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Non-European Civilizations Rediscovered

[The Gist]

Will the Age succeeding ours be simply brought about by the success of the information revolution alone? I think it will not be. Because the modern civilization is deeply in trouble and it cannot be cured by the further advancement of science and technology alone. We need something which transcends a sheer merit of another scientific and technological breakthrough. That will be the rediscovery of the wisdom of non-European civilizations rooted in cultures alien to the European. Thus, the combination of the information revolution with the rediscovery of non-European civilizations must be focused as a source of our hope for the way to construct the New Age.

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1. The Accelerating Advance of Historical Time and Premonitions of Failure

The collapse of the Berlin Wall on 9 November 1989 was an event to proclaim the arrival of a watershed in history. But we still fail to fully understand the true enormity of the historical significance of this event. Probably more time will be needed for us to do that.

The occasion was immediately understood by almost everybody as a sign of the end of the Cold War, which started in 1945 as a confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union. But when the Soviet empire collapsed two years later, the view came to prevail that the fall of the Berlin Wall ushered in the end of an era of the ideological confrontation between communism and liberalism, which was touched off by the Bolshevik revolution in 1917. The “endism” embodied in Francis Fukuyama’s “The End of History (1) reflects such an interpretation. More recently, however, as in Jean-Marie Guehenno’s “The End of Democracy” (2), there has appeared a different view that 1989 in fact heralded the end of the age of the nation-state, which began two centuries ago in 1789.

For my part, I think that the overall historical process that was introduced by the 1989 collapse of the Berlin Wall signals the beginning of the end of the process of modernization, which was born in Western Europe in the wake of the Reformation triggered by the posting of the “Ninety-Five Theses” by Martin Luther on 31 October 1517.

The Medieval Age could not conceive of life without God or gods. In Western Europe the Roman papacy dominated the society as an absolute intermediary between God and man. This community of faith was supported by the stratified aristocratic order of feudalism. Within this medieval order, individual creativity and ingenuity was stifled and one’s choices in life were limited to those conforming to a fixed traditional authority.

To liberate human capabilities from such shackles and to allow the unfettered pursuit of individual potential, the theocratic medieval order had to be transformed into a modern order with separation of church and state. It was the Reformation that made this separation possible. While the groundwork for the Reformation was laid by the Renaissance, the key element in both was the citizenry that emerged as a driving force behind the commercial economy in the late Middle Ages. Unlike the feudal aristocracy which was founded on the legitimacy of lineage, this citizen class held the contract as the basis of legitimacy. The sense of community faded as value judgments began to be guided by individualism. This gave rise to the modern rational spirit that holds logic and evidence as the only bases of truth, which in turn inspired civil revolutions and the Industrial Revolution.

This liberation of human capabilities did not occur in civilizations outside Western Europe. Consequently, Asia, Africa, and the New World remained deep in a pre-modern slumber. What West Europeans called geographic discoveries was followed up by the Age of Exploration for

them to conquer and colonize all of the non-European world excepting Japan, Thailand, and Ethiopia through the use of overwhelming military force. Europe prospered by plundering the wealth of the non-European world. Its civilization reached the acme of its glory at the end of the 19th century, more specifically, on the eve of the First World War. It was also the height of modern civilization.

In his “Lectures on the Philosophy of History” (3), Hegel viewed world history as a three-stage process of development. The stages are distinguished by the degree of “freedom” achieved as a result of the manifestation of a “world spirit.” In the first stage, “the Asian world,” only one person (the dictatorial ruler) was free. In the second stage, “the Greco-Roman world,” a number of people (the aristocracy) were free. And in the third stage, “the Germanic world,” all people (the citizenry) became free. Thus, it was that the Hegelian historical perspective foresaw and justified the global rule of European ways. The “world spirit” at the core of these “European ways” comprises the spirit of ancient Greece reconsidered during the Renaissance and Christianity revised through the Reformation. The fundamental value in this “world spirit” was that of ensuring individual “freedom” and it was believed that the global domination of European ways would accomplish this. Francis Fukuyama’s “The End of History” is no more than the testimony of a self-proclaimed witness to the history of the end of the 20th century confirming the “completion of history” foretold in the Hegelian historical perspective.

