

2006-8

The 4th International Conference on Dialogue between Civilizations

Jan 13-14, 2006 at Tunis, Tunisia

Part I Diversity and Exclusiveness in the Globalized Society

TRIANGLE OF ISLAM, JAPAN, AND AMERICA

by

Daisaburo HASHIZUME

(Tokyo Institute of Technology / hashizm@valdes.titech.ac.jp)

Before starting the dialogue between intellectuals from Islam and Japan, I suggest that the context of our encounter is provided by another, namely, Western Civilization. It initiated globalization. Since globalized society in the early 21st century will still be headed by the United States and other major Christian countries, I am going to talk on the triangle relationship of Islam, Japan and the United States, hoping that the background of our dialogue will be deepened and well-understood.

Almost all civilizations have originated from the old continent. Islamism, Christianity, Hinduism, and Confucianism have their own territories on respective parts of the continent. Each civilization is religion-based, all therefore forming a strong tradition among its people. All of these civilizations are attempts of overcoming precedent local cultures and bringing in peace. They developed universal values which go beyond the ethnic boundary, however, these values contradicted each other when they encountered. They could co-exist, but they didn't merge into one civilization.

Japan is a small island country on the fringed of the Chinese Empire. As it is separated from China by the sea, Japan had strong influences from Chinese civilizations and yet it kept its uniqueness as an independent society. For example, Japan developed its own governing system of warriors headed by Shogun, its own religion which is the mixture of Chinese Buddhism and indigenous Shintoism, its own culture which does not strictly follow the doctrines of Confucianism. Japan is a flexible society, open to the outside world, and is able to absorb the merits of other civilizations. That is the reason why Japan

could so successfully change into an industrialized country.

Among the main civilizations, Christian civilization was the first to achieve industrialization and modernization. It is a complex of science, capitalism and democracy, all of which are secularized forms of Christianity. As a result, Christians have occupied most part of the new continent. They also colonized most people of the other civilizations.

The United States gained its hegemonic position among Christian countries since early 20th century and has been one of the main contributors of globalization for several reasons. First, it is a protestant country on the new continent. Other part of the new continent are Catholic countries, and they are less active toward other countries. Secondly, the US is a less populated country compared with European countries, therefore it has abundant resources per capita, which makes it wealthy. Thirdly, the US used to be a colony, who fought its revolutionary war for freedom, and gained independence. They believe that the US is the ideal country in the world, that it has moral superiority over other countries, and that it has holy duty to protect the world from violation of freedom.

Christian countries experienced the period of absolutism. It consists of absolute monarch, absolute legislation power, permanent military force, bureaucracy and taxation systems. It was only possible for Christians after the separation of government and religion. Democracy is the descendant of absolutism. The three holy items of globalization, i.e. science, capitalism and democracy, are actually symbol of dominance of Christian civilization for other civilizations.

Islamic countries and Japan are similar in having confronted with Western threats in the past centuries. The difference is, Islamic countries have had close interaction with Christian countries, while Japan had long been isolated from the rest of the world until the appearance of US battleships in 1853. Japan had no religious regulations which may have turned into obstacles towards modernization, therefore it promptly absorbed Western customs and institutions after opening its door to the outer world.

Islamism and Christianity are both monotheistic, while Japan is rather

of the world. The attempt of systematic understandings of other civilizations, especially these between Islam and Japan, will be a helpful step toward this goal.

Thank you very much.

polytheistic. Islam and Christian civilizations have a systematic view of the world, an integrated manner of thought and behaviour, and an elaborate culture. Each factor is closely connected with another, therefore it is not easy to replace any one from another civilization. Contrarily, Japanese culture is always changing under the influence of other civilizations because it was heterogeneous from the beginning. Japanese people are quite confident of their identity after accepting important cultural features from outside world, believing that they can keep harmony between foreign civilizations and their traditions.

Japan and the US are allied, with many values in common: such as democracy and free market economy. The US was the first country that came to Japan and knocked down its doors when other Asian countries were colonized. As the US was once a colony and then became independent, Japan felt sympathy towards them.

Since then, the US has been a model to Japan, except for the short period when Japan fought against them in WWII. Japan had, and still has, a lot of merit from being an alliance to the US. It is a foundation for Japan's national interest. On the other hand, Islamic countries are not all allied with the US.

The US chooses its allies strategically and only on occasions, therefore its friends and enemies are interchangeable, like Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan.

Let me summarize the nature of the triangle of Islam, Japan and America mentioned above. They have something in common as pairs, which may exclude the third. The perfect unity of the three party seems improbable in the near future. This symbolizes the difficulties with contemporary globalized society.

Then, how can the dialogue between Islam and Japan be conducted? What is the purpose of the dialogue? What would be its desirable outcome?

The US is influencing other countries so much through the process of globalization. However, on the contrary, the US itself is being influenced just as much in the same process, because globalization means the deeper involvement of all countries in a global system. When isolated from the old continent, the US could purify its ideals and be as fundamentalistic as it likes, but the US is gradually being dissolved in the encounter with other civilizations. The world is changing toward a multi-polar network.

In this particular situation, the talk between non-Western countries are very important to facilitate this process and to prepare the next coming order