

Esho Funi as a Philosophy of Coexistence:
An Analysis of ‘Dialogue for the 21st Century’ from the
Perspective of Comparative Civilizational Studies

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THIS article was originally a paper read at a symposium seeking to examine the root cause of the ‘global crisis of humanity’. I discuss the awareness shared by Dr Arnold Toynbee and Dr Daisaku Ikeda with respect to this global crisis and the solution they offer for a fundamental resolution in their dialogue (that appears in book form) ‘Dialogue for the 21st Century’. I examine the current global crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic and the military conflict caused by Russia’s military invasion of Ukraine from the standpoint of religion and civilization, and argue for a response based on the messages contained in ‘Dialogue for the 21st Century’ that point to future pathways for humanity. My argument centers on the importance of a kind of religion that enables the blossoming of the intrinsic power of human beings who constitute and shape civilization.

During the dialogue Dr Ikeda introduced the concept of 「依正不二」 = *esho funi* (translated in English as: *oneness of life and environment*) which resonated deeply with Dr Toynbee. Their dialogue then branched into a variety of topics around this concept. Connecting the theme of the symposium to ‘Dialogue for the 21st Century’, I will focus on this concept of *esho funi*.

Esho funi is a fairly well-known Buddhist terminology; however, in the dialogue between Dr Ikeda and Dr Toynbee, it was spoken in the basso continuo tone¹ by both parties, which I believe sets *esho funi* as the theme that underpins their dialogue. I believe this theme provides a common basis for all the topics discussed in their dialogue; it is similar to the concept of ‘oneness of self and other’ found in Indian philosophical thought, which signifies placing oneself in the shoes of the other (or seeing things from the viewpoint of where the other stands). Based on this premise, I seek to analyze this deeply interesting dialogue, which can be likened to a modern-day version of *Milindapañhā: The Questions of King Milinda*.

The text *Milindapañhā: The Questions of King Milinda*, has been

examined in great detail from the perspective of Indian and Buddhist philosophical thought by researchers such as Dr Tetsuro Watsuji, Dr Hajime Nakamura, Dr Sodo Mori, and Dr Senmyo Naniwa. In particular, my mentor Dr Nakamura's *The Philosophical Exchange between India and the West* (Final Edition *The Selected Works of Nakamura Hajime*, vol. 19, 1998) is a vibrant analysis of *The Questions of King Milinda* as an exemplary exchange between Indian and Greek philosophies, representing ideas from the East and West respectively. Dr Nakamura recognized the academic significance of *The Questions of King Milinda* and personally recommended it as an outstanding case study in the field of Comparative Thought Studies. He referred to the confluence of different ideas, cultures, societies — (I summarize this process as 'civilization') — and emphasized the importance of dialogue to minimize, or at best create a path for the gradual diminution of the various types of friction that emerge as a result of this confluence. This sacred text, *The Questions of King Milinda*, does not merely explore the path of compromise for coexistence, nor does it serve simply as a useful format for political dialogue. Rather, it is an exemplary battle of the intellect (of a non-violent kind) between King Milinda (Menandros), who was also a philosopher-king, and the doyen Nagasena, a Buddhist monk and a giant in the field of Indian philosophical thought. Their dialogue resonates with their wit and wisdom and showcases a passionate philosophical battle that gave birth to new ideas. Bearing in mind the loftiness of the personalities involved, the tension derived from this philosophical confrontation epitomizes the one-of-a-kind potential of humans to carry out philosophical thought-based dialogue.

The Keyword 「依正不二」 = *esho funi*

As an expert in Indian philosophical thought and comparative religion studies, the nature of my research offers me an integrated view of various disciplines and how they converge into the subject of comparative civilizational studies. The following is a brief discussion on the theme of the symposium from a comparative civilizational perspective:

With respect to the theme of the symposium that has 'Dialogue for the 21st Century' at its core, I refer to previous research done by Dr Goro Yoshizawa, who is an authority on Toynbee studies in Japan, and also serves as the second president of The Japan Society for the Comparative Study of Civilizations. While closely following Dr Yoshizawa's prior research, I endeavor to approach the theme from the standpoint of

my own area of knowledge and expertise.² I emphasize the shared understanding of Dr Ikeda and Dr Toynbee that it is essential to address the issue which lies at the very foundation of human psyche (deep psychology), i.e., the self-serving need for survival (greed), and how to appropriately tackle (overcome) the same. Through their dialogue, Dr Ikeda and Dr Toynbee reach the conclusion that correctly addressing this fundamental issue of ‘greed’ is a key factor for overcoming the crises faced by humanity. Hence, the existence of an ‘excellent religion’³ that provides the method (wisdom) to do so is absolutely necessary for humanity’s survival. I emphatically agree with their conclusion.

And what epitomizes this perspective is the Buddhist concept of *esho funi*, which Dr Ikeda proposes and which fortuitously resonates with Dr Toynbee. Dr Toynbee draws similarities between *esho funi* and the essentials of Hellenism, that once upon a time formed the basis of Western civilization, albeit it is now dismissed by the Western aka modern scientific civilization. In other words, Dr Toynbee notes that the common values of ‘tolerance’ and ‘coexistence’, prescribed by the Buddhist concept of *esho funi*, are also rooted in Greek philosophy, or in the teachings of Jesus Christ and Saint Francis. He stresses the importance of reviving and restructuring these values so as to integrate them into the current science-based civilization.⁴

Dr Toynbee also notes that the conflict generating value of ‘exclusivity’ and ‘intolerance’ is found in the exclusionary monotheism of the Judeo-Christian religion. He critiques this conflict generating value and expresses faith in the Eastern religions to rectify and overcome its spread.⁵ Dr Toynbee outlines how Western civilizations gave birth to a self-righteous and self-interested ideology such as that found in the Judeo-Christian religion, which has become the root cause of countless crises. He further expresses his thoughts on the need to overcome this selfish ideology. Therefore, I surmise that on a fundamental level Dr Toynbee shared the same awareness of the problem (facing humanity) as Dr Ikeda, who developed his ideas based on Buddhist philosophy. In addition, I maintain that because Dr Ikeda and Dr Toynbee’s dialogue identifies the root problem of Western civilizations it has been criticized and marginalized by those who show absolute faith in the so-called scientific civilization of modern Western Europe; for they believe in the infallibility of modern western scientific thought upheld by mainstream academia, and reject any and all criticism of the modern western scientific method.⁶

Dr Toynbee’s argument does not imply a total rejection of Judeo-Christianity. He only points to the characteristic of this religion that

needs to be rectified in order for it to be aligned with the contemporary (multicultural, pluralistic) global environment and civilizational structure. This extra-Western modern civilizational perspective of Dr Toynbee resonated with Dr Ikeda who makes a non-semitic religion such as Buddhism the basis of his thought. I believe this factor stands to advantage for their dialogue, particularly in the area of comparative civilizational studies.

