

REFLECTIONS UPON THE DILEMMAS OF CIVILIZATION: THE WISDOM OF YIN-YANG DIALECTICS*

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In the aftermath of the 9.11 terror, the world appeared to be heading for a real clash of civilizations. And yet, humanity is still ill prepared for overcoming the predicaments of the currently predominant civilizations governing the life of mankind. This paper is an attempt to help understand the dilemmas of current civilizations in search of possible solutions. This is done with a framework provided by the classical thoughts of Yin-Yang dialectics originated in East Asia. The typical dilemmas posed by the dominant civilizations are related to man and nature, human nature, man and society, culture, and the triad of state, market, and civil society. And the principles of change derived from Yin-Yang dialectic stress limit to human endeavor, moderation, and flexibility or adaptability, which may be applied to deal with the dilemmas of human civilizations.

WHY CIVILIZATIONS MATTER

On September 11, 2001, the world was shocked by the horrendous act of terror committed by a few religious fanatics against what is represented by the United States. Individuals on both sides of this incident may hold completely opposite views on the meaning of the action itself from their own vantage points, while there are other people around the globe who may not exactly share either view. Many have thus far been rather cautious in openly expressing their opinions, but debates have flared up. One of such discourses has to do with what is generally known as the clash of civilizations.

Our immediate interest does not lie in determining whether or not this incident in itself reflects a clash of civilizations. Rather, we are more inclined to look into the significance of the notion of civilizations at this particular moment of human history, when such an unimaginable act is actually undertaken by some individuals and groups inhabiting this planet Earth, under the broad umbrella of civilizations. When we do that, we cannot but ponder upon the very nature of civilizations that shape the life of humanity today.

Take, for instance, the technological tools and knowledge that were effectively utilized by those individuals in this particular act of violence.

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Technically speaking, that kind of dramatic behavior was entirely irrelevant one hundred years ago when the Wright brothers flew their very first airplane in 1903. Moreover, it would have been extremely difficult to organize and manage such a global team of activists with that much efficiency and accuracy, if we had not had the sort of technological tools, technical knowledge, and easy access to them, that are only available in this information age. These are actually part and parcel of the material element of contemporary civilization widely shared by a large bulk of the human population. Few, however, have raised the question of how technology was involved in the incident and where it all originated. However, this is clearly a matter of civilization, and especially its modern form that originated in the West.

When the question now shifts to who and why, or identity and motive, the issue of civilizational affiliation becomes somewhat controversial. The fact that the individual culprits were Muslim, and their purpose was allegedly to wage a war of revenge against the United States and what it symbolically represents, does not necessarily reflect the civilizational conflict that may or may not exist. Even if these individuals truly believed that they were Muslim martyrs involved in a form of religious war to condemn Christian adversaries, that kind of act based on religious conviction does not necessarily constitute the clash of civilizations as such. Nonetheless, one could hardly deny that some element of civilizations is involved in the scheme. This is about how people form their world-views, in this case under the influence of some form of fundamentalist teachings of a certain religion adhered to by true believers, or some individuals and groups of fanatical inclinations. From this tragic incident, though, we have come to realize that our world-views are apparently different from others. This, in fact, is a simple reflection of civilizational diversity.

Needless to say, world-view is only part of a civilization. However, humanity has been awakened to the realization that there is something terribly wrong with the way people have conceived the world we live in, and their behavior that is based on that conception. It happens to be only a part of the problems humans have been exposed to in the past century, and still are affected by in the new millennium. There are all sorts of other problems that are intricately interwoven with these, and this requires us to look at them from a much broader purview, that is, a civilizational perspective. These problems plaguing humanity today are not isolated ones; approaching them individually and separately would only result in further complications rather than fundamental solutions. It is about time we started to approach them by looking at the entire forest first, and then narrowing our focus to the individual trees. A search for solutions in the present context

requires an approach of civilizational dimension.

Moreover, the tremendous pace with which changes occur in our life today, in almost all spheres, has put us in a position where we now may need an entirely different paradigm. No doubt, technological innovations have led the way and humans have experienced severe lag in many other fields of social and cultural life. Due to this disarray, unnecessary confusions and even sufferings have ensued. The quest for new paradigms useful in ameliorating these difficulties requires an approach of civilizational scale.

When it comes to the question of civilization, the usual dichotomy is between the East and West. In reality, this division is misleading and may be ill conceived. And yet, it provides a convenient starting point. It is true that the worldwide influence of the Euro-American culture or civilization has been preponderant in the modern era, and we are used to calling it Western civilization. It is also a fact that the West has embarked on various forms of self-reflection on the misgivings of Western civilization. In this context, the input from the East may serve as a catalyst to the quest for new forms of civilization that may dialectically overcome the shortcomings of both those of the East and West, and may help create new civilizations by the process of synthesis of both of them.