This Hegelian view of history did indeed provide the philosophical background for modern European civilization. However, the reality of the world at the end of the 20th century demonstrates that the relentless pursuit of “freedom” in the form of the production of wealth and the enlargement of human rights has, in effect, depleted resources, set the individual “adrift” in society. The limits and the impasse of the Modern Age have become visible in the eyes of almost everybody. Asserting that “the maturity of the Modern Age will be resulting not in its consummation but in its failure,” Ohashi Ryosuke attributes this to the “accelerating advance of historical time” in Modern civilization (4). Certainly both the evolution of life and progress of mankind on this planet show that the pace of advancement of historical time is increasing. The several thousand years since the dawn of human history account for only less than one hundred thousandth of the 600 million years since life first appeared on Earth. And the several centuries of modern history make up not even one percent of the tens of thousands of years since mankind first appeared.

Mankind has begun questioning ever more earnestly why, for what purpose, and where it is moving ahead so quickly. Ichiro, the main character of Natsume Soseki’s novel “Kojin,” stated that “the uneasiness of mankind stems from scientific progress.” If the expanded reproduction of European “will” and “ambition” characterized by the concepts of a “world spirit” and “freedom” are seen not as promising the consummation of human history in line with Hegel’s view but rather as setting the stage for the failure of human history due to the acceleration of historical time, then it follows that by returning to those ideas, which have so far been dismissed,

ignored, and cast aside because of their non-European, and for that reason also non-modern, nature, we might find the key to the revival of mankind. The denial of “earthly desires (bon-no) and the pursuit of “self-emancipation (gedatsu)” in Buddhism constitute an approach diametrically opposed to the expanded reproduction of European “will” and “ambition.” At the very least, the rediscovery of the wisdom of non-European civilizations can help apply the brakes to this accelerating advance of historical time.

2. The Failure of the Modern Age in “A Century of War and Revolution”

The significance of the 20th century in marking the onset of the failure of modern civilization becomes clear if we review from the above-described perspective the history of this century, which started from the First World War. The 20th century is often labeled a “century of war and revolution.” The “war” in this case refers to the two world wars, which were essentially fratricidal fightings among Europeans after they had thoroughly the non-European world. The participation of Japan in these wars had double meanings. First was its role in the internecine conflict among imperialist states as “yellow Europeans” and second was the inspiration that Japan provided other non-Europeans in its challenge to European domination. Most important, however, is that both the victors and the defeated suffered decline. As a result, almost all of the countries in the non-Europeans world have today broken free of European colonial rule and gained independence. Some may respond that this marks not the end of Modern civilization itself but that of European civilization alone, given that the majority of Third World countries have since their independence enthusiastically embraced modernization. It is difficult to deny that this modernization movement symbolized by industrialization is in many cases actually Europeanization. It seems as if the spirit of Europe has risen again like a phoenix in the post-colonial world. Some may indeed say that it has entered its second stage of development. Though I myself am not of this opinion, I will not debate this point here, choosing instead to address it in more detail later on.

For the moment let me begin with the contention that the two world wars did not simply warn of the fall of European civilization but also pointed to the limits and impasse of Modern civilization itself. The destructive power of the weaponry of the modern war quickly developed from the machine gun and tank in the First World War to the ultimate weapon -- the atomic bomb -- of the Second World War as a result of the rapid advances in science and technology.

The appearance of nuclear weapons gives us a glimpse into the true nature of “rationality” in the modern rational spirit, and the two world wars shook the very foundations of the unconditional belief in modern civilization. It became abruptly obvious with the accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant in 1986 that unrestrained development of technology and industrial production capability did not in and of itself offer happiness to mankind. Though not as direct and as visible as the results of wars and accidents, the effects of the deterioration of the global

environment is steadily proceeding through global warming, acid rain, the hole in the ozone layer, desertification, deforestation, etc. Advances in life science and biotechnology have also begun to present serious ethical questions that will once again make mankind reconsider the rights and wrongs of achieving these advances.