‘Dialogue for the 21st Century’ contains lively exchanges on various topics. In this article, I conduct an analysis of the significance of the Ikeda-Toynbee dialogue from a comparative civilizational perspective with *esho funi* as the keyword. In the dialogue *esho funi* is presented as a philosophical approach that serves as a counterforce or a means to overcome the ideological affirmation of selfishness (self-interest) and greed (the need for survival, a basic instinct of the human species) which produce divisions and conflict. The philosophy of *esho funi* was proposed by Dr Ikeda and corroborated by Dr Toynbee not only as a philosophical idea that transcends conflicts and divisions but as a concept that functions as a tool for thought-construction that contributes to the shaping of civilization.

The Difference Between Historical Studies and Comparative Civilizational Studies

As I mentioned previously, Dr Toynbee and Dr Ikeda’s dialogue has received both praise and censure and the assessments are polarized to the two extremes. There have not been many neutral assessments of this dialogue till date. This polarization is not limited to ‘Dialogue for the 21st Century’, but also applies to the other achievements of Dr Toynbee and Dr Ikeda.

Having said that, I must add here that this is simply my personal observation and I have neither the time nor the ability to examine this issue more closely at present. Nevertheless, it can be said that those who level acrimonious criticisms at someone who is as celebrated as Dr Toynbee is in the field of civilizational studies and comparative civilizational studies, more often than not miss his point completely. One of the reasons is that the so-called historians follow an orthodox historically rigorous perspective. Their criticism of Dr Toynbee is not just from the standpoint of modern historiography, but from the standpoint of modern scientific historical hermeneutics. Dr Toynbee raised fundamental questions regarding modern scientific thought and developed his argument from a critical perspective that

contradicts modern Western (Christian) civilization, in particular the modern scientific civilization.⁷ No wonder critics found his arguments incompatible with their way of reasoning since they held something akin to blind faith in the universalism of the modern scientific way. They failed to appreciate, however, that Dr Toynbee argues on behalf of the original aim of the modern scientific path, i.e., the universal pursuit of human happiness, wherein he acknowledges science's achievements in the pursuit of material, spiritual, and social well-being. His perspective of what is needed to further that (human happiness) is driven by his multidisciplinary vision for the future.⁸

The proponents of civilizational studies and comparative civilizational studies (the former and the latter are, strictly speaking, different in some respects, but here I treat them in an integrated fashion as comparative civilizational studies) such as Dr Toynbee and others put forward a new framework. This framework of comparative civilizational studies extends beyond the structures of historiographical frameworks applied by Toynbee's critics and the proponents of modern scientism. Dr Masahiko Kamikawa, who stated that "Comparative Civilizational Studies is a future-oriented discipline", deserves a large part of the credit for introducing the basic concept of comparative civilizational studies in Japan.⁹ To paraphrase, modern historiography examines past events objectively and rigorously in order to clarify their substance whereas comparative civilizational studies inherits historiography's methods and achievements but does not stop there. By expanding the discipline to examine how events of the past unfold in the present, and to envision the future on that basis, we not only gain awareness of the continuity between the past and the present, but can capitalize on the knowledge of past events and present experiences in order to design a better future for humanity. Moreover, this knowledge is not just collective knowledge, but what one might refer to as the study of comprehensive knowledge or wisdom, that is, intuitive wisdom or simply intuition that transcends reason and knowledge.¹⁰

This opens up a new thematic dimension that examines the contradiction between science and religion. A closer examination is beyond the scope of this article but I will share a quote by Dr Ikeda that corroborates this point. Dr Ikeda writes: "Science has religion at its base, while religion also encompasses the scientific. Thus, both science and religion are uplifted in tandem leading to a further widening of humanity's understanding. I believe this to be the case." Dr Ikeda then proceeds to refer to Einstein's statement: "Science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind."¹¹ These quotes precisely clarify

the standpoint of comparative civilizational studies. And they express a fundamental understanding of modern civilization or rather modern scientific civilization. Or what can be best described as a modern scientific civilization typical of modern Western Christian civilization origin. Further, it may be said that Dr Ikeda's perspective (as expressed in these quotes) provides a possible prescription for the limitations of this type of civilization.¹² By raising this significant topic which I plan to investigate in the future, I hope to drive the present discussion to a deeper level.

On the Issue of Translation

I have, incidentally, not limited myself to an analysis of 'Dialogue for the 21st Century', but have made some considerations on the issue of linguistic expression when developing arguments from the standpoint of comparative civilization, particularly with regard to the changes in the meaning of important academic terms in the modern and post-modern eras in Japan. This is still a work in progress, and we are still not familiar with the characteristics and historical constraints of words (pronunciation, writing, etc.), despite the enormous role they play in our thought processes when we use words to interact with others or with ourselves. In particular, in the Japanese civilization which is a type of 'satellite-civilization' that omits creating its own knowledge and constructs knowledge by borrowing information from other civilizations and regions, there appears to be neglect or a lack of interest and inattention to the origins of language.¹³ In fact, I consider this point to be a major 'stumbling block', especially in the area of Japanese academic terminology. Dr Hajime Nakamura touches on this topic in his, 'The Translation of "Religion"'.¹⁴ Following in his footsteps, I have also examined some of the problems with words that have become common knowledge and are understood and used as a matter of course today.¹⁵ Many of these everyday words that we take for granted are actually translations or modern equivalents of the original terms.¹⁶ The notions pertaining to Buddhism were also established during this period of linguistic incongruity.

