.

We have come to now the point where we should look back to the basic problem of ethics. When we think of Western ethics, we are naturally led to Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics. H. Rackham writes "Aristotle's conception of Ethics is based on a technicality that he inherited from Plato. The division of Science into Theoretic and Practical. Theoretic Science is prompted by intellectual curiosity, and aims at knowledge for its own sake; Practical Science is pursued for the guidance of life, and seeks knowledge only a means to action... The Practical Sciences or Arts are themselves subdivided into the sciences of making and the Sciences of doing." (23). Among them, "there is one supreme Practical Science, the science of man's Good or Happiness." (24) "This supreme Practical Science, therefore, the Science of human affairs (25), I think that modern man must reconsider the importance of Aristotle's philosophy of human affairs.

When we further think of man's Good or Happiness, we need to articulate the contents of ethics. Josef Derbolav, a Professor of Philosophy and Ethics at Bonn University, writes, "Roughly speaking, there are three ethical systems: consequential ethics, good will ethics,
and responsibility ethics. In consequential ethics, one's only concern is the result of one's particular action; it does not matter whether one's intention is good or evil. In contrast, in good will ethics, one is concerned with one's good intention and will; one does not care about the direct and accompanying results of one's action. One who takes this ethical view says, 'I have tried the best things that I could. Even if my intention fails, its responsibility should not lie on me but on my circumstantial situations.' The third ethical view, responsibility ethics, comprehends both consequential ethics and good will ethics. This is Max Weber's position. And I think that it is the best; however, it is the most difficult and in a sense tragic, because no one can safely carry both predictable and unpredictable burdens of destiny.'(26) He tries to synthesize Aristotelian ethics of the good and Kantian ethics of moral theory. And he advocates his "Praxeologie." His Praxeologie looks at first sight similar to Moralogy, but is very different. It is a system to organize the interrelationship of politics, economy, strategy, medical science, education, more broadly speaking, learning, art, religion.(27)

Chikuro Hiroike laments that "with the exception of the truly great scholars, students of the mental sciences, who lack the impartial and unselfish spirit which is an essential in the search for truth, have a tendency to produce various dogmatic theories solely in conformity with their own interest and passions, which in turn are influenced by their surrounding circumstances and by their respective walks of life."(28) and criticizes political science for its expediency, jurisprudence of its medieval subjectivism and too much emphasis on individual rights, economics for its self-interest and Bedürfnis, sociology for its losing the spirit of Auguste Comte and diverting into formal and materialistic channels, and "the even more serious point that sociology in general, does not embody the supreme Morality of the Sages."(29)

At the very end of the 20th century, even natural scientists are strongly required to have moral spirit. Why should we not incorporate moral value in the theories of comparative study of civilizations? Sorokin was criticized because he includes values in his system. "Because the modern academy has relegated transcendentals to philosophy and theology, it has not been feasible to constitute a scientific self within such a framework." (30) But Sorokin has his Integralism which is the foundation of his system of social thought.(31) As Vincent Jeffries writes:

Sorokin's idea of integralism was derived from his historical study of culture types and their systems
of truth and knowledge (Ford 1963). Three types of integrated culture were described: Ideational, Sensate, Idealistic. The system of truth and knowledge is the compartment of culture which pertains to ontology and epistemology. (32)

Jeffries maintains that “the problem of incorporating the truth of faith in the contemporary social sciences has been considered in some detail in a previous paper (Jeffries 1999. See also Jeffries 1997). (33)

Toynbee was also criticized because of his metahistory. But “he meant by History a vision—dim and partial, yet (he believed) true to reality as far as it went—of God revealing Himself in action to souls that were sincerely seeking Him.” (34)

The concluding part of his “The Historian’s Angle of Vision” is as follows:

History’s contribution is to give us a vision of God’s creative activity on the move in a frame which, in our human experience of it, displays six dimensions. The historical angle of vision shows us the physical cosmos moving centrifugally in a four-dimensional frame of Space-Time; it shows us Life on our own planet moving evolutionarily in a five-dimensional frame of Life-Time-Space; and it shows us human souls, raised to a sixth dimension by the gift of the Spirit, moving, through a fateful exercise of their spiritual freedom, either towards their Creator or away from Him. (35)

If history should have a holistic view, we can say that the above is quite valid.

