A Historical Review of the Dialogue of Civilizations

with a Special Emphasis on “Cross-Civilizational Spheres”

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Dialogues of Civilizations have existed since the beginning of civilizations in the third millennium B.C. Since then no civilizations have made their developments without dialogues or intercourses with other civilizations. For example, there were no doubt civilizational dialogues among Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Aegean and Greek Civilization, and among Indian, Chinese, Korean and Japanese Civilization, and also among Greek, Syrian, Arabic and European Civilization etc.

These dialogues among civilizations contributed very much to a lot of creative achievements of human culture through the entire history of humankind, though sometimes accompanied by oppositions and frictions.

These remarkable historical facts have induced me to emphasize importance of the concept of “Cross-Civilizational Spheres” in my scheme of civilization theory.

A. Toynbee, a noted historian of civilizations, recognized twenty-three civilized societies in his work A Study of History (1934-58), later revising them to thirteen independent and fifteen satellite civilizations. His theory of civilizations was then supplemented by Ph. Bagby’s concept of “peripheral civilizations” which covered the lacuna in Toynbee’s “major civilizations”.

My point at this session is that this dual conceptual apparatuses hitherto acknowledged in the comparative study of civilizations are still static and definitely insufficient for due clarification of dynamic developments of civilizations in human history.

I myself, identified twenty-one major civilizations, consciously noting interrelations among them, as I show in the diagram, and emphasized importance of the concept “Cross-Civilizational Spheres” (CCS) which I think conditio sine qua non for dynamic theory of civilizational studies (cf. my paper in Comparative Civilizations Review No. 39, 1998). I found CCS, first of all, in the “Mediterranean Civilization”. It is often said, as if it is a single civilization, but in reality, at more careful analysis, Mediterranean Civilization turns out to be a CCS, a locus of civilizational dialogues and confrontations between two different series of civilizations: one is European (Aegean, Greek, Byzantine and the West) and another is Hamitic and Semitic (Egyptian, Phoenician, Syrian and Arabic). The Mediterranean Civilization consists of two different lineages of civilization, interrelations of which produced dynamic developments and created transformations in the same place of the Mediterranean Sea by mutual contacts and influences, though sometimes accompanied by conflicts and confrontations. Then we find the “Silk Road CCS” which connected Persian and Chinese Civilization through Taklamakan Desert during the second and thirteenth century A.D. There existed also the “Indian Sea CCS” which connected Indian Civilization with Roman (then European) Civilization and with South-Eastern Civilization. We can also mention about “East Asian Sea CCS” which occurred among Chinese, Korean, and Japanese Civilization. Then “Atlantic Ocean CCS”, “Saharan CCS”, “Nuclear-Amerian CCS” etc. etc.

Simply defined, CCS is a field of constant and durable intercourse of different civilizations sharing common areas and time which contributed to new civilizational developments and transformations. Throughout human history, we have experienced numerous civilizational dialogues in various CCS which ever existed for a long time. By learning lessons from these historical experiences and now enhancing dialogues of civilizations in the global scale, we would like to hope that the 21st century not only achieves coexistence and conviviality of civilizations avoiding so-called Clash of Civilizations, but also induces us to co-operate for creation of a New Civilization towards peace and well-being of the earth.