With this point about linguistic expression as the basis, I briefly examine the words 'civilization' and 'religion' which I believe lie at the heart of 'Dialogue for the 21st Century'. Additionally, I clarify some of the issues involved with their translation.

Now, what I describe here as 'translated words' are actually kanji compounds, which were originally imported but have since taken root

in Japanese civilization in one form or another. These are words that developed a definitive meaning based on how they were communicated during the pre-modern period. By examining the changes that occurred in the Japanese language in the modern and post-modern periods I was able to take note of the discontinuity that occurred with regard to the meanings of these words. A simple illustration is how these pre-modern kanji compounds came to represent meanings that are completely different from their original meaning under the influence of the modern Western civilization, even though they continue to be used in the same (kanji compound) form. Furthermore, the two meanings (of the pre-modern and modern period) are often used interchangeably. Some typical examples of such translated words are ‘religion’, ‘civilization’, ‘culture’, ‘science’, ‘constitution’, ‘rights’, and ‘society’. Similarly, conventionally unfamiliar or uncommon combinations of kanji compounds were considered as translated words, and Western-derived meanings were attributed to them. Thus, meanings at variance with the original intended meaning of the kanji compound were memorized for words such as ‘rational’, ‘metaphysical’, ‘philosophical’, ‘political’, ‘Buddhism’, ‘hospital’, ‘police’, and ‘politics’. This caused the original meaning of the translated word to become ambiguous as these words took on an independent meaning of their own.¹⁷

After this brief outline on the issue of translation of the words ‘civilization’ and ‘religion’, I return to the discussion on the main topic.

Firstly, I would like to comment on the use of the word ‘civilization’ in civilizational studies or comparative civilizational studies. The word is a typical transliteration, although it follows the semantic concepts that formulate the word itself. While the word ‘civilization’ currently bears significant importance in the world of academics, the combination of the Chinese characters used for civilization (*Bunmei* in Japanese) are: 文 (Bun) and 明 (mei); each character has a simple as well as a complex meaning. In this respect, I consider it to be a problematic translated word as it easily deviates from its original meaning, i.e., urbanization. Even in the case of Western countries, this word was formulated in the postmodern era. Moreover, it is utilized in the academic semantic system, therefore it should be viewed as a word whose meaning is evolving, rather than as a word of diverse meanings. Adding the word ‘studies’ to it, as in ‘civilization studies’, makes the meaning of the word ‘civilization’ ever more complex. However, as this point is beyond the scope of this discussion, I will leave it at that.¹⁸

On the Versatility of the Translated Word ‘Civilization’

If one were to try to trace the origin of the translated word ‘civilization’, it would begin by searching for the first person to invent this word. Quite likely, it is a product of the modern Western civilization which engages in intellectual activities that seek to systematically grasp human activities in terms of both time and space, which is also the existing trend. Westerners forcefully colonized almost all parts of the world, literally positioning themselves to be standing at the pinnacle of humanity, and the value system they have established has formed a unified mindset for understanding human society in a linear manner from the past to the present. This mindset is described by the word ‘civilization’, including the translated word for civilization. In addition, the term civilization was popularized by the Japanese Enlightenment thinkers such as Yukichi Fukuzawa. However, the translated word ‘civilization’ = ‘Bun’ (文) + ‘mei’ (明) on the other hand, was originally a term used to denote the era name during the reign of Emperor Go-Tsuchimikado (1469–87). This combination of Chinese characters used for the word civilization did not carry any ideological meaning.

In fact, in the first English dictionary to be ever published by a Japanese, titled ‘An English-Japanese Pronouncing Dictionary’ (commonly known as the Satsuma Dictionary), the word civilization was interpreted as: ‘good manners’ (*gyogi-tadashiki*), ‘enlightenment’ (*kaika suru*),¹⁹ and so on. This word ‘civilization’ later came to denote the translated word *Bunmei* (文明), around the time of the publication of the *Onkunshinbunjibiki* dictionary, wherein the following meaning was attributed to it: “Civilization is a term that signifies the courtesy and grace of humanity” (Jpn.: *Bunmei towa jindou no reigi tadashiku yuubi naru o iu*).²⁰ It is assumed that the Enlightenment perspective of Yukichi Fukuzawa’s book, *An Outline of the Theory of Civilization* (1875), played a major role in the formulation of this translated word.

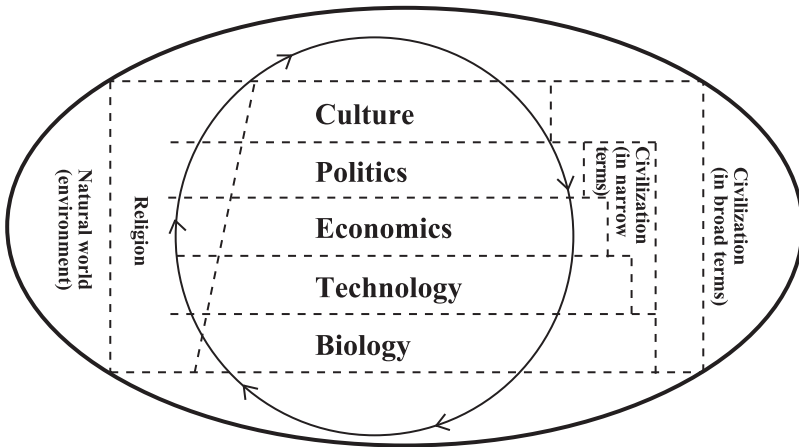
At this point, our understanding of the theory of civilization was yet to progress to the perspective advocated by contemporary comparative civilizational studies of having a bird’s eye view of the intellectual activity of mankind. On the other hand, there existed terms such as ‘Kaika’ (開化) (‘Enlightenment’) or ‘Bunmei Kaika’ (文明開化) (‘Westernization in Japan’) that conveyed the same meaning as civilization. These words were popular during the early years of the Meiji era.²¹ And although they were meant to describe the state of the world, Tetsujiro Inoue in his highly influential work *Tetsugakujii* (A Lexicon of Philosophy 1881), which had a major impact on

the formation of academics in modern Japan, translated the word civilization as ‘Kaika’ (開化) (‘Enlightenment’).²² While this is not a definitive contention, it appears that between the late Meiji to Taisho period the interpretation of these two authors was integrated into the meaning of the fixed translated word ‘Bunmei’ (文明) in order to describe civilization.