It is in this spirit that I am presenting a frame of reference from the sources of Eastern civilization that may aid in understanding the predicaments of humanity, and suggest paths to solutions of the dilemmas of human civilization under the predominant influence of Western culture. I shall first furnish a scheme of analysis drawing upon the ancient thoughts of *Yin-Yang* dialectics, and then single out the most notable dilemmas of contemporary civilization in an effort to search for possible solutions.

THE WISDOM OF *YIN-YANG* DIALECTICS

The Essentials of Yin-Yang Dialectics

The notion of *Yin* and *Yang* constitutes an essential element of the ancient Chinese world-view. Originally, *Yin* stands for shade and *Yang*, for sunshine. *Yin* and *Yang* later came to be identified as representing opposite phenomena in the world, some very concrete and others more abstract, some natural and others social, and so forth. Typical examples include sun and moon, day and night, light and darkness, heat and cold, high and low, above and beneath, long and short, hard and soft, strong and weak, male and female, father and son, senior and junior, superior and subordinate, before and after, and so on. As such, it already implies a dialectical idea.¹

First, this ancient thought divides the world into two opposing categories. Dichotomy is the basic element of the dialectical world-view and the logic of dynamic change. This does not mean that everything in the world can and should be divided into two types or categories, and that they must all be opposite to each other. It is this dichotomous world-view and logic of dynamic process that matters here. By means of this frame of reference, it is attempted to understand and explain the nature and relationships of certain phenomena.

Second, the relativity of relationships between the two elements implies that one in a pair of phenomena may become *Yin* or *Yang* depending on the position in the relationship. For example, a father may be a *Yang* element in a relationship with his son. Relative to his father or mother, however, the father suddenly is put in the position of *Yin*. Or, a mother may be a *Yin* to her husband or senior in-laws, but her status with regard to her offspring attains a *Yang* standing. This can be extended almost indefinitely to any dyad in natural, mechanical, or social relationships. In other words, they work like the dummy variables of zero (0) and one (1) in the digital system. In short, *Yin-Yang* dialectic is a logical system for dynamic shifts of relationships in any phenomena under analysis.

Third, these two are conceived to be basically opposite to each other. In the Western dialectic, thesis and anti-thesis are in a contradictory relationship. In principle, one has to overcome the other in order to reach some synthesis, or *Aufheben*. However, in *Yin-Yang* dialectic, they are at once contradictory and complementary. To begin with, these apparently opposing elements cannot exist without the other. Sunshine or light does not have any meaning if there is no shade, whereas shade cannot come into being without sunshine or light. Again, there are exceptions.

According to the ancient Chinese theory of the Five Basic Elements (*ohang*, 五行) that compose things under heaven, namely, metal, water, wood, fire, and earth, each pair may either be in contradictory and mutually harmful relations or in complementary and mutually beneficial relations. For instance, water helps grow trees but quells fire: water and wood are in a beneficial relationship, while water and fire are in an adversarial position with respect to each other. *Yin* and *Yang* are in such a position that depending on the situation and context, each may be helpful or injurious to the other.

Fourth, *Yin* and *Yang* are conceived to be two kinds of vital energy or

¹ For the ideas summarized in this section on *Yin-Yang* dialectics, see Chan(1973) and Fung(1948). I have earlier adopted these ideas to my own theoretical discussion(Kim, 1991).

material force *Ki* (*chi* in Chinese, 氣) that helps create and change things in the universe by their dynamic interaction. If they interact as mutually useful forces to each other, as characterized above, this interaction causes the creation of things, whereas their interaction as mutually harmful forces causes change in things. In this process, *Yang* is understood as the positive energy or force that produces, while *Yin* is seen as the passive element that provides the ground for *Yang* to operate on for production. *Yang* is a force that starts things, and *Yin* completes things. Through their dynamic interaction, the world is created and altered.

Fifth, the nature of the dynamics of *Yin-Yang* interaction is described as the following: the movement of the universe yields *Yang*, but if the movement reaches the limit, it becomes stillness and the stillness yields *Yin*. When the stillness reaches the limit, it returns to the movement. When these two *Ki* forces meet, respond to and interact with each other, they create things and change them in such a way that things develop infinitely.

Although this basically represents an idea of cyclical change, it also entails a notion of development. As a matter of fact, the central concept of change in ancient Chinese thoughts, “*I*” (易) of the *I-Ching*, the Book of Changes, essentially means opening things so that one achieves goals. Here, “opening” signifies, according to later philosophical interpretations, realizing potentials of things under heaven. One finds an almost identical interpretation of the term “developer” in French, which means opening the closed and expressing their potentials. The only and crucial difference, however, is that in Asian thought, this realization of potential is to be achieved by humans through their relentless effort of self-discipline and diligent learning. In essence, morals are involved.