Another reason that the history of the 20th century, this “century of war and revolution,” illustrates the limits and failure of Modern civilization is the true state of “revolution.” We must not forget that the modern rational spirit has led to the development of Marxism, one manifestation of the belief in the omnipotence of science. The origins of this ideology can be found in West European civilization. It is rooted in the conviction that all creation, not only natural but social phenomena and even human existence, can be explained “scientifically.” Thus it was truly a product of modern civilization. Guided by Marx’s slogan “from Utopian Socialism to Scientific Socialism,” the socialist USSR created by Lenin and completed by Stalin proclaimed the “visible hand of man” could replace the “invisible hand of God” in regulating society, in controlling historical progress, in reforming mankind, and in constructing on this earth an eternal paradise of a communist society. However, as stressed in Zbigniew Brzezinski’s “The Grand Failure” (5), communism was simply a “tragedy of history” and led to unprecedented oppression and criminal behavior. One could very well say that the “revolutions” of the 20th century did testify to the limits and failure of modern civilization to the same degree as its “wars.”

From my viewpoint stated above, the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989 was neither only the end of the Cold War that started in 1945, nor only the end of the ideological confrontation that began in 1917, nor only the end of the age of the nation-state that commenced in 1789. It was the end of a greater historical period that encompassed them all. It was a symbol of the end of modern civilization itself that was inaugurated in 1517.

3. The Rediscovery of Non-European Civilizations and the Arrival of the Information Revolution

As has already been shown, modern civilization has run up against numerous limitations and impasses. I would like first to examine here the question of whether our very survival requires us to abandon the basic elements of modern civilization and change over to new value systems, new lifestyles, and new methodologies. Or whether we must and will continue down the path essentially laid by modern civilization.

To begin with my conclusion, given the Medieval civilization as the “thesis” and the Modern civilization as the “antithesis,” we neither can, nor should immediately revert to the “thesis” of the Medieval civilization even if we are confronted with the self-contradictions in the “antithesis” of the modern civilization. What we should seek instead is the “synthesis” which

elevates the experiences of both civilizations. While this synthesis will succeed to the spirit of rationality in which science is accepted as the mother of progress, it is also expected to resolve the “uneasiness of mankind,” which Ichiro of Natsume Soseki’s “Kojin” described as “stemming from scientific progress.” Starting with the premise that man is biologically a social animal, we must give reconsideration and greater recognition to the role of the community as an entity embracing and assigning a place to the individual, though of course this is not intended at all to degrade the importance of individual freedom and our respect for human rights that are a part of the invaluable assets passed on from the Modern Age. This may mean moving beyond our overvaluation of rationalism and reshaping rationalism into a form which will maintain a balance between its effectiveness and its limitations. Eastern wisdom will have much to say in this regard.

The recognition will be in order that rationalism is ultimately dependent on human brains, whose capabilities are essentially limited. By its very nature human brains are an imperfect tool. In his famous “Incompleteness Theorem,” Kurt Godel states, “In any logically consistent system, there exists a proposition that can be neither proved nor disproved.” This theorem pointed out the above-mentioned recognition from within the context of Modern rationalism. But Eastern wisdom, existing outside the bounds of modern rationalism, has long suggested this. A “synthetic” perspective must be returned to Modern civilization, which has leaned too far in the direction of “analytical” methods. The spark of “intuition” must be restored to a Modern thought process, that depends too heavily on “logic” alone. A concept of “circulation” must be reintroduced to Modern man’s sense of time, which has given itself over to an extreme belief in “progress.” A sense of “symbiosis” must be reinstated in Modern sense of values, which have devoted too much respect to the fiat of “competition.” There is no doubt that such modesty existed in both East and West before the Modern Age. Having built modern civilization on the negation of this medieval wisdom, however, we have given little thought to the idea that perhaps the time has come to reexamine these values. Rehabilitating such modesty from the Medieval Age is by no means the same as reverting to the “thesis” of that age. It will allow us to mend the splitting seams of the Modern Age as “antithesis” and enable us to develop a new civilization as our “synthesis.” In every sense, the meaning and value of “moderation” are being looked at once more.