Through this brief overview of the formation of the relationship between ‘civilization’ and its translation (translated word) ‘Bunmei’ one can fathom the ambiguity that lies behind the current use of the word civilization. I will leave a detailed discussion of this topic for another occasion. As already indicated, the viewpoint that seeks to comprehensively understand the whole of human life and activities is a very modern one. This also bears relation to the establishment of comparative civilizational studies. This is because humans have come to understand the spatial unity of planet Earth to the point where it can be interpreted in terms of a single set of values. It is also because we can now perceive the long passage of time from the past to the present and can measure it in units of time, whereby we discover a sense of unity or at least a sense of continuity. Moreover, the development of thinking that enables us to understand these concepts comprehensively and systematically has made possible the ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach to our human endeavor, i.e., what we refer to as civilization. And it is not unreasonable to seek the impetus for the further development of civilization within the parameters of modern science, which was also the driver of the modern Western civilization.

Thus, the word ‘Bunmei’ emerged as a word for describing the systematic knowledge of human activity, divided into the elements of region, time, people, topography/ geographical features that constitute the highly distinctive domain of culture; and the area of social management such as politics and economics; and furthermore, can be categorized into the domain of technology and science wherein humans are viewed as living organisms. These domains, such as culture, politics, and economics have a universal image as described in Diagram 1 (Diag. 1 for short). And it is my view that each of these elements — represented as domains in the diagram — has a deep and strong connection with religion. However, depending on the type of domain, this link is either strong or weak. In Diag. 1, I illustrate this relationship.

Here, I have symbolically represented the different elements of civilization as if they had been cut into circular slices, much like how a CT scan image would capture the dynamics of the human body. I have further divided the elements of civilization into cultural, political,



Diag. 1 Structure of Civilization (Mandala), and it's fault map
 *Civilization is a three-dimensional structure, with elements from each domain influencing each other temporally and spatially.

economic, technological, and biological domains based on how deeply each element is involved with religion. Perhaps the use of the word 'system' is appropriate here, if we are to view each domain as a kind of autonomous, dynamic entity. Nonetheless, whether we use the word 'domain' or the word 'system' does not make any difference to our understanding.

The diagram shows that each civilization is unique due to the difference in the balance of the six elements (domains) mentioned in the previous paragraph. And even within the same civilization the proportion of these elements fluctuates in relation to the time/ era. This suggests that the transformation of civilization is dynamic.

Also, the special characteristic of this diagram is in the recognition that religion is not simply a part of the domain of culture but a fundamental element in the formation of civilization itself. This point may be discomfiting for the Japanese people. It also emphasizes the importance of the role of religion in civilization as stressed by both Dr Toynbee and Dr Ikeda in their dialogue.

The Confusion Generated by the Translated Word for Religion, i.e., 'Shuu-kyo' (宗教)

Whether one views it from the standpoint of world history, civilization studies, or even in reality, there is no other value system like religion

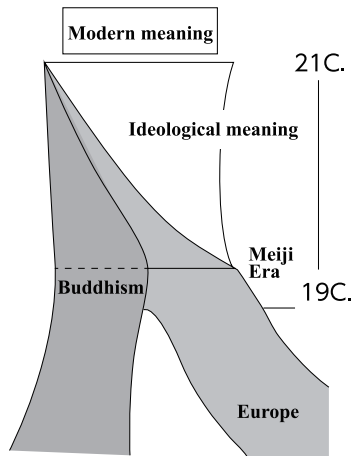
that systematically transmits a constant and uniform message over long periods of time; and one that has contributed to social unification. Needless to say, religion is symbolically represented in scriptures, ritual traditions and religious art; no other system that has existed over millenniums is believed in, respected, and passed down from generation to generation in the same manner as religion.

However, if one uses the word ‘Shuu-kyo’ (宗教) in Japan, people react to it defensively, or with disdain and indifference, for it is their understanding that such an attitude is the appropriate way to respond to religion.²³

Although I will not be discussing this point in depth here, it must be noted that even till this day people hold a negative image of religion, believing that “religion is dangerous” and “religion is dubious”, and that only “women and the illiterate or lower strata of society rely on religion”.²⁴ This negative interpretation of religion was popularized by the policies of the Meiji government. The Meiji government strategically formulated this view of religion in order to reconcile the modern spirit of freedom of religion with the nationalization of Shinto. In other words, they propagated Shinto as a belief system exclusive to Japan, not as a religion in the Western sense of the word, but as a moral code that all those born Japanese should follow.

Hence, there was a period in the early days of their movement when Shinto was also described as ‘virtue teaching’ or ‘moral teaching’. It was imperative for the new Meiji government to carry out the nationalization of Shinto in order to establish its legitimacy. So, to reconcile this nationalization of Shinto with the fundamental idea of religious freedom of modern Europe they came up with the strategy to promote Shinto as being out of the scope of religion, i.e., ‘not a religion’; thus the concept of freedom of religion would not be applicable to it. On the one hand, their policy was to make the Japanese people regard Shinto as the national moral code to be practiced from the primary education level. On the other hand, in return for tolerating Buddhism and Christianity, their policy was to inculcate indifference to and disdain for religion within Japanese society. And I believe this distorted religious outlook may be at the root of the events that led to the Greater East Asia War as well as the reason for the contemporary irreligiousness and decline of spirituality in Japan.

Diagram 2 (Diag. 2) is a simple representation of how the meaning of this Japanese translated word for religion ‘Shuu-kyo’, which is compound word made up of two kanji characters, acquired an exclusively Japanese nuance and diverged from its original meaning.²⁵



Diag. 2 The composition of the meaning of 'religion'.