Principles of Change Derived from Yin-Yang Dialectics

From *Yin-Yang* dialectics summarized above, I have derived four basic principles of social change (Kim, 1991). I summarize them here rather than repeating them in detail.

A. The Principle of Limit and Return

The first is the principle of limit and return. As introduced above, in the process of *Yin-Yang* interaction, each reaches the limit only to make way to the other. According to the Book of Changes, “As the sun sets, the moon rises; as the moon goes, the sun comes; as the sun and the moon push each other, light is yielded. As cold winter passes, hot summer arrives; as hot summer is gone, cold winter comes; cold and heat push each other, seasons

come and go (Yi, 1980: 469).” Another passage from the Book of Changes states: “when things reach the ultimate end, they begin to change; once change occurs, things move ahead; and once things go forth, they last for long (Yi, 1980: 461).”

This cyclical notion of limit and change was aptly applied to the history of political regimes by a prominent Confucian scholar of the Choson Dynasty, Yi Yulgok, who suggested three stages of cyclical change of regimes. First, one creates a new state, second, one tries to preserve the established, and third, one renews through revolutions, if one fails to preserve it. To create a new state, one establishes new order and provides rules and institutions. In the stage of preservation, one tries to realize and transmit the established order and institutions. However, as the period of stable maintenance of the established is prolonged, old customs and values become obsolete so that they no longer are effectively able to tackle the accumulated problems. To ameliorate the situation, waves of renewal surge to eventually transform everything by means of revolutionary change. If the problems are satisfactorily resolved through this renewal, the newly established order may survive. Otherwise, another revolution may be required to create another new state (Kim, 1991; Kum, 1984).

It is interesting to note that similar ideas of limit were actually espoused by Sorokin in his famous principle of limit (Lauer, 1973). According to Sorokin, when one type of culture flourishes to reach its limit, it inherently breeds seeds of demise within itself. Thus follows the cyclical shift from one type of culture to another, and so forth.

In the interpretation of one of the hexagrams of the *I-Ching*, it is said, “there is nothing plane that does not tilt, and there is nothing that goes which does not return. Such is the Way of things on earth under heaven (Yi, 1980:112).” That everything returns to its original position or to the opposite pole is the principle of the Way (*tao*) of the *I*, change. As was indicated above, whenever *Yang* completes its function, its force or energy is exhausted and comes to the limit, then it returns to *Yin*, and *vice versa*.

Taoist thought also touches upon this principle of return in its ontological discourse. For example, in the Book of Tao, *Laotze*, says, “to return to one’s root is the law of movement of the Way (*tao*) ... The full blown blossoms and leaves of the tree (or things in the world) each return to their root (Kim, 1979: 115-6, 200-1).”

As is always the case with East Asian thoughts of ancient origin, they never fail to imply or indicate the moral ramifications of certain principles of cosmological order and change. The *I-Ching*, for instance, was initially conceived, designed, and utilized as a tool for divination. The ultimate sig-

nificance of such a practice, nevertheless, was not merely to foresee the future affairs of one's life, but to caution and discipline oneself to be morally prepared and to live in an ethically decent manner. Likewise, the principle of limit and return is intended for humans to behave cautiously lest they may unreasonably overdo or tilt excessively in one direction, for excess can bring disaster.

B. The Principle of Moderation or Equilibrium

The principle of "golden mean" or *Chungyong* (中庸) is exactly the answer to the problem of excess. This is derived from the principle of limit and return implied in *Yin-Yang* dialectics, which suggests that extremity can breed calamity. It follows that moderation helps you behave correctly, and in order to do that, you may want to keep equilibrium in your mind and action.

Chung literally means middle or median. According to the Book of Golden Mean, *Chungyong*, it refers to a state of not tilting to one side and a state of neither extreme wanting nor over-abundance. The state of mind before any emotional feelings of joy, anger, sorrow or pleasure are actually expressed outward is also meant to be the state of *Chung*. This principle is especially emphasized in Confucian teachings for the sake of self-discipline for those who aspire to be sages or men of virtue and wisdom (Yi and Chang, 1980: 203). Even *Laotze*, the Taoist sage, imparts that sages do not overdo anything, nor indulge in luxury, nor take extreme measures. If one knows how to be content, one does not have to face shame, and if one knows how to stop, one does not have to face danger (Kim, 1979: 169, 212).

