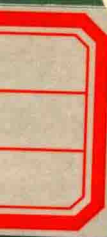


Civilization in Transition

■ Zhou Shuchun

and China's World Dream



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Introduction

A Turning Point in Human Civilization

Wang Weiguang

President of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences

America's *Time* magazine published a cover story named *The Second Age of Reason* in its September 8, 2014 issue, which describes a "sea world of information" made up of the Internet, smart phones and big data, a "golden age of keys." It seems rather excessive to name this age another Age of Reason with respect to the Age of Enlightenment in European history, but we can certainly make the judgment that human beings are undergoing a turning point in civilization. As shown by world developments since the advent of this new century, human civilization is now entering a new transitional period, a period of change to the form of civilization as well as a transcendence in concept.

The European Renaissance and the Enlightenment of the 17th and 18th centuries exerted a full-scale and far-reaching influence over Europe and indeed the wider world. The next several hundred years witnessed the rapid development of industrial civilization and the global expansion of capitalism. The "spread of rationality" has turned a huge range of science fantasies into reality, created social wealth on an unimaginable pace and scale, and always turned human needs and desires to the largest extent into drivers of economic and technological development. Successive waves of technological revolution and industrial revolution continue to explore new territory in world development; while deepening globalization draws all regions, countries and peoples into inevitable competition, including the last "haven of peace" on Earth. This has made

an enormous contribution to the development and progress of human society, but it also casts a huge shadow on the future of the world.

After centuries of precipitous advance, the West-led industrial civilization is encountering unprecedented difficulties, and human development has reached a new crossroads. At the dawn of capitalism's great rise, Engels proposed two historic reform tasks: reconciliation between Man and Nature and reconciliation within the entire human race. But the 200 years that followed were characterized by intensified "conquest" rather than "reconciliation." On the one hand, Man's conquest of Nature has reached a height which has indeed enhanced human welfare, but such plundering exploitation is likely to kill the golden goose – not only endangering a large number of species and severely damaging the ecological balance, but also bringing group inequality and generational inequality among human beings. On the other hand, the conquest of man by man continues to exist in different forms at different times, and human beings face violence, oppression and bloodshed provoked by polarized opposition. This is inequality and opposition built on the global economic system of capitalism.

Facing this unbalanced, conflicting and disorderly world, the international community reflects more deeply on the development of human civilization. Driven by the international financial crisis, critique of the mode of capitalist industrial civilization reached new heights. We can say that the ballooning expansion of capital and technology under "the banner of rationality" has come to an end. As Chinese sociologist Fei Xiaotong once pointed out, human society is now facing a "civilizational crisis." But Western culture is unable to lead mankind out of this crisis because the crisis, to a great extent, has been brought about by Western industrial civilization. This brings a historic opportunity for new

integration of civilizations.

British historian Arnold Toynbee said, "In that light, among all nations, China, with a unique way of thought fostered during the past two thousand years, has made the best preparation to avoid the human suicide." Of course we cannot simply interpret this as meaning that the Chinese culture will play the role of "savior," but it is certain that after a few hundred years of communication, blending and confrontation, Eastern and Western civilizations are entering a new era of mutual reconfirmation, and as the Chinese civilization is striving for national rejuvenation, it is bound to make its contribution to the transition and development of human civilization.

When President Xi Jinping of China visited UNESCO this spring, he quoted the inscription on the stone wall at the entrance to its headquarters: "Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed." He also advocated that "we must also step up inter-civilization initiatives in education, science, technology and culture, across borders, time and space, to spread the seeds of the idea of peace far and wide so that they will sprout, take root and grow in the hearts and minds of the world's peoples, and cultivate great forests of peace on the planet we all share." This idea not only expresses a longing for peace, but also highlights the importance of ideas and concepts for building a better human future. Over the past decade, in its proposals to build a harmonious world of lasting peace and common prosperity, and in its later commitment to raising awareness of the common destiny shared by humanity, the Communist Party of China has always shown concern for the future of mankind, practiced and promoted a new model of international relations, and worked to establish a new concept of civilization that can help solve world problems in the age of globalization.

Meanwhile, Chinese academics study the transition of civilization and international relations as an important subject of the times, and work hard to strengthen communication with other countries, especially Western countries. In the interests of communication and mutual learning, Vice President Zhou Shuchun of Xinhua News Agency has written this book, *Civilization in Transition and China's World Dream*, in which he systematically analyzes the evolution of historic conditions, and based on this analysis, concludes that both the concept of a "harmonious world" and the awareness of a "human community of common destiny" represent a rational return to the world concept of development, reflecting an optimistic judgment of international trends and deep worries about the future of mankind, and highlighting the philosophical wisdom of China as an ancient civilization and its responsibility as a modern power. Undoubtedly, the author's thinking and judgment conform to objective reality, and the book is a powerful attempt to spread China's spirit and values and promote exchanges between different civilizations.