As agriculture supported the Medieval Age and industry the Modern Age, the information industry will likely support the Age succeeding the Modern Age. At the same time, whereas the Medieval Age was characterized by the juxtaposition of various civilizations and the Modern Age by the preeminence of the European civilization, the Age to come will be noted for its cosmopolitan nature of civilization. In this new Age a monotheistic rigorism will gradually give way to a polytheistic tolerance. In the long term the infrastructure of an information age will tend to promote this shift. While no attempt can or should be made to do away with all of the values born of Europe, the rediscovery of and insistence on the values of non-European civilizations will no doubt intensify in an effort to rectify the predominance of European values.

For the time being, such is a necessary process in transcending the Modern Age. One should expect that the interaction of the rediscovery of non-European civilizations and the arrival of the information age, at first glance two completely unrelated phenomena, will become two decisive factors in forming the new Age succeeding the Modern Age.

4. Characteristics of the Ancient, Medieval, and Modern Ages

Needless to say, the failure of Modern civilization has been most conspicuous in those modernized countries (the so-called industrialized countries), that have been leading the development of Modern civilization. Modern civilization is one of individualism, built on a framework which stands on the fiction that individuals directly participate in the establishment of a state through a social contract. As a result of tying the individual and the state too closely together and of overemphasizing this direct tie, those intermediary communities, which operate between them and embrace people in the naturally shared sense of a common fate – e.g. the family, religious groups, citizens' groups, corporations, labor unions, and regional organizations – continue to lose their sense of unity.

It is true that corporations have gained certain authority that seemingly substitutes for that of the state, but individuals are not discovering their own identities within the corporation. Religious groups such as the Aum Divine Truth sect and Islamic fundamentalist groups and/or citizens' groups such as Amnesty International and Green Peace do appear at first glance to have an increasing capacity for absorbing these individuals, but this rise in their popularity is actually a reaction against the dissolution of communities in modern civilization and not growth propelled by the tailwind of Modern civilization.

It is possible in future that the attraction of these groups will grow steadily as the pressure of Modern civilization on communities eases, but the general trend of Modern civilization dictates that the individual will continue to lose his or her identity within the communities and will thus live an isolated existence drifting in mass society. Furthermore, the presence of the nation-state itself, a key player in the Modern Age, is growing weaker as the Modern Age declines and the "borderless" phenomenon gains strength. Even in the ties between the individual and the state one begins to sense a passive bleakness. Mankind at the end of the 20th century might be characterized as social animals confronting the biological threat of losing the basis for its social subsistence.

The failure of modern civilization, because of its global scale, is drawing into the maelstrom of its consequences even those unmodernized countries (the developing countries). That modern industrialized civilization with its mass production and mass consumption is reaching its limits is clear not only from the environmental pollution and destruction mentioned earlier but also from the possibility of a collapse of the balance between food, energy, and other resources on the one hand and an increasing population on the other. Modern civilization is thus under

attack in both North and South on issues of global importance. It is obvious that any solutions must also be on a global scale.

To indicate the Age which follows next in the sequence of Ancient Age, Medieval Age, and Modern Age, I would like to employ the expression "New Age." I have on an earlier occasion used the term "post-Modern age." (6) But with this term I can imply nothing more than a simple sequence of time denoting that the Age comes after the Modern Age. I know there are those who call the Age "New Medieval Age." (7) This is also an attractive naming of the Age concerned. But here let me decide that I take the liberty of introducing the term "New Age" in this essay.