This kind of moderation or cautiousness must come from a deep understanding of the principles of change of the universe, according to the Book of Changes. The following are some passages from the Book (Yi, 1980: 52, 469-70).

If one only knows when to advance but does not know when to retreat, if one only knows one can survive but does not know to prepare oneself for demise, and if one only knows how to gain but does not know one can lose, how can you call this a sage?

The sage does not forget danger when he is safe in his position, he does not forget ruin while he enjoys his survival, and he does not forget confusion of disorder when order prevails and the state is well run. This is the way to keep oneself stable and preserve the state.

Two modes of moderation may be identified. One is the ideal-typical *Chung* which orients the diversity of all forms of change to the legitimacy of goodness. The other is the situational *Chung* which secures the most appro-

priate method of adaptation in the given reality of the times. The former is called the righteous and correct *Chung* (*chongchung*, 正中), and the other, timely *Chung* (*shichung*, 時中). In other words, when one adheres to the principle of moderation and keeps equilibrium in one's mind, behavior, and social status, in accordance with the Way of heaven, this is the correct mean one follows. When one maintains one's moderate emotions, action, and social position appropriate to the current situation, this is the timely mean one practices (Kum, 1984: 87).

It should be noted at this point that even these two modes of *Chung* may be comprehended in the scheme of *Yin-Yang* dialectics. As Yi Yulgok suggested, there may be two approaches to social renewal, one more fundamental approach and the other a more realistic one. Depending on the circumstances, one may have to tackle the problems from a more basic stance adhering to principle, or from a more practical vantage point of realistic judgment. In either case, one must not forget to take into account the essential elements of the other approach or viewpoint. For a more fundamental problem, one may also have to look into the practical questions of the immediate present, while solutions for a down-to-earth problem may require more basic considerations of the issue in accordance with principle (Kum, 1984: 90).

Here we encounter the concept of adaptability. Adaptability in the theories of social change is closely related to the notion of equilibrium. When equilibrium of the system is disturbed, change occurs. Change induces the system to attempt to restore equilibrium, and this in turn is more feasible if the system has a greater capacity to adapt to the environment. Likewise, the idea of *Chung* in East Asian thoughts requires adaptability of the individual and society. This adaptive capacity or tendency is closely linked to the capacity to attain moral discipline in order to maintain equilibrium in the individual's mind and action. And, in general, adaptability requires flexibility.

C. The Principle of Flexibility or Adaptability

Let us remain with the issue of adaptability for a greater while. In general terms, either in society or in the case of individuals, once equilibrium is broken, change ensues. If something is slanted to one side, or either too much or too little, then change is imminent. Under such circumstances, adaptability is required in order to avoid disaster. This adaptability is represented as timeliness in Confucian teachings of *Chungyong*. In this connection, Yi Yulgok is quoted below (Cho, 1985).

Generally speaking, timeliness refers to saving the people by means of flexibility to amend and make laws at any time necessary. When Chongja was commenting on the I-Ching, he said that we study the Book in order to help grasp the trend of our times so that we may understand the meaning of our times. He also stated that to change and innovate at each opportune time is the most universal Way. Since laws are promulgated usually to meet the needs of the times, they may become out of date and out of context as times are changed.... All these were done by the sages of olden days not because they enjoyed change and innovation, but to meet the needs of the times.

So, when needed by the circumstances of the times, adaptability is required to make necessary change and innovation. The more flexible individual minds and societal structures are, the more likely they are to adapt to the changing environment. People with rigid consciousness and societies with stiff principles of organization and structural construct find it difficult to make necessary change and innovation when needed by the circumstantial changes.

No other classical text of East Asian thought expresses this emphasis on the importance of flexibility more symbolically and poetically than *Laotze*, when it says (Kim, 1989):

A live person is tender and weak, but a dead body is stiff and hard. Fresh plants and trees are soft and feeble, but they become hardened when dead. Therefore, the soft and weak represent life and the hard and strong represent death.

In reference to *Yin-Yang* dialectics, one could summarize these principles of change as follows: in an environment where the dynamism of *Yin-Yang* interaction constantly creates change, it would be most difficult to expect individuals and groups of hard-minded rigidity, adhering to stiff principles of social organization in an inflexible structural context, to seek and achieve necessary change and innovation, while maintaining the state of *Chung*. This state is not tilting toward one or the other extreme, neither wanting nor over-abundant in anything. It is in the same line of reasoning that I have espoused earlier that a society needs to become more flexible to achieve societal development (Kim, 1991).

THE DILEMMAS OF CIVILIZATION

Civilization is a product of epoch-making innovative change in the life of human beings in history. It is at once a process and a consequence of the emergence of a completely novel set of patterns and contents of human life

never imagined prior to its birth. Civilization only survives when it can make constant changes. Hundreds of large and small civilizations in human history have come and gone because they failed to make necessary change. Civilization, in this sense, therefore, is change itself, for it attains life and sustains itself by change alone. Since change is a process of yielding new things, a civilization that is unable to renew itself is doomed.