A Diagram Illustrating the Formation of the Meaning of the Translated Word 'Shuu-kyo' (宗教)

Diag. 2 is a simple illustration of the formation of the semantic context of the kanji compound 'Shuu-kyo' as it is currently understood. The word 'Shuu-kyo' today carries the traditional meaning based on the Chinese characters; in fact, it is said to have originated as a compound word created in order to translate the Indian Buddhist scriptures and evolved independently as a Buddhist term alongside the development of Buddhist sects. In the Meiji era this word was used as a translated word for the Western word 'religion'. It was assigned a new meaning that had been formed in the context of the Western civilization, i.e., Christian civilization. However, even up to this point the divergence between the two meanings is not as large. This is because the word 'Shuu-kyo', traditionally used in China and Japan, is derived from the original meaning of religion: to express the sect's (Shuu) grasp of the essence of existence in words (kyo).²⁶ This Chinese/ Japanese meaning is fairly consistent with the Western notion of religion and there is not too great a gap in the meaning. That, of course, is the reason why 'Shuu-kyo' was used as the translated word for the Western word 'religion'.

However, in my view, a politically motivated ideological connotation was added to this translated word 'Shuu-kyo' in the post-Meiji era, signifying something that only 'women and the illiterate or lower strata of society rely on'. This created a derogatory image of the word 'Shuu-

kyo' which in my view is largely responsible for the negative view of religion prevalent in current Japanese society. Furthermore, I believe this has greatly undermined the Japanese people's understanding of Buddhism, Christianity, and other religions as well as the understanding of the civilization that was formed around them. Moreover, I hold this lack of understanding combined with deliberate opposition to open-minded perspectives on religion as the root cause behind the misunderstanding of and opposition to the religious views of both Dr Toynbee and Dr Ikeda.

In the case of Dr Toynbee, not only does there exist a discord between his perspective and the prevailing viewpoint of modern science and the public opinion regarding the separation of church and state, but there is also the hurdle of "Jewish religious congregations who are handicapped by their fixed tradition of exclusivity and intolerance". Such statements as, "This is one of the rewards of being a monotheistic religion,"²⁷ born from the modern Western Christian civilization are now being rebutted by some thinkers in the global academic sphere or by those with everyday common sense. This is due to the fact that the former's way of thinking is monotheistic, the shortcomings of which have been made explicit by Dr Toynbee. It is apparent that such a way of thinking requires correction.

In any event, in order to comprehend the dialogue between Dr Toynbee and Dr Ikeda, it is imperative that we recognize how the values offered by religion play a major role in shaping civilization. Perhaps this is an obvious point to make, but I believe that taking into account and being sensitive to the confusion of language caused due to 1) the large shifts in the meaning of words which is the obvious fate of a civilization like Japan that has borrowed its writing system and concepts from other countries and 2) the pseudo-Western civilization formed after the civilizational rupture of modern Japan, will make our approach to the research subject at hand that much more precise.

The Common Philosophical Thread Running through 'Dialogue for the 21st Century'

As stated earlier, the term *esho funi* that originated in Indian philosophical thought, or more appropriately in Buddhism, is emphasized by both Dr Toynbee and Dr Ikeda in their dialogue. Stemming from Buddhist thought, *esho funi* is that common spiritual thread of mutual understanding that ties Dr Toynbee and Dr Ikeda together. Dr Ikeda explains:

[According to Buddhism], it is only when human beings achieve harmony with their environment, i.e., nature, that they can live and enjoy life together, and that there is no other way to creatively achieve fulfillment in our life. The Buddhist principle of *esho funi* is based on this view of nature and makes it clear that human beings and nature are not in a mutually antagonistic relationship but are interdependent on each other.²⁸

He develops this argument further: “The living entity and its environment stand in an integral and indivisible relationship. In the pursuit of this all-encompassing relationship between the subject and the environment Buddhism discovered the driving force of life or life-force that pulsates throughout the universe.”²⁹ To this, Dr Toynbee replies, “I see. But even for Westerners who were educated in Greek and Latin and studied pre-Christian Greek and Roman literature this concept of *esho funi* is not an unfamiliar one.”³⁰

From this point forward their dialogue develops deeply and broadly around this term *esho funi*. Dr Toynbee has already expressed his criticism of modern Western civilization by this point in the dialogue, therefore it is understood that the polarization of opinion (approval or disapproval) on his views is related to the ideas presented here.

Now, as Dr Ikeda mentions, this term *esho funi* which originated in Chinese Buddhism conveys that human beings (humans) and nature (the environment) are separate from each other and yet at the same time are indivisible. This means that they are not separate, or in conflict or confrontation, or contradictory, but rather one, which has been the fundamental philosophy of Buddhism since the advent of the Buddha. Furthermore, it can be said to be an extension of Indian traditional thought. Specifically speaking, this philosophy is known in the Indian orthodox philosophy of Hinduism (or what was known as Brahmanism in the olden days; to be referred to as thus hereafter) as ‘thou art that’ (*tat tvam asi*).³¹ Or the idea of *pratītyasamutpāda* in Indian Buddhism which perceives subjects and objects to be interdependently linked to one another.³²

Although this idea is particularly evident in Indian philosophical thought, generally in a polytheistic society the value system represented in the form of diverse deities attests to the diversity or degree of freedom of values enjoyed by this type of society. This is radically different from the ideas and societies constructed on the basis of monotheistic and exclusivist religions such as Judeo-Christianity. These

two types of civilizations are fundamentally different. This is probably why Dr Toynbee referred to pre-Christian Greek and Roman civilizations that were more polytheistic in nature.

Even for Buddhism, which broke away from the Hindu religion and formed its own thought system, the foundation lies within the tradition of Indian philosophical thought. Rather, Buddhism denies the temporally and spatially consistent and unchanging existence of the Atman described in orthodox Hinduism, and instead preaches ‘no-self’ and ‘voidness’ — re-imagining the consistency of missing time frames to be revolving around the spatial axis of interdependence (mutual dependence). This is the so-called concept of dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*). The concept of dependent origination denies the absolute distinction between self and others and endeavors to grasp both sides of the equation. In short, Buddhism constructs a theory of contradictory identity (or self-identity of absolute contradiction according to the Nishida school of philosophy), in which each individual is independent but at the same time linked to each other. Thus, it can be said that the relationship between oneself and others which is explained by the concept of ‘dependent origination’ is central and unique to Buddhism’s philosophy. And the idea of ‘no-self’ or ‘voidness’ is actually the building block used to simplify the concept of dependent origination. The relationship between persons who share a common karma is strengthened by the compassion they experience for each other as a result of their awareness of their common karmic experience. This would then make it ideologically possible to achieve harmony and symbiotic coexistence between the individual self and others (unlike in Indian philosophical thought, in Japanese Buddhism the ‘other’ includes even nature which is considered non-sentient, i.e., devoid of emotion and ruthless).

