

# The 'Clash of Civilizations' Faces Evidence-based Perusal

Written by Takashi Inoguchi

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TAKASHI INOBUCHI, FEB 19 2013

### Introduction

The late Professor Samuel Huntington was a world-renowned great scholar of *rara avis*. He is greatly missed since his premature passing away. He was full of often unorthodox ideas and his writings exuded from passions about the United States and its missions. In this essay I introduce Huntington's clash of civilizations thesis in the post-Cold War context of "one hundred schools of thought" blossoming across the globe. Then I situate his clash of civilizations thesis within his own intellectual contour of alarming and alerting fellow Americans about what he believed were the weaknesses and vulnerabilities of the United States as it confronted the world with its own devout missions. Thirdly, I carry out an evidence-based analysis of his thesis. This is an important exercise because Huntington was not only a great scholar but also an irresistibly seductive writer.

### One Hundred Schools of Thought Blossom after the Cold War

The end of the Cold War saw the "one hundred schools of thought" literally blossom. One can recall all the prophecies like the end of history (Fukuyama, 1992), the imminent great crisis (Mearsheimer, 1990), U.S. primacy (Krauthammer, 1990/91), and the clash of civilizations (Huntington, 1997). I have joined the one hundred schools movement by proposing the scheme of the tripartization of global politics: Westphalian, Philadelphian, and anti-Utopian (Inoguchi, 1999, 2002, 2009). By tripartization I mean that the world would be driven largely by three distinctive principles with varying mixes: Westphalian, Philadelphian, and anti-Utopian. By Westphalian, I mean sovereign state-centered perspective. By Philadelphian, I mean functionally formed global regimes. By anti-Utopian, I mean the prevalence of anarchical spirits and emotions. Instead of arguing that one dominant principle prevails in global politics as many of the prophets in the one hundred schools movement do, I argue that three distinctive driving forces interact together depending on history, geography, and economics.

The three principles may look to some like Robert Cooper's (2000) tripartite geopolitics, in which he argues that global politics is governed by three distinctive regions: post-modern, modern and pre-modern. By post-modern he means Western Europe and other trilateral countries; by modern he means all the newly independent countries with state sovereignty kept as a flagship; by pre-modern he means all the countries that do not know Westphalian norms and institutions. Cooper's tripartite characterization of global politics is tied to geography and the colonialist legacy. Inoguchi (1999) differs from Cooper (2000), in that the former argues that the three governing principles of global politics coexist even in one society with varying mixes. Cooper's work (2000) is also broadly similar to Ronald Inglehart's work (1977, 1990, 1997; Inglehart and Welzel, 2005) in that rising incomes sparks a transition from materialism to post-materialism. Inoguchi (1999) juxtaposes three frameworks—Westphalian, Philadelphian, and anti-Utopian—with their economic, political, and cultural foundations and principal authors specified. Principal authors of the Westphalian framework are Henry Kissinger (2000), Alexander Gerschenkron (1962), and Benedict Anderson (1991). Principal authors of the Philadelphian framework are Francis Fukuyama (1992), Robert Reich (1991), and Benjamin Barber (1996). Principal authors of the anti-Utopian framework are Samuel Huntington (1997), David Landes (1998), and Robert Kaplan (2000). Note that Huntington belongs to what I call the anti-Utopian school of thought along with another Harvard professor and a freelance writer. I argue that varying mixes of the three

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frameworks depend on temporal and spatial contexts.

## Clash of Civilizations Thesis in Huntington's Intellectual Contour

Huntington was articulate, astute, and agile in identifying what he believes to be the key weak points or vulnerability of the United States in world politics. In 1957 when the United States faced the Soviet challenge of Sputnik, he saw the vulnerability of the United States vis-à-vis the Soviet Union in civil-military relations (Huntington, 1957). In 1967 Huntington saw that the United States misunderstood the development of emerging countries, most notably in southern Vietnam, in that progress in economic development leads to political development, that is, democratization (Huntington, 1968). His argument is that political institutionalization is critical in enabling many emerging countries to leap forward to political development. In 1981 he saw the often-overlooked strength of the United States amid the Iranian crisis limited by the burdens carried over from the post-Vietnam and post-oil crises (Huntington, 1980). In 1996 he saw the clash of civilizations as a time-defining force, from which he saw one of the U.S. weaknesses (Huntington, 1996). In 2004 he saw the increase in the non-English speaking population of the United States (especially among Latinos) as a key national threat because the English language is central to U.S. identity formation, including the socialization processes inculcated in family, church, and school through the use of English (Huntington, 2004). He was immensely versatile. He was impressively eloquent in writing but not as much in lectures. Above all, Huntington was an intense patriot. He wanted to devote himself to country through these and other writings, but not through working in the government. He knew that he was at his best in writing about government, not acting in government. In sounding the alarm and alerting others about the impending clash of civilizations after the Cold War, Huntington wanted the United States to be well prepared for what he saw as the tectonic change unfolding in global politics. Overall, he was correct in identifying some of the new driving forces such as China, Islam, and the increasing importance of religion in politics. But on three points the basis of his thesis is wrong. It is to these three points that I turn now.