Human society as a vessel of civilization can survive and flourish only when it can make necessary adaptation to the changing environment and change itself. In this connection, we might ask the following fundamental questions about the capacity of a society to do this:

- 1) Does the society successfully survive by adapting effectively to the environment?
- 2) Does the society maintain a degree of communal solidarity and societal stability by integrating the differentiated parts which are not torn apart from one another through severe conflicts?
- 3) Does the society effectively make decisions concerning societal goal attainment and is it able to mobilize resources necessary to attain such goals?
- 4) Do the social institutions satisfy the needs of individual members to an adequate level and control their behavior so that serious deviance is properly prevented?

If the answer to these questions happens to be negative, then the society in question is in trouble and the desire to change is likely to be aroused. Now, faced with this need for change, how does a society embark on the task of making the necessary change? It is in this context that reflections on the nature of civilization itself may be required. Before we make any change, we must know what to change and how. One way of approaching this task is to reflect upon the dilemmas posed by the current civilizations and seek solutions to them.

Dilemmas are perceived here as dialectical issues, one end of the dilemma affecting the other in such a way that one could not reach a solution without touching both ends in an adequate fashion. The wisdom provided by the principles of change that is derived from *Yin-Yang* dialectics, especially that of *Chung* and flexibility, is required here. I shall now present and briefly discuss the most basic dilemmas posed by civilizations in the contemporary world, in the hope that this discourse sheds some useful light on the possible solutions we need in our effort to search for new paradigms of civilizational dimension.

Dilemmas Related to Man and Nature

Since human civilization emerged in the form of artificial alteration of the state of nature surrounding human beings, we might as well begin with this category of dilemmas juxtaposing man and nature. I am using the word "man" to denote humanity for the sake of convenience. This involves a ring of feedback linking man, nature, technology, city, nature, and man.

A. Man and Nature

Basically, civilization originated in the struggle of man with nature. By the technological innovation of agrarian cultivation, man created civilization. Agriculture already entailed human intervention with the natural order of the ecological system. Industrialization has paved a wide avenue for man to drastically alter nature by extensive use of resources from nature and by technological modification of and interference with nature. In the process, one-sided exploitation of nature has gone too far, consequently affecting the very quality of human life.

Humans now have to face the dilemma of when to limit technological intervention, and how much of nature could be conserved as nature. In order to improve the quality of material life for man, economic growth is imperative. For further economic growth, more resources are to be exploited and more alteration and exploitation is to be made with respect to nature. The ecological conditions so affected now have negative impacts on human life. To improve the ecological conditions, further technological innovations are needed, which in turn require more resources, and so on. The vicious circle has to be terminated at some point.

One way of tackling this dilemma is to suppress ever increasing human needs. While we generally are well aware of the difficulty of achieving this goal, one could still harbor the hope of reaching it by reinforcing the moral teachings of Eastern classical thoughts. This is not meant to suggest that Eastern classics are the only such source. It merely reflects the historical reality that the dominant civilization overwhelming human life today is basically Western in origin, and it might be said to have reached a sort of limit at this juncture in history. Thus, the East and West must meet in a dialectical encounter with open mind in the search for alternative civilizations.

B. Man and Technology

Technology was not only the very source of civilization, but also has

opened the door to almost infinite alternatives for man to explore and exploit the natural order. The irony is that it has also offered Pandora's box to humanity. It is now equipped with the power to destroy man and the planet Earth at any moment. The dilemma here is that man needs technology and benefits from it, but there must be some limit to its power. Technology, which is clearly an enormous invention of man, has attained a self-propelling tendency so that it is almost beyond human control to stop its incessant innovation.

Eventually, however, man is the creator and user of technology, which is only a tool for the improvement of human life. Man is to take the ultimate responsibility *vis-a-vis* technology, as to how much of it should be created and whatever use it may be put to. This again is related to the issue of how much human needs can be humanely adjusted.

C. Man and City

If technology is the material foundation of civilization, then the city is the social space of civilization. No city, no civilization. Both city and technology have affected nature and the natural ecology of human social life. Once again, the city is at once the hero and the villain of civilization. City life has offered man much affluence and culture, on one hand, and yet, on the other hand, it has also left man with so much social vice and ecological ills. Man now has to resolve this dilemma. The questions here are two-fold: how humans as citizens are to live in harmony with nature; and how we resolve the dialectical dilemma of the concentration and dispersion of population and resources, and that of centralization and decentralization of power and functions.