Beijing

September 16, 2014

Preface

...the great transformation to which the century is moving – the reconciliation of mankind with Nature and with itself.

– Frederick Engels¹

Mankind's path to great harmony does not lie in competition, but in mutual assistance. While competition is the principle of other species, human beings consider mutual assistance as their principle. They will prosper if they follow this principle, and perish if they don't.

– Sun Yat-sen²

1 Frederick Engels, "Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy," *Selected Works of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels*, Vol. 1 (Chinese edition), People's Publishing House, 1995.

2 Sun Yat-sen, *Plan for National Reconstruction* (Chinese edition), China Chang'an Publishing House, 2011.

Questions about peace

Since representatives from the Japanese Government signed the Instrument of Surrender with the Allied powers aboard the *USS Missouri* in Tokyo Bay in September 1945, the world has largely enjoyed peace for seven decades. Despite the half-a-century-long Cold War as well as hot wars of various magnitudes, including the Korean War, the Vietnam War and the Iraq War, and the fact that there must be an armed conflict going on somewhere in the world at this very moment, full-blown wars like World War I and World War II have been avoided. For the generations that can experience the scourge of war only in movies and history books, peace seems to be an inevitability that is beyond question. But can the peace that has persisted to this day continue? How long will it last?

The history of mankind is nothing but a chronology of war and peace. But which of them constitutes the mainstream remains a question to which there is hardly a universally accepted answer. While 70 years is almost a lifetime for the average person, it is a short period in history. Is peace an interlude between wars, or are wars interruptions of peace? Is the peace that we often take for granted the beginning of lasting peace, a special favor given by God to human beings today, or a relatively long precursor to the next world war? When looking at the current peaceful period with these questions in mind, we may be immediately overwhelmed by anxiety.

We live at a time of peace and development. But nations, without exception, have yet to halt their defense programs while enjoying the blessings of peace. Is it true that increasingly sophisticated weapons will always end up being replaced by an upgraded next-generation arsenal without being used in warfare? Weapons, from clubs to firearms, were

previously considered symbols of progress in human civilization and particularly in productivity. War was even regarded as a catalyst for science and technology. Will society ever become so highly developed that humans can bid farewell to arms?

“Throughout the centuries, people have yearned for lasting peace, but war, like a haunting ghost, has been accompanying the journey of human progress every step of the way.”¹ Though history is plagued by devastating armed conflicts, peace remains an eternal pursuit of mankind. The cycle of war and peace has haunted the world for centuries. To this day, there are still widespread doubts about whether mankind can get rid of this cycle. If competition among nations is unavoidable, we need to ponder if peaceful competition can become the norm. If peace has persisted since the end of World War II by mere coincidence once again, we should commit ourselves to studying and grasping the inevitable factors underlying this special period.

The peace of today will be perpetuated not by nuclear weapons, which can nevertheless deter the outbreak of a world war, or the balance of terror based on nuclear weapons, but by changed historical conditions and the will of mankind. In light of this basic reality, Chinese leaders have put forward to realize the world dream of “lasting peace and common prosperity.”

A philosophical world view

The physicist Albert Einstein said, “Man tries to make for himself in the fashion that suits him best a simplified and intelligible picture of the world; he then tries to some extent to substitute this cosmos of his

1 Chinese President Xi Jinping’s speech at UNESCO headquarters, March 27, 2014, [Xinhua], Paris.

for the world of experience, and thus to overcome it. This is what the painter, the poet, the speculative philosopher, and the natural scientists do, each in his own fashion.”¹ From a scientist’s point of view, Einstein’s remarks express both criticism and admiration. While it is naïve to put imagination and wishful thinking before experience and reality, a world without aspirations, like a man without ambitions, will not go far. The progress of the world calls for imagination and people’s commitment to seeking a bright future. At a time when the world undergoes profound changes, we should be less cynical and more enthusiastic about taking actions to make the world a better place.