I would like to take an overview of the distinguishing characteristics of Ancient, Medieval, and Modern Ages, as this is prerequisite to establishing the characteristics of the New Age. Agriculture provided the economic base of both Ancient and Medieval Ages. But in Ancient Age the land was sparsely populated. Rulers were more interested in the wealth accumulated in cities, concentration points of population, than in land itself. For this reason, the concept of territorial borders was still immature; governance often took the form of city-states as in ancient Greece, circuit rule as in ancient Rus, or predatory empires as in the ancient Orient. The Medieval Age in both East and West saw a sharp improvement in agricultural productivity, making possible a rapid rise in population. Thus, rulers gradually turned their eyes towards the increasingly scarce resource of land, with farmers becoming slave-peasants strictly tied to the land. In both Western Europe and Japan the concept of land ownership was deliberately developed out of the feudal system.

With the arrival of the Modern Age, nation-states were born from the citizenry revolution. The populace within the territory of those nation-states rose from the status of slave-peasants appended to the land to that of masters of land endowed with suffrage. The economic base of society also shifted from agriculture to industry. Being equipped with heavy installations, industry was established by constructing factories, hiring laborers, bringing in raw materials, processing these, and selling the end products to the marketplace. Control over railways and searoutes were of strategic importance. All of these changes served to strengthen the attachment of nations to their territory. The modern nation-state as formed in Europe was a type of community sharing a common fate based upon the common memory of history. The identity of individuals was closely tied to the state by a national sense of solidarity. These European nation-states completed the division of the world by the end of the 19th century and, in doing so, introduced the concept of national borders into such areas as the Arabian desert and the African jungles which had never known such demarcations before. This might well be remembered as one of the abnormalities of the Modern Age. In fact, however, the perfection of the universality of such territorial borders also symbolized the climax of the Modern Age.

5. The New Civilization as the Information Society

What kind of characteristics will the New Age have? Its economic base will be neither agriculture nor even modern industry but almost certainly the information industry. In the New society, which has the know-how to satisfy the demand for food and material with the minimum expenditure of social energy, the dominant majority of the population will be freed from agriculture and industry, i.e., from the bondage to the land. The significance of national borders will quickly wane as the information revolution typified by personal computers and the Internet permits exchanges that transcend physical space. This is what is meant by the so-called “borderless” phenomena. Already as a consequence of the end of the Cold War, capital, labor, and technology have begun to move freely across national borders in search of the most optimum combination. This phenomenon is often called “mega-competition.” Under such circumstances, individuals and corporations feel less and less bound to the nation-state to which they are supposed to have a loyalty. For the same reason, the state comes to lose grip of those individuals and corporations which operate across borders.

The nation is an entity in which people are connected with the state through their ties to the land, i.e. territory. If the land can no longer hold people, if individuals and corporations relocate as they please, and if people become free to choose to which country they pay taxes, the subsistence base of the state, i.e. the power to tax, might be fundamentally undermined. The state will not be able to collect taxes simply on the basis of its sovereign authority. It might have to offer its public services for quid pro quo. In this case it must be admitted that the politics are turning over one of its key functions to the marketplace. This can only mean the waning of the state and the retreat of the politics. The politics was most inflated when Hitler and Stalin ruled the totalitarian states of Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia. Today in most of the industrialized democracies, the so-called ungovernability is a perennial aspect of the political processes. Most politicians are degraded to the position of playing a role of brokers and agents working for the interest of such special interests as pressure groups and electoral constituencies.

The tendency of politics to concentrate not on the “grand politics” of statesmanship in pursuit of the national interest regarding fundamentals and principles, but rather on “petit politics” of brokerage for various special interests, has become symptomatic of domestic politics in most of the modernized countries. The end of the Cold War is certain to accelerate this tendency. The bigger the organizations within both state and society grow, the more complex the rules and procedures become. It is true that politicians become entangled in this web and lose their will and ability to lead. Many politicians find themselves demoted to the position of mere situational managers. Even the mass media, which boast themselves to be the fourth estate, are no more a master of themselves as they are driven by commercial rationality. The importance attached to television viewer ratings is a clear indication of this tendency. With political leaders reduced to brokers and/or managers, and the voice of the sovereign people less and less

audible, the political process is being transformed into a quasi-automatic process bound by a limitless number of invisible rules and procedures made free from anyone's control. Once upon a time the economic process was dominated by the non-economic interference of feudal lords and by the centrally planned directives of totalitarian states. But now it is guided, in principle, only by "invisible forces" operating in the marketplace. The politics in the New Age could very well undergo a similar transition.