Dilemmas Surrounding Human Nature

One of the fundamental issues in the philosophical discourses of human civilizations has always been the subject of human nature. Human nature poses several dilemmas for a more reasonable life for human beings. As civilization has been increasingly affected by the materialistic and somewhat hedonistic mass culture, the dilemmas surrounding this issue become more urgent to resolve.

A. Desires versus Ideals

As a prominent characteristic of contemporary civilization, one may cite the tendency to stimulate human material and physical desires to such an extent that the lofty ideals espoused by so many brilliant minds seem to be

losing their luster before the rage of hedonistic cultures. To satisfactorily gratify all these needs requires enormous strides in the economic production of material amenities, which in turn puts tremendous pressure on technological innovations. These innovations then tend to further encroach on the natural ecology, and so on, exacerbating the vicious circle surrounding man's nature. Some measures are definitely needed to ameliorate the rising level of aspirations and to contain or at least adjust human needs. Moderation again is the key to the solution.

B. Body and Mind

In the case of humans, body and mind are not separate phenomena. Yet, bodily comfort and pleasure do not necessarily produce peace and happiness of mind, and *vice versa*. Since the imbalance of the currently dominant civilization places an overwhelming emphasis on the body, causing a variety of problems for human social life, restoration of some balance is in order.

C. Material versus Spirit

A civilization without a proper material basis cannot exist, but if the material aspect overwhelms the spiritual, then it is breeding seeds of demise in it. Likewise, the overblown spiritual dimension overshadowing the material could be a source of distortion. That is why the search for golden mean is desired.

D. Emotion versus Reason

The unbridled expression of emotions and the limitless pursuit of emotional ecstasy is another feature of the currently dominant civilization. One dimensionality is also detected in the extreme reification of reason in the almost blind belief in technological sophistication. Moderation often seems to be completely out of sight of human social-cultural life.

Dialectical Tension between Man and Society

Ever since humans started living in some form of collective, there has always been a degree of tension between man and society. Various dilemmas have been posed, and we shall summarize the major examples of these dilemmas.

A. Individual versus Collective

The first form of tension between man and society evolves around whether the individual or collective is to be accorded greater value and

importance in social life. The usual stereotype has that the group has been the central figure in Eastern traditions, whereas the weight given to the individual has been much heavier in the modern West, where the ideology of individualism has been systematically espoused and widely practiced, both in the capitalist economy and in the democratic polity.

In the process of modernization, however, certain extreme phenomena ensued both in the East and the West. In the Eastern experience, the sudden surge of modernization initiated and disseminated from the West has extensively encroached upon the various existing traditions of collectivism. This has left the collectivist orientation in disarray, not necessarily completely destroying it, on the one hand, and creating a monstrous form of individualism-by-default, on the other. This version of individualism is such that the centrality of the individual is overemphasized to yield self-centered, egoistic tendencies without solid cultural and institutional backing of ethically sound individualism-by-ideal (Levy, 1962). In Korea, for example, a new jargon has been coined to denote the combination of the old collectivism in the form of familism and this new type of individualism-by-default. It is called group-egoism and collective self-centeredness. This tendency is often expressed in various events of protest involving NIMBY (not-in-my-backyard) phenomena.

Individualism has also been somewhat distorted in the West in such a way that the problem of the atomization of human relations and the alienation of individuals has become rather common. The emphasis on the self and the individual has gone to the extreme, leaving the individual lonely and apathetic. An abnormal version of collectivism experimented with in the West took the form of totalitarian or authoritarian socialism, primarily in the Eastern bloc. This experiment, as we have witnessed, failed to lead the system to return to the modern tradition of individualism. It is here that a type of individualism-by-default crept into the social vacuum, once the iron wall of authoritarian collectivism crumbled.

These historical experiences remind us of the warnings sounded in the principles of dialectical change examined above to maintain moderation and avoid extremity and rigidity, for otherwise things would return to the other pole and further changes would be required. We are facing a new era when this age-old dilemma of individual *versus* group needs be resolved.

B. Freedom *versus* Order and Authority

The second form of tension is found in the dilemma of promoting individual freedom, and yet preserving social order and institutional authority. By nature, order and authority required in the social-institutional setting

restrict individual freedom. Extreme freedom, with no limit to the pursuit of one's own desires and needs, is not only impossible, but also inordinate in social life. However, neither is the totalitarian suppression of individual freedom permissible under any circumstances. The middle point or *Chungyong*, the golden mean, is needed.

