Introduction

Just a few weeks ago the world-famous sociologist Anthony Giddens gave a keynote speech in Berlin, titled “Education – portal to life” at a conference on the challenges and opportunities for education in the 21st century, organized by the Deutsche Bank. He focused in his keynote on three major issues: globalization, technology and individualization. He described globalization as directly linked to improved communication at a time in which messages reach the other side of the world in a split-second. Technology, in particular biotechnology and modern information – and communication technology, pervades all sectors and aspects of daily life in our knowledge-society. At the same time, we see a worrying tendency to place one-self, the individual, the “here” and the “now” increasingly above the collective, the “there” and the “future”.

There, in a nutshell we discussed – in Berlin – the core-issues of the topic of this first Global Seminar in Shimane on “IT – the Family and Gender”. My task today is to sketch the broader context of globalization and communication. How it impacts on the relations between people? People coming from very different backgrounds: geographically, historically, and culturally? In order not to be misunderstood, I would like to mention here that when I speak about culture, I include religion and philosophy.

Globalization

Let me start by stressing that today’s – our — world is characterized by rapid, still accelerating change. This change is the direct consequence of highly improved means of transportation, communication and information. The increase in the speed, frequency and volume of interaction, as well as the exchange of goods and ideas, has been impressive, in particular in the second half of the 20th century. The impacts are visible in all sectors of society: economic, social, political and cultural. These complex and profound processes together have become known as globalization. Thus globalization is in the first place a matter of communication, of a “shrinking” world. It is a mistake to see globalization only in economic terms: this aspect of globalization is in fact much
more linked to unguided introduction of market-liberalization, without adequate actions to bring the necessary support institutions in place, on time. There is no possibility to be against globalization as improved communication. This is with us to stay. In fact information and exchange worldwide is already with us for centuries. Last year, for instance, we celebrated the existence, continuously over four hundred years (!) of relations between Japan and the Netherlands. More than a century ago, in the Meiji period, the famous Dutch painter Vincent van Gogh created a beautiful picture of the “Courtisane” (1887), which reflected his image of a geisha.

We must, however, look carefully at the impacts, nowadays and in the future, of globalization in the social, cultural and economic sectors. As Secretary-General Kofi Annan has indicated, clearly, it is our task to make globalization “work for all”. This means to allow people to maintain their cultural identity to guarantee them social justice and equity, as well as to eradicate poverty and to ensure “a better life, in a safer world for all.” To achieve this we need a better understanding of our own situation, potential and aspirations as well as of those of other people. Such understanding needs communication, dialogue to clarify the positions of other people. It is for this reason that this year, the year 2001, has been appointed by the General Assembly of the United Nations to be the Year of “Dialogue among Civilizations.”

**The Need for Dialogue**

Not all speeches in large meetings are particularly meaningful. Some, however, indeed are! These do much to mobilize people and change the expected, so-called “normal”, course of events.

This was the case with the groundbreaking speech, given by H.E. Mohammad Kathami, President of Iran, in the General Assembly of the United Nations on 21 September 1998. In this speech he made a strong appeal to the world community to institutionalize dialogue, replacing hostility and confrontation with discourse and understanding. He said among others: “Establishment and enhancement of civility, whether at national or international level is contingent upon dialogue among societies and civilizations representing various views, inclinations and approaches. If humanity at the threshold of the new century and millennium devotes all efforts to institutionalize dialogue, replacing hostility and confrontation with discourse and understanding, it would leave an invaluable legacy for the benefit of the future generations.”

**Response of the UN General Assembly**

On 4 November 1998, the General Assembly adopted the resolution to proclaim the year 2001, the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations. In doing so the General Assembly recognized the diverse civilization achievements of mankind, crystallizing cultural pluralism and creative human diversity. The General Assembly also stressed:
that positive and mutually beneficial interaction among civilizations has continued throughout history, despite impediments arising from intolerance, disputes and wars;

• the importance of tolerance in international relations and the significant role of dialogue as a means to reach understanding, remove threats to peace and strengthen interaction and exchange among civilizations;

• and that civilization achievements constitute the collective heritage of humankind, providing a source of inspiration and progress for humanity at large.