## Evidenced-Based Analysis of Huntington's Thesis

With the broad characterization of post-Cold War global politics and with the place of the clash of civilization thesis in Huntington's intellectual contour briefly summarized in the two previous sections, I now turn to the evidence-based scrutiny of Huntington's thesis and its foundations to see whether his thesis is of lasting value or not. With the help of the AsiaBarometer (Inoguchi, 2012; Inoguchi and Fujii, 2012), I argue that the clash of civilizations thesis suffers from three key weaknesses: (1) the assumption of core states in major civilizations in Asia, (2) the underestimation of the deepening permeation of globalization, and (3) the fascination combined with fixation with the specific geographical areas adjacent to Western Europe.

### *Assumption of Core States in Major Civilizations*

Huntington assumes that core states exist in eight major civilizations that act as a sort of regional leader. Asia (i.e., East Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia, and Central Asia) presents anomalous situations for this assumption (Collet and Inoguchi, 2012). It has produced five major civilizational-defining belief and value sets: Buddhism, Confucianism, Islam, Christianity, and Hinduism. Buddhism is concentrated in Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam, China, Korea, and Japan. But the core state is difficult to identify. China is said to be the core state of Confucianism. But calling China Confucianism's core state is somewhat difficult. Those countries adjacent to China, sometimes called the Confucian countries, that is, Vietnam, South and North Korea, and Japan, do not necessarily have positive responses when the following question specifies China, "To what extent do you think the following country has a good or bad impact on your country?" (Collet and Inoguchi, 2012). Christianity does not have a core state in Asia. Neither the Philippines nor South Korea can be said to be a core state. Hinduism has a core state: India. In this analysis, the most serious deficit is that Islam does not have a core state. Demographically, Indonesia has the largest Muslim population in the world, followed in the Asian region by India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Malaysia, Brunei, and the Maldives. Yet it is difficult to identify Indonesia as a core state. Also, Pakistan and Iran do not qualify as a core state based on the responses of the AsiaBarometer to the question, "To what extent do you think the following country has a good or bad impact on your country?" On the whole it is very difficult to assume that each civilizational entity, if it is to exist, has a core state with followers of a similar walk of life, most notably of a similar religious creed

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and habit, as far as the entire Asian responses to the above noted question. This is a very critical point because in Huntington's view the threat of Islam and the rise of China pose structural dangers to the security of the United States and of the West. Neither of the two civilizational entities meets the structural components Huntington assumes, that is, a core state with its followers presumably adjacent to it.

## *Underestimation of Permeation of Globalization*

Huntington assumes that the resurrection of religion even transcends borders and sometimes runs wild in the extreme version of Islam fundamentalism. Why I categorize him as an anti-utopianist is that he appears to believe that the transborder and transnational forces of religion make the world chaotic and anarchic. Outside of his conception of Islam and China, the basic framework of Westphalian state-centric sovereignty remains robustly retained. In assuming this, Huntington tends to underestimate the deepening and fragmenting tide of globalization that permeates each and every part of the world (Inoguchi, 1999). It is as if he assumed that the strong sovereign state, further consolidated by the resurrected religious forces, asserts the civilizational entities such as a greater cultural China and a religiously united Islam. China has no followers (McGregor, 2012). Islam is fragmented between Sunni and Shia, while globally Islam has no center (Lewis, 2010; Esposito, 2009). This is not to say that Huntington is incorrect in foreseeing the rise of China and of Islam. But he is incorrect in saying that each forms some civilizational entity that is bound to pose a great threat to the West. Also, Huntington is incorrect in saying that China and Islam are likely to form a coalition against the West.

What we see is often the opposite: China supports Serbian President Slobodan Milošević against Islamic Kosovo Albanians; China supports Syrian President Bashar al-Asad against largely Islamic anti-government forces; China suppresses Islamic Uighurs inside China; China adopted a wait-and-see policy when Muammar Gaddafi's regime in Libya was under attack, extending emergency support to Libya without specifying any names of leaders or groups.

## *Fixation on Areas Adjacent to Western Europe*

Huntington is, perhaps inadvertently, Western-biased. This comment is not meant to be critical of him. To non-Western observers of international relations, some American analysts of international relations appear to focus on areas adjacent to the West, whether the frontier is located in Berlin or in Jerusalem or in the South China Sea. Perhaps it is natural, as many Americans believe that the United States was founded on the principles and spirit of seeing more of like-minded peoples establishing their own republics (Cox, Ikenberry, Inoguchi, 2000). In Huntington's case, the threat to the West comes from the frontiers of two fronts, the Middle East and East Asia. Until President Barack Obama steadily withdrew U.S. forces from Iraq and Afghanistan and until he pronounced the Asia-Pacific pivot strategy that focuses the U.S. forces in East Asia and the Pacific, the U.S. capability of waging two wars simultaneously was the sacred doctrine. Huntington pronounced the doctrine to prepare for the clash of civilizations, which would help the United States to reconfigure U.S. forces most effectively and efficiently amid the post-Cold War relaxation, and to boast of the unipolar moment in U.S. strategic focus.

(A note on the AsiaBarometer: It was carried out in six waves in the 2000s to register quality of life and related matters in all 29 Asian societies, with the exception of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and Timor Leste. The surveys were carried out in random samples and nation-wide schemes for each society. Roughly sixty-three thousand respondents, i.e., roughly eight million attributes are registered from them.)

## **Conclusion**

My scrutiny of Huntington's clash of civilizations thesis has revealed some of its fundamental fragilities. Yet his combination of patriotic passions, intellectual robustness and literary flair has undoubtedly made him a great man to be remembered long after he ceased to be busy alarming fellow patriots with seductive flows of sentences.

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