As the world enters a new era featuring the coexistence of diversity and integration, new concepts of development have gained prominence in global politics, opening up new opportunities for the progress of mankind. Only when we transcend traditional values and world views in the hope of promoting the development of the world and mankind can we resolve development bottlenecks. China has presented the dream of a harmonious world in a bid to offer a new vision for global development. While highlighting the philosophical wisdom and theoretical prowess of the Chinese nation, it shows an optimistic judgment of international affairs, deep worries about the future of mankind and the ultimate concern of an ancient country and a responsible global player over the fate of human beings.

Thatcher’s assertion

The late British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher was a stateswoman highly respected in China. But the Chinese find one of her conclusions about their country unacceptable. According to media reports, she once

1 Albert Einstein, *The Collected Papers of Albert Einstein*, Vol. I (Chinese edition), The Commercial Press, 1983.

said to the effect that it is impossible for China to become a global power because the country lacks a belief system that can influence the world, an assertion that is obviously prejudiced. It should be admitted, however, that although traditional Chinese culture, including Confucianism, has contributed greatly to the world with its profundity and richness, China's influence has declined since the modern era began. That's partly because the country has been on the receiving end during cultural exchanges and integration. Though China boasts richness of thought and culture, and takes pride in its own values concerning the world as a whole, society and life, we cannot conclude that China has created a system of thought with a global influence. How can it put such a system in place? The views of Le Daiyun, a professor of comparative literature at Peking University, are quite representative. She believes China should "establish a vision for society, an ideal of life and a system of values in a Chinese way."

In the globalized information age, all-round and in-depth changes have taken place in people's lives, having a major impact on all areas of human civilization and prompting the international community to reflect upon the development of the world. A century ago, Chinese thinker Lu Xun said, "Externally, we should not lag behind the trends of the world. Internally, we should not give up our inherent traditions. We should come up with a new vision in light of the present and the past." At the critical juncture, when the Chinese nation is striving for renewal, China needs and is able to establish a globally influential belief system that will enable the country to make new contributions to human civilization. China's "world dream," the conception of "a harmonious world of lasting peace and common prosperity," is likely to provide an inclusive potential framework for the establishment of this system.

Wight's inquiry

British thinker Martin Wight published an article titled "Why Is There No International Theory?"¹ in 1966. Although this work of enduring interest did not address the real absence of an international theory, Wight's inquiry has since become a classic providing international studies researchers with much food for thought.

Wight expressed his dissatisfaction with short-sighted narrow realism while calling for a profound historical vision. A logical analysis of academic disciplines shows that political science, which deals with a country's domestic politics, and international politics, which investigates politics among countries, should have been twins. They are, however, unrelated. That's because international politics cannot make "progressive explanations" like political science, which seeks to create a better system based on research into domestic political systems. In the traditional sense, international politics is a theory of survival. Countries fight for their survival by competing with each other or even waging wars. International relations are so recurrent that those of today are not much different from those in the past. Precisely because progress is impossible, international relations research does not have progressive implications. As a result, there is no international theory.

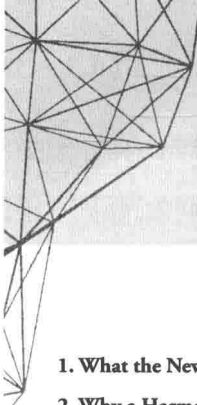
While we do not question the existence of a scientific theory of international relations, Wight's inquiry remains relevant today. Compared to the time when Wight published his famous article, international relations theory as an academic discipline is now better established and more systematic. But there has hardly been a convincing counter-argument to Wight's views. It might be said that a truly globally relevant

1 Martin Wight, "Why Is There No International Theory?" in H. Butterfield and Martin Wight, eds., *Diplomatic Investigations*, George Allen & Unwin, 1966.

international relations theory has yet to emerge.

China's proposal to promote the development of a harmonious world of lasting peace and common prosperity addresses the pressing issues of the contemporary world – what kind of world should we build and how should we build it. It is the contemporary version of the traditional Chinese ideal of “establishing a moral system for society, imbuing people with a purpose in life, reviving the discontinued academic traditions of past masters and ensuring peace for future generations.”¹ It will have positive implications for efforts to establish a theory of international relations in the real sense. It is predictable that the notion, which is believed to be able to catalyze a new world order, will be a topic of discussion worldwide for years and decades to come, and contribute to the creation of a new paradigm for the progress of mankind.

1 Volume 14 of *Complete Collection of Zhang Zai's Works* by Zhang Zai (1020-1077), a philosopher in the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127) and one of the founders of Neo-Confucianism.

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1. What the New World View Means
 2. Why a Harmonious World Is Possible
 3. What Problems Inspired the Chinese Theory