The Assembly therefore welcomed the collective endeavour of the international community to enhance understanding through constructive dialogue among civilizations and invited all governments, the United Nations system, including e.g. UNESCO and the United Nations University (Tokyo) and other relevant international and non-governmental organizations to actively contribute.

Response of the UN-system

In an address held on 5 February 2001, in Seton Hall University’s School of Diplomacy and International Relations (South Orange, New Jersey), the UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan explained in a very clear way why dialogue among civilizations is so important for all of us. “The United Nations – at its best — can be the true home of the dialogue among civilizations; the forum where such dialogue can flourish and bear fruit in every field of human endeavour”. “Without this dialogue taking place every day among all nations – within and between civilizations, cultures and groups – no peace can be lasting and no prosperity can be secure. That is the lesson of the United Nations’ first half-century. It is a lesson that we ignore at our peril.”

History teaches us that alongside an infinite diversity of cultures, there does exist one global civilization. President Khatami in his speech introducing Dialogue among Civilizations at the Millennium Summit of the United Nations in early September 2000, characterized this world civilization in terms of one river but a river with many tributaries and where warm and cold streams are coming together. It is after all a world civilization of diversity based on shared values of tolerance and freedom; it is defined by its tolerance of dissent, its celebration of cultural diversity, its insistence on fundamental, universal human rights, and its belief in the right of people everywhere to have a say in how they are governed. It is a civilization based on the belief that the diversity of human cultures is something to be celebrated, not feared. Indeed, many wars stem from people’s fear of those who are different from themselves. Only through dialogue such fears can be overcome. Diversity, therefore, is both the basis for dialogue among civilizations, as well as the reality which makes dialogue necessary.

Diversity, how to indeed turn diversity into a positive force enriching human development, is at the heart of all dialogue, in particular among civilizations. Mr. Giandomenico Picco, the personal
representative of the Secretary-General for the UN Year of Dialogue among Civilizations has in line with this directed his action to the preparation of a book on the issue of dialogue focusing on the perception of diversity. This book will be presented to the Secretary-General during the 2001 session of the United Nations General Assembly and will aim at laying the groundwork for a new paradigm in international relations. In a time in which the effects of globalization become stronger and widespread, such a new paradigm might be of extreme importance, in particular also for countries like Japan.

**A Year of Dialogue?**

The arguments for a broad participation in the Dialogue among Civilizations are compelling. It is an appropriate and necessary answer to the notion of an inevitable clash of civilizations, as it provides a useful context for advancing cooperation over conflict. It also helps us draw on the deeper, ancient roots of cultures and civilizations to find what unites us across all boundaries, and shows us that the past can provide signposts to unity, just as easily as to enmity. Perhaps most important is, however, that the Dialogue can help us to discern the role of culture and civilization in contemporary conflicts, and so to distinguish propaganda and false history from the real causes of war. That, in turn, should ease the path to peace.

As so often, however, many hesitate to participate in the unknown, to enter unchartered territory, for all kinds of good reasons. To be successful this Dialogue should have no geographical, cultural or social boundaries. In practice, however, it is clear where the major interest lies. This is illustrated by the participation – just the day before the Millennium Summit – in the roundtable organized at UN Headquarters in New York in September 2000. This roundtable was supported by the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Mohammad Khatami, and chaired by the Director-General of UNESCO, Koichiro Matsuura. The Secretary-General and 12 Heads of State (Afghanistan, Algeria, Georgia, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Latvia, Mali, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Qatar and the Sudan), the Secretary of State of the United States and the Foreign Ministers of Azerbaijan, Costa Rica, Egypt, India, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Iraq were in attendance. Many major countries were not represented. In particular, the absence from countries like France or Spain, Brazil and, indeed Japan is difficult to understand. It is clear that much more time is needed to develop a dialogue in which all countries will participate.