C. Rights versus Responsibilities and Obligations

In the same line of reasoning, there needs to be a middle ground to balance the demand for and the pursuit of rights on the part of individuals and groups, with the willingness to assume responsibilities and fulfill obligations to others. So far in the history of human civilization, the need to protect and promote human rights has been much greater than that of stressing the obligations of responsible parties. Even today, there still is a long way to go to improve conditions of human rights around the globe. Nevertheless, the time may be ripe for humans to be more serious about doing their part in fulfilling obligations and responsibilities as members of the global village.

In this connection, it would be interesting to note that the InterAction Council, an organization of former heads of states around the world, has put out the Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities (1998), to commemorate the semi-centennial of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations (1948).

D. Gemeinschaft versus Gesellschaft

This apparently old scheme may need to be reconsidered in the contemporary context of great transformations. With the rapid evolution of what is known as cyberspace in this age of information-communication technology, there is already concern about the emerging cyber-community whose nature nobody really comprehends at the moment, and can hardly be predicted for the future. Individuation clearly is a trend that may or may not impinge on the communal nature of community life. Modern trends, as Ferdinand Toennies was concerned with, do show signs of the relative decline of the old *Gemeinschaft*-like community life, yielding to a more rampant rise of the *Gesellschaft*-like society of interest seeking. Some balance is definitely required to make human societies more livable.

E. Particularism versus Universalism

In a similar vein, human societies are facing the dilemma of retaining the particularistic element of human social relationships while attaining rationalization of social life governed by universalistic principles. Thus far, the modern West has moved in the general direction of rationalization and

achieved a degree of universalism. However, more recently, a form of reaction that has emerged in movements such as postmodernism challenges this rationality and universality of Western culture. In the East, the particularistic culture has tenaciously sustained itself to limit the universal principles that are needed for Eastern societies to make necessary adaptation to the tide of globalization dominated by the West. Here, too, one has to seek some middle ground.

Dilemmas Relevant to Culture

Focusing on the features of cultural life, the recent development of mass culture is slanted toward certain inclinations, and we need to seriously reconsider such developments. A few examples follow.

A. Vulgar Culture versus Refined Culture

Civilization and culture by definition imply cultivation, sophistication, and refinement. With the unprecedented development of mass media and information-communication technology, the quantity of cultural items disseminated throughout the world has skyrocketed. The question now is whether the quality of the content of cultural products is constantly improving in the direction of further refinement, so that they help upgrade human mind and quality of life for the people. The substance of the majority of prevailing cultural items tends to be overwhelmed by violence, obscenity, and other forms of vulgarity. One wonders if this trend is not affecting the spiritual life of humanity, eventually ruining human mind and spirit. Return to the other pole in this dilemma seems inevitable in order to restore some balance.

B. Pragmatic Culture versus Culture of Humanities

Prominent in the higher education programs, for instance, is an emphasis on technical fields, including physical and social engineering, often with an unwarranted disregard of humanities and other basic studies. Pragmatic interests overwhelm humanistic concerns. This tendency is pervasive in social and cultural life in general, waiting to be corrected to rehabilitate civilization with a sense of balance and moderation.

C. Culture of Letter versus Digital Culture

Due to the dramatic development of new media, the culture of visual images is fast replacing that of the printed letter. Many experts still claim that books and printed material will not totally disappear, despite the pre-

ponderance of digital culture. Nobody really can predict what would happen to coming generations who will definitely be more accustomed to the visual culture of a digital age than may be expected. Reaction may be formed, but some measures are needed to ameliorate this situation.

D. National Culture *versus* Global Culture

Thus far, as far as cultures are concerned, the rapid advance of globalization has at least yielded two opposing trends of centrifugal as well as centripetal development. At the moment, while national cultures are making every effort to tenaciously retain their diversity, the convergent force equalizing cultural contents seems to be preminent. Also, globalizing cultures are more likely to carry the vulgar element that causes desolation of the mind and spirit of man around the world.

There are, therefore, two dimensions to this dilemma. On the one hand, it deals with the maintenance of national cultures in the face of the surging wave of globalization. On the other hand, it deals with the problem of keeping cultures of the world from being indiscriminately affected by the vulgar cultures of Western origin. If the world has to be equalized, unity in diversity would be more desirable than the flat leveling of everything.

Dilemmas of the Triad: State, Market and Civil Society

As globalization has become part and parcel of modern life, the issue of democracy and capitalism for the future of mankind has evolved around the dilemmas posed between pairs of the triad: state, market, and civil society. This needs to be considered in the broader context of the world system.