According to me, the dialogue between Dr Ikeda and Dr Toynbee advocates the ‘symbiosis of self-interest and altruism’ as the basic idea for the construction of wisdom, which is essential for human peace and the solution for ‘the crisis facing humanity’. And I believe that *esho funi* is how their idea can be developed concretely. This is because Buddhism has spread throughout the world centered on this idea and in the process has realized nonviolent, peaceful societies everywhere.

While I cannot go deeply into a discussion on what is peace here, peace in Buddhism does not subscribe to the socially structured peace realized by force or compulsion or coercion as is witnessed in other civilizations and religions. Buddhism prescribes peace that is achieved only through nonviolence and without upsetting the social order, and

it also preaches the attainment of peace within the heart, i.e., a social peace built on mutual understanding where the self and others are positioned in an equal relationship standing on the same plane.³³ At any rate, by referring the civilizational diagram I have created, one can understand how religious ideals have played a great role in the development and spread across time and space of the components of civilization on which our real-world societies have been built. Thus, I conclude that religion shoulders a major responsibility in peacebuilding. In particular, ‘Dialogue for the 21st Century’ perceives Buddhism’s potential for realizing peace.

Religion from the Perspective of Dr Toynbee and Dr Ikeda

The expectations expressed by Dr Toynbee and Dr Ikeda in the potential of religion to shape civilization have already been stated in the preceding discussion. In particular, both men are united on the firm common understanding that Buddhism which is a non-self-righteous religion can contribute to the creation of a peaceful society in the 21st century.

By this point, it is hoped that the meaning of religion and civilization in its universal sense, going beyond the limitations of the Japanese people’s biased perception, is clear. And so, if we were to take a bird’s-eye view of Dr Toynbee and Dr Ikeda’s discussion on religion, both men’s perspective is as follows: “All great religions and philosophies teach that the true goal of every living being is to overcome and extinguish their innate self-centeredness, i.e., to renounce the self.”³⁴ “Religion involves the perception of this layer of the subconsciousness and further tries to seek the reality or truth at an even deeper level beyond the subconscious.”³⁵ “Religion and/ or those who possess the religious intuition bring great value to humanity as a whole; therefore, it is vital that everyone awakens to this intrinsic value.”³⁶ This is what Dr Toynbee refers to as an ‘excellent religion’ (*see* note 3), and it is my understanding that their dialogue entails a search for this possibility in Buddhism.

The special characteristic of Dr Toynbee’s philosophical thought is that he embraced both the merits and demerits of modern scientific civilization and tried to transcend both. He recognized that this would be the major challenge our generation will face in the wake of global crises; that the existence of ‘a great religion or philosophy’, especially an ‘excellent religion’, (*see* note 3) was essential to resolving the problem.³⁷ It is important to note here that Dr Toynbee’s theory of

civilization places great emphasis on religion. This is also the perception of Dr Ikeda, one of Japan's leading religious figures. I, too, believe that this perspective of religion lies at the heart of the dialogue between Dr Toynbee and Dr Ikeda. Naturally, their discussion on *esho funi* is also based on this premise.

Both men share the understanding that in order to overcome conflicts and disputes at various levels in human history it is necessary to respond to egocentrism (selfishness), which has its origin in the biological dimension of the desire for self-preservation, with altruism (love or compassion), a characteristic of the present-day human race.³⁸ Both men opine that the possibility of transcending these seemingly conflicting ideas lies essentially in the wisdom to perceive the reality that transcends ideas and positions that are viewed as contradictory and opposing to each other. This wisdom is sought not only within the theory that represents the Buddhist term *esho funi* proposed by Dr Ikeda, but also in its practical conduct that is based on moral values.³⁹

This is because both men believe that the dialogue is not limited merely to the ideological realm, i.e., the conceptual level, but that its purpose is to provide intellectual guidance for the crisis that humanity is facing — something that I expressed figuratively as a knowledge map. Their dialogue does not lean toward mere abstract theory but rather discusses the practical behaviors or actions that can be applied in reality. Through activities such as conducting this dialogue they are taking concrete action toward that end.

The Philosophy Underpinning *esho funi*

In 'Dialogue for the 21st Century', Dr Toynbee and Dr Ikeda discuss that the problems facing humankind are reflected in the problems between individuals, between individuals and societies, and between individuals and nations caused due to the limitation of modern Western civilization which is based on a form of cognition that sees societies and nations as entities in conflict with each other. Dr Toynbee identifies this problem from the perspective of comparative civilizational studies, and advocates its rectification through the application of Eastern knowledge and tradition, especially Buddhism. In this, he strongly resonates with Dr Ikeda's perspective.

In other words, Dr Toynbee and Dr Ikeda share the understanding that behind the problems facing modern Western civilization, especially modern scientific civilization, lies a self-centered mindset of Judeo-Christian origin, and that Buddhist or rather Mahayana Buddhist thought

as symbolized by the term of *esho funi* is the guide for correcting this problematic mindset.⁴⁰

Although this dialogue took place half a century ago in the 1970s, the essential nature of the issue remains the same and is relevant even today. Especially now — as we are witnessing the misery caused by Russian President Vladimir Putin’s unreasonable military aggression against Ukraine — we must share a renewed sense of impending crisis for both sides and learn from Dr Toynbee and Dr Ikeda’s dialogue on how to resolve this crisis through the use of communication and wisdom rather than confrontation. In this sense, ‘Dialogue for the 21st Century’ can be viewed as a serious discussion from a comparative civilizational perspective that provides a knowledge map of solutions for this type of crisis.