To promote such a broad based global dialogue civil society, in particular universities and other institutions of higher education can contribute a lot. The United Nations University, therefore, has developed a programme of activities which can contribute in a meaningful way. The core of these activities is to see what contributions in particular the academic world, the universities can make through their education, research and reflection. Jointly with UNESCO it will organize a major conference from 31 July to 3 August in Tokyo and Kyoto. Core themes will be promoting dialogue, understanding different (other) civilizations, learning from history, multicultural societies, Asian
contributions and universality versus particularity. The conference will be preceded by a series of workshops, which will address these themes from different perspectives, such as: education, science, communication/media, and ethics.

**Sincere Dialogue**

Sincere dialogue is not easy to achieve. In the first place it is important to realize that our perception of the reality is highly influenced by the society in which we live, the education in-and outside schools we have received. It really takes an effort therefore to understand the background from which our partners in the dialogue arrive at and do explain their views. Dialogue is therefore, primarily about listening and trying to understand. A capability many in the modern world have lost, as in a highly competitive world they have become used to the rules of a debate. Debates, after all, are not aiming at understanding, but at winning the argument.

Dialogue does not only ask for a different attitude. It also asks for knowledge. Knowledge about the others, dialogue partners from different (other) civilizations, as well as the conditions under which they live and their civilization. Understanding other people, their constructed reality: the concepts, values and experiences that guide their interpretation of reality is essential for meaningful dialogue. It becomes increasingly clear that in their future, in our interlinked but diverse world real dialogue among people, a real sharing of life experiences will only be possible when there is a clear understanding, a sense of the backgrounds from which our partners, other people are coming. Schools have a major role to play here, to prepare future generations not just for their role as citizen of their country, but also as citizen of the world.

This points at increased importance of social science, history, geography in schools, not just to learn about their own country and people, but about other people in an increasingly interlinked, shrinking world. It is, indeed, crucial what we teach schoolchildren about other countries and peoples. The Council of Europe in an effort to promote reconciliation and understanding started long ago, a programme in which experts from different countries mutually check what is written in textbooks for schools about other, neighbouring, countries and peoples. It is clear that such programmes implemented in other parts of the world would improve global understanding and the quality of Dialogue among Civilizations in a decisive way.

**A Kaleidoscopic World**

We, indeed, do live in a rapidly changing *kaleidoscopic* world. For some purposes this world is organized in countries, like Japan, the Netherlands, the United States of America, etc. of different sizes and forms. For other purposes as a consequence of *decentralization* the world is organized on the basis of regions at a sub-national level, e.g. of prefectures like Shimane or more traditional regions like the Kinki, Kanto, or Kansai. For other purposes again, the world is rather organized in
larger supra-national regions, as a consequence of regional integration. There are many examples such as the European Union, NAFTA, or the Organization of African Unity, soon to become the African Union.

All these big and small regions and countries are linked to each other by people, people of very different backgrounds, who can only learn to understand each other by true dialogue, dialogue among civilizations. And there is change; change at different speed in each of those regions and countries; rapid change. We might imagine ourselves this situation by taking two paintings of Mondriaan on top of each other, and turn them; turn them at different speed, so as to make them shift in relation to each other. In this situation, with a lack of sound dialogue many misunderstandings are possible, as we have seen in recent times from Seattle to Genoa. What we do need is, indeed, more communication: the beginning of a sincere dialogue among civilizations, as an alternative to more barricades and fences at the local, regional, national and global (anti-ballistic) levels.

Learning to Appreciate Diversity

The current global situation requires a dialogue among civilizations, both to resolve existing conflicts – of ownership, of power and of worldview – and to help prevent future ones. Such a dialogue aims to increase mutual understanding and respect, not only among those with different political convictions, social positions and economic power, but also among people of different cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds. Diversity is often perceived as a threat to one’s own individual or group identity, but better mutual understanding leads to a more tolerant and receptive attitude. At its best, inter-civilizational dialogue can result in a collective sense of shared goals, enabling us to address the most important issues of all: What kind of future world do we want to live in? How can we work together to solve the problems facing humankind today, and begin creating that future? This does not necessarily imply a common approach to every issue, but without such a constructive dialogue the future is less likely to become one that we would want.

Dialogue is a Process of Transformation

Inter-civilizational dialogue should be understood as an ongoing process in which the participants show not only a willingness to exchange information by sharing their own thoughts and listening to others, but also the openness to transform their own worldviews by integrating other perspectives into their ways of thinking. The recognition of differences alone does not yet lead to mutual understanding; it is only through a genuine receptivity to other viewpoints that mutual appreciation occurs.

