

World Civilization Forum 2005

The National Institute for Research Advancement (NIRA) sponsored the World Civilization Forum 2005 jointly with the Japan Foundation and the United Nations University on July 21 and 22 at the United Nations University in Tokyo under the theme "how to bring young people together to overcome difference in the world." The Forum was also supported by Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, NHK (Japan Broadcasting Corporation), Nihon Keizai Shimbun, Inc., the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and All Nippon Airways Co. Ltd.

Twenty-five specialists from regions around the world participated as panelists in this forum chaired by Professor Amartya Sen of Harvard University. Heated discussion developed during the two-day forum that was composed of a closed conference held on the first day (July 21), participated in by 90 researchers and specialists, and an open conference on the second (July 22) with approximately 490 participants including non-specialist citizens. Japan's Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi gave an opening address at the open forum emphasizing the importance of holding the forum in Japan.

Purpose of the Forum

The twentieth century was a period of dramatic advancement for human civilization, yet we have weathered various confrontations and conflicts. Presently in the twenty-first century, ethnic confrontations and terrorist attacks still persist in regions around the world. The "confrontation" that backgrounds these events is deeply rooted in dissatisfaction with and despair about the present world system: justice, fairness and equity are not maintained, and the situation is unlikely to improve in the near future. In fact a number of radical non-national organizations are attempting to establish worldwide networks capable of challenging the existing system by fomenting pessimistic emotions among citizens.

In light of this, the World Civilization Forum 2005 was held to serve

as a venue for dialogue in search of clues to dissolve the existing structure of confrontation and to restore world peace, stability and prosperity.

Forum Outline

In opening the forum, Dr. Amartya Sen, Chairman of the forum, raised the following issues: this is not a forum held under the premise that “a certain civilization is superior to others”; the forum is not a venue for intercivilization dialogue; and the difference between the civilizations is not considered in the forum, because there are people connected to several cultures and civilizations. For example, an American citizen of Malaysian decent and Chinese ethnic origin may well exist.

It is also important to be aware that various civilizations share a common heritage. For example, democracy is considered an idea from Western Europe, however, Prince Shotoku who ruled ancient Japan as well as King Asoka of India have adopted collegial systems. This forum is not an atlas that illustrates the different civilizations of the world. The focus of the forum is the people.

Session I: Partnership for Justice in the Globalizing World

In response to the advancement of globalization, some of the rich have become richer while the poor even poorer. Globalization does not benefit all people equally, but on the contrary, widened the gap between rich and poor as represented by such phrases as “digital divide.” The dissatisfaction arising from the widening gap enhances people’s awareness of their identities, and in turn, when this is combined with factors such as the sense of inequity and poverty, conflicts and terrorism are likely to be induced.

Another problem that was revealed as a result of the advancing globalization is the limitation of existing world systems founded upon nation-states. Let us consider the issue of failed states. When a nation fails along with the rule of law, the citizens lose trust in the nation. In response, as shown in a number of cases, it is possible that the nation will

massacre its citizens. Once this happens, the conventional principle of non-intervention in the domestic affairs of other nations is non-tenable. At the same time, however, there is no single entity that can serve as a world government. The United Nations is expected to intervene when a nation loses its functionality, but the UN is not capable of overseeing this task even after 60 years of existence. It was stressed in the forum that the UN must be strengthened in order to maintain global justice.

Session 2: Development as Capability Expansion: Alternative Paths to Justice, Freedom and Well-being

When we consider the issue of development, it is important not to measure it simply by GDP, but by the quality of life of the citizenry. In some countries, vulnerability and instability were actually aggravated by the advancement of globalization. Therefore, it was emphasized in the forum that not only the national perspective but that of human security is crucial for a nation's development.

In some developing nations, resources, markets, sanitation, education and government are not inaccessible to citizens. This can become a factor inducing citizen dissatisfaction with the lack of justice and fairness. It is important to provide citizens with opportunities to participate in politics and the economy regardless of economic status. Otherwise it is possible that the young generation, because of this dissatisfaction, will be driven to terrorism or other violent actions.

However, it is not appropriate to blindly advocate multiculturalism out of fear of a clash between civilizations. As poverty is a form of injustice, it can become a cause of violence. In light of this and as pointed out in the forum, the eradication of poverty is the prerequisite to implementing world peace.

Session 3: The Arts in the Age of Globalization

The advancement of globalization facilitated communication and thus, imbued the arts with significant influence. A person living in a

remote area can almost simultaneously enjoy the same variety of arts as someone living in an urban area. Yet it is still unknown whether globalization will enhance the fusion of traditional and modern arts or will instead contribute to the decline of certain types of art.

Meanwhile, the boundary between high art and pop art has become blurred. Japanese animation such as the Hayao Miyazaki films and Pokemon have electrified youth worldwide.

Will pop culture such as this contribute to linking various societies beyond national borders? Questions were raised as to whether the people, particularly young people, will be able to overcome political differences and become spiritually united through the arts.

Art must not be used for political objectives and efforts must be made to prevent political imperialism. Arts that can be accepted by any civilization are the true arts of the age of globalization. At the same time, arts that demonstrate uniqueness are the arts that can transcend the national borders. It was also pointed out in the forum that innovative efforts must be made to prevent the spread of standardized commercial art by the progress of globalization.

Conclusion

The World Civilization Forum 2005 was evaluated highly for its efforts to realize dialogue without being civilization-specific. It is expected that further discussions on civilizations will develop in the future under a framework free from confrontations.

The World Civilization Forum 2005 report will be published by NIRA in the fall of 2005.