V

Samuel P. Huntington’s “Clash of Civilizations?” in Foreign Affairs (Summer 1993) and his revised and enlarged book, The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order (1996) had a sensational impact. Many people, probably influenced by the Foreign Affairs article, criticized part of the title, The Clash of Civilizations, and condemned him for not saying the “symbiosis” of civilizations. Few have discussed squarely the latter half of the book title, the Remaking of World Order. In actual fact Huntington discusses the symbiosis of civilizations, and writes as follows:
Instead of promoting the supposedly universal features of one civilization, the requisites for cultural coexistence demand a search for what is common to most civilizations. In a multicivilizational world, the constructive course is to renounce universalism, accept diversity, and seek commonalities. (36)

He proposes three rules on how to avoid the clash of civilizations: At least at a basic “thin” morality level, some commonalities exist between Asia and the West. In addition, as many have pointed out, whatever the degree to which they divided humankind, the world’s major religions—Western Christianity, Orthodoxy, Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Confucianism, Taoism, Judaism—also share key values in common. If humans are ever to develop a universal civilization, it will emerge gradually through the exploration and expansion of these commonalities. Thus in addition to the abstention rule, and the joint mediation rule, the rule for peace in a multicivilizational worlds is the commonalities rule: peoples in all civilizations should search for and attempt to expand the values, institutions, and practices they have in common with peoples of other civilizations.

This effort would contribute not only to limiting the clash of civilizations but also to strengthening Civilization in the singular (hereafter capitalized for clarity). The singular Civilization presumably refers to a complex mix of higher levels of morality, religion, learning, art, philosophy, technology, material well-being, and probably other things. (37)

Civilizationists and moral scientists are experts at finding commonalities of world religions. If the comparative study of civilizations is one of the mission-oriented sciences like peace studies, why do we not explore the commonalities? Exploring of the commonalities is important, but not enough. Recently I read Lawrence E. Harrison & Samuel P. Huntington, eds., Culture Matters: How Values Shape Human Progress, 2000. (38) It contains Huntington’s Foreword and Harrison’s Introduction and 22 papers. Without falling into the pit of extreme cultural relativism, Harrison points out the following assertions:

- Life is better than death.
- Health is better than sickness.
- Liberty is better than slavery.
- Progress is better than poverty.
- Education is better than ignorance.
- Justice is better than injustice. (39)
On the above value system, most of the papers investigate the relation between various cultures in the world and economic, political, and social developments. Mariano Grondona writes that there are development-favorable cultures and development-resistant cultures. We may choose one or a few elements of cultures which are contributable to the welfare of the people in the respective areas. Other papers are also very constructive when we think of the welfare of humankind in concrete terms.

In conclusion, my proposal is as follows:

1. To make a holistic "comparative study of civilizations," we have to gather more balanced sources and perspectives covering the East and the West and the North and the South. This statement, however, does not necessarily exclude and devalue particular studies based on particular sources.
2. Since civilizations include culture, which contains religion, philosophy, morality, Weltanschauung and others related with value, the comparative study of civilizations has room to incorporate value in it.
3. An aspect of the comparative study of civilizations is that it is a mission-oriented science: to decrease human misery, folly, greed and arrogance, and to increase human happiness and welfare, and to elevate the levels of truth, goodness, and beauty among humankind.

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NOTES

(1) Melville, Redburn, White-Jacket, Moby-Dick, 185.
(4) See Palencia-Roth, "Comparative Civilization Analysis, As Seen from the West," in the Journal for the Comparative Study of Civilizations, No. 4, 13-18, and also "Hermeneutics, Dialogics,


(12a) Saicho and Kukai, 253-300.

(12b) Hajime Nakamura, Cultural Exchange of the East and the West, 194-201.


(14) See Chikuro Hiroiike, A Treatise of Moral Science, Chap. 12, VI.i.

(15) A Series of Esoteric Buddhism 3 Kukai’s Life and Thought, 245.


(17a) Bunsaburo Matsumoto, “Jiun Sonja’s Academic Achievement,” in Kaijun Juge, ed., Jiun Sonja, Dainihon Yuubenkai Koudansha, 1944, pp. 206-245) and

(17b) Torajiro Naito, “Jiun Sonja’s Learning,” ibid., 84-106, especially 98-103.

(18a) The Works of Saint Jiun, 18 vols. and 1 supplement
(22) Andrew Dickson White, *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom*, 1896.
(24) Ibid. xx.
(25) Ibid., 642.
(26) Josef Derbolav, *Marksteine Europaischer Ethik*. Waseda-vorlesungen, 1984 12-14. I had an honor to interpret Prof. Josef Derbolav's series of lectures, "Ethics in Europe from Socrates to Kant," from October 2 to November 7, 1978, at the Institute of Moralogy, which is the sister organization of Reitaku University, Kashiwa-shi, Chiba-ken, Japan. Later he published the main parts of these lectures in the above book form.
(29) Ibid., 38.
(33) Ibid.
(35) Ibid., 2.
(37) Ibid., 320.
(38) Lawrence E. Harrison & Samuel P. Huntington, eds., *Culture*


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