Nursing Self-respect and Respect for Others
The key element of successful inter-civilizational dialogue is respect: respect for others as well as respect for oneself. It is often a combination of lack of self-respect and not being respected by others that leads to conflicts. Education, understood here as an ongoing process including both formal and informal modes of teaching and learning, plays a crucial role in nourishing such respect as well as an appreciation of diversity. In order to do this effectively, however, education should not attempt to convey one uniform understanding of the world. Ways of understanding are embedded in the context of particular cultural groups, which is why different civilizations have different perspectives on the world. Education should also help us to appreciate the fact that, even as there is usually more than one perspective on any given problem, so there is usually more than one way of addressing that problem.

Diversified Curricula

In concrete terms, to contribute effectively to a dialogue of civilizations, education should:

- Take into account not only what elites and the industrialized world as a whole can teach to non-elites and developing countries, but also – and equally importantly – what dominant groups can learn from those who have been marginalized.
- Give room in school curricula to knowledge, skills and models of analysis rooted in local cultures. Merely to teach “Western” scientific approaches, belief and value systems not only ignores the existence and validity of other worldviews, but may harm the ethnic, cultural and national pride of local people by creating or reinforcing a negative image of themselves.

A concrete example for such a two-way understanding of education is the “Andean Project n peasant Technologies” in Peru (“Proyecto Andino de Tecnologías Campesinas”, PRATEC), which is devoted to the affirmation of Andean culture. Based on the conviction that the indigenous knowledge of the Andean peasants, which has enabled them to be self-reliant for many centuries, should be taught at schools and universities in Peru, PRATEC aims to “de-colonize” the agricultural education curriculum, which in its current form reflects only non-indigenous scientific approaches. In this way, PRATEC aims to “regenerate” traditional Andean peasant culture by helping the Andean people recover respect for their own history and traditions.

- Nurture self-respect, including pride in one’s cultural, ethnic, national or other group identity, without basing that self-respect on value judgments about other cultures, ethnic groups or nations. Only in this way can nation-building develop with the attitude of mutual respect necessary to engage in dialogue.

In Malaysia, for example, offering comparative religion classes in schools and universities has proven to be an effective way to foster inter-religious tolerance. In schools, knowledge about religions and cultures is conveyed by directly teaching about them, or by referring to other religions and cultures in materials designed for the improvement of reading skills. At the tertiary levels, universities and institutions are increasingly offering degree courses in comparative religion. Personal encounters with members of different religions, videos and visits to various houses of worship are part of the course work.
Multi-level Approaches to a Better Education for the Dialogue of Civilizations

Since it is the form of education that extends the furthest and usually has the most impact, formal classroom education will be at the forefront of fostering the dialogue of civilizations. To adapt and transform educational principles and curricula to the requirements of a meaningful inter-civilizational dialogue, however, is not only the responsibility of the individual teacher, but calls for cooperative efforts on many levels:

1. Constant efforts should be made to accommodate diversity in classes and in administration at all educational levels, including both formal schooling and adult education programmes.

2. On the national level,
   • School curricula should be developed in a cooperative effort involving members of all cultural groups within the society – including not only ethnic minorities, but different social classes and other groupings;
   • Programmes should be established to improve multi-cultural teaching methods through exchange of information, research and training for teachers.

3. On the international level,
   • Institutions should be established to advise in curricula development. Such institutions would best function on an intra-regional basis, but with provisions for the inter-regional exchange of information and successful methodologies;
   • Other programmes should be implemented that support national efforts for better education in the skills and knowledge necessary for a dialogue of civilizations. New distance learning technologies and concepts can be meaningfully employed to enhance the outreach of such programmes.

4. In addition to these recommendations for formal education, it should be recognized that other institutions in society, including the media, corporations, NGOs, and other information-disseminating organizations, also play a role in the education process. These institutions should therefore be encouraged to provide accurate information and analysis which avoids cultural stereotypes, and to be as inclusive as possible with respect to minority and alternative points of view.

Thank you very much.