A. Market *versus* Distribution

One of the thorny problems facing the surge of capitalism in the global scene is how to check the market force to enhance the chance of more equitable distribution. The dilemma of efficiency *versus* equity that has constantly been posed in the process of modern capitalist development is not an easy one to resolve. As indicated, the foiled Socialist experiment emphasizing distribution has left global capitalism in an arena where a real challenge of serious competition is not offered. Extensive restructuring of the economic and social systems on both the global and national levels has become necessary, and it has been realized in the process that distributive justice may not be easy to attain in this new situation. The problem of inequality generated by the free market is now arousing concern among many peoples and societies.

B. Market versus State

The dilemma between market and distribution is closely related to the tension between market and state. Provided that the market operates rationally in an orderly manner by itself, the less the state intervenes, the better. Since the market, however, is an imperfect process, it is necessary for the state to regulate it. The issue of inequality, for instance, has been handled by the state through various welfare programs, including social security, insurance, and other social safety nets. The burden created by these measures of the state sector has usually held back the normal and effective operation of market mechanisms. The Socialist experiment is an extreme case.

The linkage between the state and market may also be found in the corruption of the state bureaucracy and special favors gained by the corporate sector. This inevitably interferes with normal market operation and affects the economy negatively. Thus, like an old Korean saying, one had better keep proper distance from in-laws and lavatories. That is, the relationship between the market and the state may have to be appropriately set so that they should be neither too close nor too far from each other.

C. Market versus Civil Society

When Margaret Thatcher proclaimed that “[T]here is no such thing as society,” Lionel Jospin retorted by saying, “[Y]es to the market economy; no to the market society.” Even George Soros, who should know how the market operates, expressed concern about the deep penetration of unhampered markets into social life when he said, “the untrammelled intensification of laissez-faire capitalism and the spread of market values into all areas of life is endangering our open and democratic society. The main enemy of the open society, I believe, is no longer the communist but the capitalist threat (Soros, 1997: 45).”

One way of coping with this threat is for the state and civil society to mutually fight the penetration of market values and forces. If the state cannot perform this function, then civil society has to bear the burden of keeping itself intact. This challenge happens to be formidable.

Civil Society versus State

In the process of democratization, civil society has gradually been gaining its autonomy from the state, overcoming the despotic rule of authoritarian power. Still, however, the relative clout of civil society is limited *vis-a-vis* state control and arbitrary decisions restricting rights and impinging upon

its autonomy. From now on, though, the state can and should make use of whatever rich resources the voluntary sector of civil society may have in its pursuit of national goals, instead of attempting to control civil society. The voluntary sector, on the other hand, should strive to assume its share of societal responsibilities, to look after and care for the vulnerable elements of society while keeping a vigilant eye on the performance of the state and market. This balanced check and cooperation is needed in contemporary political life.

The Complex Matrix of World System - Market - State - Civil Society in the Age of Globalization

Recently, rampant globalization has strengthened the power of the World System of capitalism, boosting the relative position of the market, while weakening that of the state. The only seemingly viable sector at the moment seems to be civil society which, for example, has manifested its potential power by protesting against the global force represented by the WTO, NAFTA, APEC, ASEM, and the like. Such a move is only beginning, and its future is still uncertain.

In this connection, it might be useful to listen to an American political scientist's plea (Ehrenberg, 1999: 250).

Deepening inequality and gigantic concentrations of private power pose the most important danger to democracy and civil society alike. Political, economic, and social affairs are as mutually dependent today as they always have been — no matter what claims are made about the autonomous logic of different spheres. Extending democracy to the economy, the state, and civil society is the central challenge of contemporary life. As always, this requires comprehensive political activity and theory that must begin with the redistribution of wealth.

Thus, we must think in terms of the global context, the context of the World System. This indeed is a question of civilizational dimension. And we might want to open our minds to seek some wisdom from Eastern sources.

IN CLOSING

I fully realize that we have started from a grandiose purview of human civilization and probably have wound up with a shallow presentation of common dilemmas of contemporary life. As the old Eastern saying goes, "one starts as the head of a dragon only to finish up as the tail of a snake."

Thus, this type of cursory review of complex ideas and issues of grand scale does not do justice to the subject under discussion. It is only intended to draw the attention of those who may be interested in such issues, and to suggest to the world some alternative ways of looking at things and finding solutions to the problems identified.

Both *Yin-Yang* dialectics and the civilizational dilemmas require much more careful analysis and detailed explication. The very brief summary presented here only touches the surface and delves into a small portion of the entire logic and issues. My primary purpose is to reach the intellects and minds of those who may not be familiar with such ideas and views, especially those in the Western intellectual circles, so that further discourses may evolve. When the topic is civilization, it is imperative that every party involved opens their minds and listen to the others' voices. Genuinely open dialogue is what is really needed in this task. My wish is that this piece would provide some stimulant for further discussion and fruitful dialogue among civilizations of the world today, when the level of mistrust among different civilizations seems to be unusually increased.

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