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Editor's Note

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Editor's Note

I.

Is there an inevitable coming clash between Western Civilization and the Chinese Civilization? That question took the spotlight at the annual meeting of the International Society for the Comparative Study of Civilizations this past summer.

A centerpiece of the conference was the presence at the meeting's climax, during the annual awards ceremony, of two prominent Chinese dissidents. The audience hushed as these widely honored men rose in front of the hall to address the meeting. They were introduced by Jill Ku, a prize-winning, courageous radio broadcaster with Radio Free Asia, who moderated, explaining their significant roles in the ferment that is China today. Ms. Ku, the most heard human voice in the world, hosts a daily call-in show that is listened to avidly by millions; many call in from China, at great peril to themselves, in order to comment on news of the day.

According to Yu Jie, a well-known Chinese writer, the very theory of a clash of civilizations "has become the Chinese Communist Party's best shield." This is because the Chinese Communist Party "has skillfully transformed the difference of two systems, Chinese autocracy as opposed to Western democracy, into to a clash of civilizations – the conflict between the Chinese civilization and Western civilization." Yu goes on to argue below that this should be seen as nonsense, because the communists are a product not of the ancient, long-lasting Chinese civilization but find their origins in the West, in the French Revolution and in Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist theory.

Much of Marxist theory is based on the emergence after the Industrial Revolution of a new class of workers, predominantly industrial workers, the proletariat. Lenin tried to modify Marxist theory on this, but Mao really had to stretch to apply the theory of communism to a land which, in the first half of the Twentieth Century, was not a highly industrialized society and thus had relatively few members of the proletariat class.

At any event Yu, a recent dissident who was long prominent as a writer in China, declared that China today actually presents "not a clash of civilizations, but a clash between the civilized and the uncivilized." To him, China poses a far greater threat than the Soviet Union ever did and it "remains a tiger that will bite... that is man-eating." The democracies of the world, and the United Nations, must work to bring democracy to China's people, Mr. Yu said.

Also addressing the ISCSC was Harry Wu. In his remarks, Mr. Wu – one of the most famous Chinese dissidents of our epoch, a victim of many years in a concentration camp – coined the term "classicide" to describe what has gone on in China. "Genocide," as defined by the United Nations, he said "involves acts committed with the intent to destroy a national, ethnic, racial or religious group."

Classicide has had roots in the Communist Party's revolutionary theory. According to many scholars, modern attacks on the privileged classes began with the French Revolution's hostility to the aristocratic class that had long oppressed the vast majority of the population. Said Mr. Wu, "classicide" in practice begins with the idea that society is composed of different classes of people, all of whom, at least in China, can be divided into two major groupings: the exploiters and the exploited. Under Mao, the Communist Party sought to exterminate the "exploiter classes." At the beginning of this classicide in China, all people were placed in one of four classes: the landlord class, the rich peasant class, the middle peasant class, or the poor worker and peasant class.

Soon after Mao decided to root out all but the poor worker and peasant class, Mr. Wu, who denounced the Soviet repression of the Hungarian Revolution in 1956, was branded a "bourgeois counter-revolutionary rightist" and sentenced to life in the concentration camps of China, the "laogai." These terrible prison camps, which have housed about 50,000,000 people since their establishment, continue to thrive today, he said, even though Chinese leaders have abandoned the flag of class struggle.

Listening to the two men speak was the president of the ISCSC, Dr. Andrew Targowski. In trenchant remarks, he then observed that twin developments, the spectacular economic development of the Chinese, triggered by Western Civilization, and the concurrent decline of Western Civilization, have provoked many predictions of the near-future world order.

So far, he said, it seems that the West cooperates with China quite well, since through outsourcing of Western manufacturing, China employs its large labor force and the Western financial elite benefits tremendously in business, due to cheap labor. But, the question for civilizationalists to consider is, according to Prof. Targowski, how long can that kind of cooperation last? Will the current cooperation between China and the West be replaced by a clash for resources?