The two men discuss many diverse topics; however, the basic or underlying problem they address — the common problem identified by both Dr Toynbee and Dr Ikeda — is the self-centeredness (egocentrism) that lies at the heart of the problems facing our modern civilization. Their dialogue points to the fact that overcoming this obstacle is essential to the construction of a peaceful form of human civilization in the 21st century.⁴¹ Dr Toynbee assumes that human beings’ ‘self-centeredness’ originates from the biological need for survival innate to living organisms, yet simultaneously indicates that this self-serving or self-centered thought process of human beings has shaped modern Western thought and has engendered a self-centered kind of civilization. Moreover, Dr Toynbee points out that the root of the problem lies in the Semitic and self-righteous way of thinking. He believes that in order to correct and overcome this way of thinking, a philosophy that gives rise to the possibility of mutual understanding is needed.

In other words, it is mutual distrust at the individual level that leads to conflict and strife, which in turn leads to fear, and ultimately this becomes the root cause for escalation into large-scale conflict or catastrophic warfare. This is what the Buddha taught in a nutshell; however, this kind of analysis and comprehensive and deep understanding of the human condition is most lacking in modern Western civilization. Both Dr Toynbee and Dr Ikeda believe that if this understanding (presented by Buddhism) can be fully developed and integrated with modern Western civilization, especially modern scientific civilization, it can provide a knowledge map for solving various problems that confront it and the advantages of modern scientific civilization can be used for value creation.

In Conclusion

‘Dialogue for the 21st Century’, which took place almost half a century ago, has a depth of awareness of issues and presents a clear argument even for modern readers. But has its meaning truly been understood? Have we fully utilized the knowledge that was provided as a blueprint for our future?

I believe that as of now we lack a comprehensive intellectual receptacle to fully understand ‘Dialogue for the 21st Century’. However, humanity now faces serious problems such as global environmental degradation, depletion of finite resources, food supply problems, and pandemics that must be addressed by us collectively. To solve such problems, it is indispensable for humanity to change the traditional individualism, self-centeredness, exceptionalism, and self-aggrandizement mindset and adopt a common super-individualistic or hyper-individualistic and holistic perspective. Viewed from this perspective, ‘Dialogue for the 21st Century’ has deep contemporary significance. In addition, it presents the type of comprehensive thinking that has a great deal in common with future-oriented comparative civilizational studies.

Notes

- ¹ The basso continuo is a low tone (or note) musical part in Baroque music that provides the harmonic structure to the music by delivering the bassline and chord progression. This low tone is also used to underline or underpin one’s point in a speech.
- ² For more details refer ‘Purpose of this Symposium’ (<https://www.totetu.org/about/about-us/gakujutsu-taikai/2021.html>) as viewed on June 30, 2022.
- ³ Translator’s note: Toynbee uses the expression ‘higher religion’ in his book, *A Study of History*, Oxford University Press, vols. 1–3, 1934, vols. 4–6, 1939, vols. 7–10, 1954, vols. 1–12, 1961. A ‘higher religion’ according to Toynbee serves to connect the human soul with the spiritual reality of the universe: “[T]heir purpose is to enable men to find a direct personal relation with the transcendent reality in and behind and beyond the Universe, though so far they have fallen short of their spiritual aspirations.” (*A Study*, vol. 7)
- ⁴ Daisaku Ikeda and Arnold J. Toynbee, *Nijuisseiki eno taiwa*, vol. 1 二十一世紀への対話(上) (Dialogue for the 21st Century) (Tokyo: Seikyo Shimbun, 2002), 70 onward. All references to their dialogue here are from this book and direct quotations have been translated from Japanese by the translator.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, 80–81.
- ⁶ On this point, refer to Goro Yoshizawa 吉澤五郎, *Toinbi tonno taiwa — Gendai eno chosen, kibo no michi* トインビーとの対話——現代への挑戦・希望の道 (Dialogue with Toynbee: A Challenge for the Current Times, a Path of Hope)

(Tokyo: Daisan Bunmeisha, 2011); Masaru Sato 佐藤優, *Chikyujidai no tetsugaku — Ikeda-Toinbi taidan o yomitoku* 地球時代の哲学——池田・トインビー対談を読み解く (A Philosophy for the Global Era: Deciphering the Ikeda-Toynbee Dialogue) (Tokyo: Ushio Shuppan, 2016).

⁷ Ikeda and Toynbee, *Nijuisseiki eno taiwa*, vol. 1, 49; 51.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 48 onward. This viewpoint is the fundamental stance of comparative civilizational studies, and the criticism of Dr Toynbee by historians stems from a fundamental difference in academic leaning on this topic. The same is true in case of the criticism levelled at Dr Ikeda.

⁹ Refer Masahiko Kamikawa 神川正彦, *Hikaku bunmei no hoho — Atarashii chi no paradaimu o motomete* 比較文明の方法——新しい知のパラダイムを求めて (The Method of Comparative Civilizational Studies: Searching for a New Paradigm of Knowledge) (Tokyo: Tosui Shobo, 1995).

¹⁰ Ikeda and Toynbee, *Nijuisseiki eno taiwa*, vol. 1, 61–63.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 67.

¹² For more details on this section, refer to Shuntaro Ito 伊東俊太郎, ‘Hikaku bunmei 比較文明’ (Comparative Civilization), in *Ito Shuntaro chosaku shu*, vol. 7 *Hikaku bunmeiron I* 伊東俊太郎著作集 第七卷 比較文明論 I (The Collected Works of Shuntaro Ito, vol. 7 Comparative Civilization Theory I) (Tokyo: Reitaku University Press, 2008).

¹³ For this point refer to my work titled, ‘Rekishi teki joho toshite no Shotoku Taishi — Nihon teki kanyo shiso no kisoteki kenkyu 歴史的情報としての聖徳太子——日本的寛容思想の基礎的研究(1)’ (The Historical Shotoku Taishi: Fundamentals of the Japanese Philosophy of Tolerance [1]), in *Kokusai johogaku kenkyu, sokango* 国際情報学研究 創刊号(International Information Studies Research, First Issue) (Tokyo: Chuo Daigaku Kokusai Joho Gakubu, 2021), 153–66.

¹⁴ Hajime Nakamura 中村元, “‘Shukyo’ to iu yakugo 「宗教」という訳語’ (‘Religion’ as a Translated Term), *Nihon gakushiin kiyō* 日本學士院紀要 (Bulletin of Nihon Gakushiin) 46, no. 2 (1992): 39–146.