Taxes and politics have always been inextricably interconnected. "No taxation without representation." But changes are taking place now in this relationship. A considerable portion of the workers in Tokyo are long-distance commuters from the three neighboring prefectures of Kanagawa, Saitama, and Chiba. Hence these workers live and gain access to public services in these prefectures. But their working, playing, and spending tend to take place in Tokyo, where so many companies and businesses are concentrated. Consequently, the taxes collected per capita in Tokyo reportedly amount to two or three times those in the three suburban prefectures (8). From the opposite perspective, these three suburban prefectures are unable to offer adequate public services with less than half the tax revenue. This issue could be quickly resolved were the state and its political structure sound. But, as mentioned above, the state continues to wane and political authority ebbs.

This is all happening at a time when the warmth and flexibility with which the individual is embraced by intermediate communities such as family, religious groups, citizens' groups, corporations, labor unions, regional organizations, etc. are disappearing as a consequence of the advancement of modernization. Who will undertake the job of creating values and maintaining order in the New Age? And how? Can the job be done by an extension of the wisdom of the Modern Age? Or will the job be done by the principles which radically differ from those of the Modern Age? These will be the greatest issues facing mankind as we stand on the threshold of a fourth age, the descendant of the Ancient, Medieval, and Modern Ages.

6. Value of Bypass Route and "Healer and Healed" Relationships

In light of the fact that those unmodernized countries, after having broken free of European colonial rule, are eager to promote their own modernization and industrialization, some observers have insisted that mankind must and will basically continue down the path already blazed by Modern civilization. But I myself believe that such an opinion lacks a broader perspective. China, with a population of 1.2 billion, and India, with that of 0.9 billion, are pursuing modernization and industrialization in exactly the same manner as the modernized countries.

But if China, with a per capita GNP of \$470, and India, with that of \$310, bring their per capita GNP to that of \$28,190 as already reached by Japan or to that of \$23,240 as already reached by

the United States (9), and if each and every household comes to own a car, from where will the petroleum needed to run these cars be supplied? Indeed, is this even physically possible in the first place? According to the same World Bank statistics, energy consumption per capita in 1992 (in units of equivalent kilograms of petroleum) was 3,586 kg in Japan and 7,662 kg in the United States versus 600 kg in China and 235 kg in India (10). What does this mean? Only that such “modernization” would lead to a new demand for petroleum of enormous proportions. This fact alone makes obvious the bankruptcy of the argument in vindication of a simple modernization drive.

A professor of international politics in the United States has reasoned that China, developing into a major economic as well as military power, might eventually employ military force in conflicts over petroleum resources in order to satisfy her enormous energy demand, and that joint development of petroleum resources with China should be undertaken now (11). This recommendation might well turn out to be an alleviator of the difficulties. But it is certain that the recommendation will never provide a conclusive solution to this matter.

In the Himalaya Mountains sits the tiny kingdom of Bhutan, which is known for the royal policy of respect for the country’s traditional culture and of encouragement of wearing folk costumes. Bhutan refuses to give free rein to economic development such as the construction of dams and roadways in order to protect the natural environment of the Himalayas. It is also well known that in countries such as Iran that adhere to Islamic fundamentalism there has been a repulsion for westernization and modernization. Nevertheless, these courses of action have been taken by these countries at their own initiative. There are notones that could be forced upon them from outside, especially by modernized countries which are already enjoying the fruits of modernization.