Dr. Targowski noted that from 600 AD until 1500 AD, China was the world's most technologically advanced society. China today has the ability to surpass the "robot" stage and to become a developer of science, technology, and production again. He proposed that if China Westernizes, there will be no "clash of civilizations" at all, but rather merely conflicts of interest.

The ISCSC President compared the situation in the United States today (a civilization represented by the "1%" with the highest income) to that of the Roman Empire in the 5th century AD, as it was about to collapse. He also compared in a chart twelve aspects of culture and civilization as seen in China and in the Western Civilization. For where he goes with these two analyses, and the possibilities regarding a coming clash with China, please read his outstanding essay in this issue.

II.

In addition to the many wonderful papers on China and the West, including those presented during the Awards Dinner, the organization held a second special section. This was held at the United States House of Representatives, in the beautiful Gold Room of its Rayburn House Office Building.

The first part of the special program featured remarks by Caroline Poplin, an expert in health care and the law. A practicing physician who also trained at Yale Law School and started her career as an attorney, she is a respected journalist. Dr. Poplin was able to lay out the key issues in this highly charged topic.

She began by comparing the healthcare delivery system in the United States to that found in other industrialized OECD countries. In those other lands, all citizens have health insurance. In general, she reported, the insurance is comprehensive. That is, it covers virtually all necessary health care expenses, although in some cases, for an additional voluntary payment one can access additional doctors, facilities, and perhaps some elective services.

By contrast, until now, and apart from public health systems such as Medicare, Medicaid, the Veterans' Administration and the active duty military health care system (Tricare), there has been no regulation of the cost of health insurance or the cost of health care in the United States, she said. Thus,

it should come as no surprise that Americans pay the highest prices in the world for health care. For all that, however, our health outcomes, compared to those of other OECD countries, are no better than middling. Our healthy life expectancy ranks only 29th in the world, behind Slovenia. Our infant mortality rate is 30th.

She asked the audience to consider what she calls the issue of "managed care, managed competition." She observed that modern medicine often has been able to turn what used to be "acute" into what is now "chronic." That is, medical advances mean that we can now maintain individuals for many decades, whereas they would have simply died a century ago. Moreover, illness is not spread equally – and a small percentage of ill people incur the majority of costs.

She thus concluded with a question: Is America a liberal democracy in the European tradition, or is it *sui generis*, a free market outlier?

There was yet another exciting set of events for the ISCSC on Capitol Hill. Two members of the United States Congress came to the Gold Room to talk about an oft-unnamed problem of civilization right in America: the territories of the United States.

First to speak in this segment was the Member of Congress from American Samoa, Rep. Eni Faleomavaega. He explained carefully the history of the relationship between American Samoa and the United States. He discussed the nature of being a territory, what it means to be a “national” -- not a citizen -- of the United States, and the prospects for the future. In addition, he explained the many ways in which American Samoa is a significant part of this country and, in so doing, he illuminated the complexities of our contemporary American polity and the happy resolution of a clash of civilizations: Polynesian and Western.

The second to speak was Rep. Eleanor Holmes Norton, the United States Representative from the District of Columbia. In her remarks she analyzed issues of society and polity thoroughly for those who were present at this gripping session.

Rep. Norton reviewed the nature of the District of Columbia and its special relationship with the federal government, showing how a clause in the portion of the U.S. Constitution which enumerates the powers of Congress addressed the creation of the District of Columbia as the seat of government of the United States. There was never an intention on the part of the founding fathers to deprive the citizens who reside in the District of Columbia of their rights as granted in the Constitution, she asserted, and she explained how over the years the complexity of the relationship has been buffeted by larger political and social realities.

She was asked of what this “nation” is constituted if those who live in the District of Columbia, or in American Samoa, or in the other territories of the United States are excluded from fundamental rights while contributing their lives so fully to the country? In her response she explored emerging possibilities – including imminent demographic changes -- which might ultimately resolve the existing dilemmas that she described and analyzed so masterfully. Further, she said that this tension has to be addressed by the nation and she gave the members present hope that it will be, if not immediately then not in the far distant future, either.