¹⁵ Refer to my work, *Bukkyo to yoga* 仏教とヨーガ (Buddhism and Yoga) (Tokyo: Tokyo Shoseki, 2004).

¹⁶ The word ‘Buddhism’ was once used to refer to the Buddha’s teachings, and is fundamentally different from the applied connotation of religious doctrine, cult, scriptures, and rituals. This point seems to have gone unnoticed; indeed, historical review on this matter requires careful attention. In *Ningen kakumei* (Human Revolution), vol. 8, ‘Gakuto 学徒’, (Seikyo Shimbun, 2013, pp. 202–04), Mr Josei Toda explains the difference between Buddhism and the Buddha Dharma, “You see, what they teach there is London Buddhism.... This is the Buddhist view of Buddhist scholars primarily based in the UK.” However, this point is missed even by current Buddhist scholars who prescribe to this London perspective of Buddhism. I iterate these perspectives, but also use a modern perspective to examine Japanese civilization derived from the new discipline of comparative civilizational studies. Eiichi Tsutaki, a commissioned researcher at the Institute of Oriental Philosophy, provided the information for this section.

¹⁷ For details, see Masaaki Sogo 惣郷正明 and Yoshifumi Hida 飛田良文, eds., *Meiji no kotoba jiten* 明治のことは辞典 (The Dictionary of Meiji Era Vocabulary) (Tokyo: Tokyodo Shuppansha, 1998).

¹⁸ In general, comparative civilizational studies can be applied in two ways: one

- where concepts and methodologies are utilized to understand human history in a new way, and the other where the academic conceptualization of what comparative civilizational studies is all about is examined.
- ¹⁹ Shinkichi Takahashi 高橋新吉, Kenkichi Maeda 前田献吉, and Masana Maeda 前田正名, eds., *Wayaku ei jisho* 和譯英辭書 (An English-Japanese Pronouncing Dictionary) (Tokyo: American Presbyterian Mission Press, 1869), 94.
- ²⁰ See ‘Bunbu’ section of Otohiko Hagiwara 萩原乙彦, ed., *Onkunshinbunjibiki* 音訓新聞字引 (Index of Kanji by their Chinese and Japanese Pronunciations) (Tokyo: Kobundo, 1876).
- ²¹ Sogo and Hida, eds., *Meiji no kotoba jiten*, 520–21.
- ²² Tetsujiro Inoue 井上哲次郎 ed., *Tetsugakujii* 哲學字彙 (Lexicon of Philosophy) (Tokyo: Toyokan, 1881), 19.
- ²³ In particular, it is often stated with pride that “the Japanese are not religious”. On the other hand, however, they are extremely enthusiastic about religious rituals such as visiting graves and paying homage on New Year’s Day. In other words, as various public opinion polls indicate, it is the word ‘religion’ that evades the Japanese, and there is a large gap between their understanding of the word ‘religion’ and of individual religious acts. As they understand very little about it, hence, their understanding of religion does not deepen.
- ²⁴ Yasutsugu Shigeno 重野安釋, *Kyouiku chokuyu engi* 教育勅諭衍義 (Amplifications to the Rescript on Education) (Tokyo: Kobayashi Kiuemon, 1987).
- ²⁵ Here, the Chinese character Shuu (宗) means the ‘essence of existence’, which was understood as something that cannot be expressed in words. Hence, Kyo (教) which means ‘teaching’ or ‘expression in words’ is added to form the compound Shuu-Kyo (宗教), i.e., religion = essence of existence expressed in words.
- ²⁶ For details see my work, *Iyashi to shizume to nihon no shukyo* 癒しと鎮めと日本の宗教 (Healing, Calming and Japanese Religion) (Tokyo: Hokuju Shuppan, 2009). In addition, see Yoshio Yasumaru 安丸良夫 and Masato Miyachi 宮地正人, *Nihon kindai shiso taikei: Shukyo to kokka* 日本近代思想大系 宗教と国家 (The Compendium of Modern Japanese Thought: Religion and the State) (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1988).
- ²⁷ Ikeda and Toynbee, *Nijuisseiki eno taiwa*, vol. 1, 80.
- ²⁸ Ibid., 70.
- ²⁹ Ibid., 71.
- ³⁰ Ibid.
- ³¹ Refers to the relationship between the individual and the absolute.
- ³² Regarding this point, refer to my work, *Indo shukyo koboshi* インド宗教興亡史 (A History of the Rise and Fall of Indian Religions) (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobo, 2022). For more details see Hajime Nakamura 中村元, ‘Upanishaddo no shiso ウパニシャッドの思想’ (The Philosophy of the Upanishad), in *Ketteiban Nakamura Hajime senshu*, vol. 9 決定版 中村元選集 第九卷 (The Collected Works of Nakamura Hajime Final Edition, vol. 9) (Tokyo: Shunjusha Publishing Company, 1990). However, please note that unlike Dr Nakamura I am not discussing Indian philosophical thought exclusively; rather I present a bird’s eye view of both Indian and Buddhist thought from the perspective of comparative civilization. Thus, there would be some disparities between Dr Nakamura’s understanding of each area and mine. However, it is precisely because a breakthrough in the construction of new thought has been made, I propose that the true meaning of ‘Dialogue for

the 21st Century' should also be considered in this context.

³³ About the differences in the conceptual understanding of what is peace, refer to my work titled, 'Bonten kanjo shiso to shinbutsu shugo — Bukkyo no heiwa shiso o sasaerumono 梵天勧請思想と神仏習合——仏教の平和思想を支えるもの' (The concept of Brahma and the Synthesis of Shinto and Buddhism: The Structure Supporting Buddhism's Peace Philosophy), in *Ajiateki yuwa kyosei shiso no kanosei* アジア的融和共生思想の可能性 (The Potentiality of the Asian Concepts of Harmony and Symbiosis) (Tokyo: Chuo University Press, 2019), 1–70.

³⁴ Ikeda and Toynbee, *Nijuisseiki eno taiwa*, vol. 1, 38.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 64.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 68.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 38–40.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 37–40.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 70–80.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 80–81.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 37–41; 89.

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