This being the case, the only approach to resolving fully this issue is to turn off the same path to industrialization and modernization as taken by the modernized countries. Bypassing it will enable unmodernized countries to avoid the accompanying pitfalls of Modern civilization. But, of course, taking a detour must not mean the abandonment of their hope for attaining the living and cultural standards already achieved by the modernized countries. To this end, cooperation from the modernized countries is needed in two regards: first is in achieving technological breakthroughs that will make possible the construction of such a bypass route and second is in introducing the conversion of the perception of values from the old to that which give meaning and significance to the construction of such a detour. And the most important is the latter because one cannot impose on others values in which one does not believe oneself and which one hesitates to introduce into one’s own country. Thus, the modernized countries must themselves first accept the set of values that hold this bypass route important. Such will inevitably entail accepting changes in one’s own lifestyle. This set of values associated with the bypass route will be the starting point for the values of New civilization that seek to overcome the limitations and impasses of modern civilization.

It is very interesting that the Modern Age began with the Renaissance – that is, the movement to revive the civilizations of ancient Greece and Rome. One of the points in common in the feudal values of medieval Europe and pre-modern Asia was the priority given to community values over individual values. To liberate the individual from the constraints of the community a revival of the values of the citizens of Ancient Greece and Rome was believed necessary. In actual fact, the citizenry of ancient Greece and Rome was a privileged aristocratic populace supported by a slave economy. But disregarding the existence of slavery and looking only at the relationship between the citizens, it was thought that here was an ideal republican civil society free of the oppression of the Medieval Age. With these conditions in common, they thought there was a sense of continuity between the Ancient Age and the Modern Age which sat on either side of the Medieval Age.

In any case, the Modern Age began as a sharply reactionary movement against the Medieval Age. Its creators set out to establish a new set of values unlike those of the Medieval Age through inspiration from Ancient Age. The Modern Age has continued up to the present, where this endeavor has been carried to an extreme. Unquestionably the individual was exposed to many irrationalities in the Medieval Age, in the name of a Christian God in Europe and for the sake of the Confucian virtues of loyalty and filial piety in the East/. The successes of the Modern Age in freeing the individual from these shackles cannot be overestimated. However, as in all things, the maxim “overdoing is as useless as underdoing” is applicable. The error of pushing the individual too far to the forefront is one we are paying for at the close of the Modern Age.

It is undeniable, though, even to this day and in all corners of the world, still so many fundamental human rights remain ignored and violated. Many individuals await relief from unjust oppression and exploitation. Mankind must dedicate still more energy to inculcating and implementing the concept of human rights. Still, if one does not develop concepts which cast a completely different light on the problems we face from that with which we have been familiar, the siege under which the modern civilization finds itself cannot be broken. Leaving behind Modern civilization with “injurer and injured” relationships, we need a New civilization with “healer and healed” relationships.

7. A Renga Structure to Support the Network Media

In the process of forming modern civilization, the intermediate communities between individual and state gradually lost strength and the individual, without a community as intermediary, was expected to directly participate in the shaping and management of the nation-state. The basic human right of suffrage should have insured this. However, as the state has grown aggrandized, it has become a distant entity increasingly out of reach of the individual. And an individual has vanished among the manipulated masses. In addition, the threshold of national boundaries has

been lowered as the borderless phenomenon progresses. Thus the existence of nation-states is also reducing its significance. The individual as a product of the Modern Age has at last become rootless, floating around in urban settings and pondering the vacuousness of the “freedom” which presumably is his or hers.

Heretofore such conscious denial of self as “self-emancipation (gedatsu)” in Buddhism or the “self-sacrifice for public service (messhi boko)” in Bushido (the samurai way) and/or such inclination towards collectivism as the “ie (family)” system that forms the basis of Japanese society or the generic “guanxi (nexus)” that penetrates Chinese society (13) have been viewed by Europeans as examples of Asian backwardness. As a matter of fact, many Asians also took the same view of this. However, as Asia, especially Confucian-Buddhist East Asia, emerges from the Asian backwardness, the fact that they not only have preserved but have taken advantage of this Asian ethos in the process of their modernization comes to draw our interest and attention.