Dr. Toby Huff, who was a plenary speaker at a previous ISCS conference, concludes our plenary session by writing about the consequences of the 17th century scientific revolution. None of the other great powers of that time – the Ottoman Turks, the Persians, the Mughals in India, the Chinese – recognized its importance, he argues, and as a consequence they declined. The paper in this edition continues his previously published plenary argument.

III.

In the issue of the journal you are now holding we run these remarks in a special section, as noted. In addition, however, we carry, as usual, several outstanding peer-reviewed contributions on a wide range of topics.

David McNaughton examines the implications of Oswald Spengler's philosophy as we consider contemporary European history. Even though Spengler is rarely read any more and is seen by many as too strongly a German patriot, he wrote of the necessity for the West to be guided wisely as it enters "its final (*Caesaristic*) phase." Spengler, says McNaughton, was an Ethical Socialist who believed that the interests of the state must be placed above those of individuals. He felt that money had overstepped its function, ruinously dominating government policies, not to mention the lives of individuals. But we have not heeded the warning, the author observes trenchantly.

Second, Dr. Ruan Wei offers two intertwined meanings of the word "civilization." First, civilization may suggest a cultural type or way of life, or second, it may imply an historic or cultural entity, a congeries of peoples sharing and practicing a particular set of values or way of life within a common geographical locus. As he discusses China and the role of the Chinese throughout Eastern Asia, he argues that one civilization can structurally appropriate the components of another while retaining its own identity.

In addition, an advanced civilization can play a key role in enhancing a relatively backward culture by dramatically raising its social development level, he argues. He offers as examples the Russians adopting Eastern Orthodox religion and the Japanese adopting Chinese culture; thus, he says, these groups moved from being merely tribal alliances to rapid civilizational advancement.

A Confucian case "for economic freedom" is then made by Robert C. Thomas. He argues that Confucian tradition underlies much of the current economic and geopolitical rise of China. This tradition carries deeply rooted and resilient sets of values that have long shaped the lives and attitudes of the Chinese people. He examines significant theoretical elements of free market economics as well as certain aspects of foundational Confucian texts, especially the *Analects of Confucius*, to show that it is fully possible for economic freedom to survive and thrive in societies permeated by Confucian thought.

Next, Hisanori Kato examines one fascinating aspect of modern Indonesian Islam and compares it, the Mbah Priok sect, with the perhaps better-known (in the West) Japanese Buddhist Shinran school, showing similarities that span civilizations and religions. Both traditions are what he labels "fundamental" but also "liberal." As he notes near the end of his interesting study, leaders of both of these heterodox faiths unconventionally interpret original teachings of their religions with great emphasis on their own personal

authenticity as well as openness and tolerance. At the same time, he points out, their stance on faith differs from that of conventional fundamentalists who uncompromisingly adhere to the original scriptures and refuse to deviate from doctrines.

A paper by Laina Farhat-Holzman then explores the very important question of why the majority of Muslim states today have not developed economically and why many are, or may be on the verge of becoming, failed states. She asks which aspects of modernization have been rejected by this region, unlike the development trajectory of non-Muslim Asian states.

Ricardo Duchesne follows with an analysis of Hegel's famous, if very difficult, book, *Phenomenology of Spirit*. According to Prof. Duchesne, the Western Civilization is the only one in which freedom and reason have progressed over the course of history. Max Weber saw the applicability of Western reason to the rationalizing activities of formal and theoretical reason; according to Prof. Duchesne, Weber was less preoccupied with the way reason has subjected social life to quantification, precision, and standardization.

Hegel, on the other hand, was drawn to what Dr. Duchesne calls the restless desire of Western reason. That has led the Western culture to become a place where freedom of inquiry, tolerance of diverse views, and meritocratic advancement are central. Prof. Duchesne concludes that the Western civilization, drawing upon very ancient roots, is a unique one in its emphasis on the restless process of freedom.

The journal includes, as always, significant book reviews, thanks to the Book Review Editor, Dr. David Wilkinson. I hope that you find the articles in this Fall number of interest and that they will stimulate further work in the always creative field of comparative civilizations.

Joseph Drew