In Christian Europe, the relationship of the individual directly confronting a single God and asking forgiveness provides the basic scheme for social structure. In contrast to this, Confucian-Buddhist Asia the social structure arises from the relationship of the individual venerating ancestors and vowing the eternal continuation of the bloodline. According to Kaji Nobuyuki, Japanese Buddhism consists of 80 percent Chinese Confucianism and 10 percent each of Indian Buddhism and Chinese Taoism. What accounts for the 80 percent of Chinese Confucianism is said to be the concept of “filial piety” (14). Although a statue of Buddha occupies the central place in a household Buddhist altar in Japan, the focus is the mortuary tablets for the family ancestors, in which the concept of “filial piety” is crystallized. The continuity of an unbroken family line affirms the identity of the self and the roots of one’s existence.

In Christian Europe everything derives from man’s contract with God, but in Confucian-Buddhist Asia the objective of man’s life is “self-perfection (shushin)” in Confucianism and “self-emancipation (gedatsu)” in Buddhism. A sole God does not forgo contracts with other gods, but from the outset the road to self-realization allows for a variety of approaches. Forgiveness granted by a single God and the concept of an agreement with a single God planted the seeds of European individualism as well as intolerance for other religions, but ancestor veneration and self-realization have been the womb of Asian collectivism as well as tolerance for other convictions.

The information revolution as represented by personal computers and the Internet may well provide the impetus for establishing new human relations through networking in the age of individualism. The individual appears to have lost his or her way in the isolation of Modern civilization. The systematic development of diversified, i.e. non-centralized, communication technology such as computer networking on a level dependent on neither the hegemony of the

state nor the hegemony of the marketplace, may just help create communication networks independent of both of these while at the same time globally interdependent.

From the Heian Era through the Edo Period a form of poetry known as “renga (linked verse)” was popular in Japan. Following a pattern of coupled stanzas, with the first stanza made up of three lines of 5, 7, and 5 syllables respectively and the second stanza consisting of two lines of 7 syllables each, a “party” of multiple persons by turns put together a thousand or even ten thousand verses. Each person’s stanza had its own meaning and was composed individually, but the renga as a whole was put together by a “party,” which served as an “intellectual forum” without anybody presiding over the forum. In fact, the forum is held together by invisible rules and procedures. Though each and every stanza is independent, an entire renga demonstrates a certain multi-dimensional unity and none of its composite stanzas constitutes a sole center. Could not the structure of this renga suggest a possible structure for networking in the information age?

As the idea of a “borderless” world takes hold, with the state in decline, intermediate communities in disarray, and individuals in limbo, how will values be created and order maintained? It is hoped that these values and order of the New Age will bypass the characteristic “injurer and injured” relationships of Modern civilization, including colonization, imperialism, war, revolution, nuclear weapons, environmental destruction, etc. and replace them with “healer and healed” relationships. When we consider this as a challenge for the civilization of the New Age, we must first assume that neither an oligarchic condominium of several superpowers nor a centralized world empire transcending sovereign powers may be probable. Then our efforts in this regard must be directed towards the incorporation of countless wills into an overall will through a sort of “intellectual forum,” where not a master presiding over the process but a set of rules and procedures operating for the good of everybody is expected. Only then, the global political and economic regime might succeed in synthesizing the process of global governance harmoniously.

In contrast to the Modern Age, which has been painted completely in the single color of European values, the New Age will be painted in the color of harmony representing cosmopolitan values. The New Age will incorporate the air of tolerance for heretics and heathens that prevailed in the Tang capital of Chang’an and/or the Mongol (Yuan) capital of Karakorum. Unlike the Medieval Age, which relied almost exclusively on the personal media of face-to-face discussions and meetings, and unlike the Modern Age, which was almost unilaterally manipulated by the whim of the mass media of newspapers and television, the New Age will develop a unique relationship with the media of the day, which I would like to call the network media. This network of personal computers linked to one another by the Internet system will help the individual to recover his or her identity lost in the Modern civilization. Even those intermediary communities which once appeared on the verge of dissolution will be revitalized. I believe that the infrastructure of the information age, if matched nicely with the

rediscovery of such non-European values as the wisdom built around the renga framework, will enable mankind to find means to respond to the unprecedented historical challenge of forming a new civilization.

[Note]

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