

INTRODUCTION

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The papers in this volume were presented at the 12th International Symposium, "Japan in a Comparative Perspective" held at the International Research Center for Japanese Studies, Kyoto, Japan, during 12-17 January 1998. This Symposium evolved as a result of an encounter and interest in the laborious publication of Professor S.N. Eisenstadt of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, *Japanese Civilization in a Comparative View* (the University of Chicago Press, 1996). I have long been interested in the methodology of explaining Japanese historical experiences utilizing social scientific tools which have been developed mainly to analyze and explain historical experiences in the West. Professor Eisenstadt, who has long been a leading theoretician in sociology, has attempted in this book the very analysis of Japanese historical experiences I was interested in.

I contacted Professor Eisenstadt via my colleague, Professor Tomihide Kashioka, and fortunately received his full participation and collaboration in organizing this symposium based on his theory of civilization. This Symposium, therefore, was a collaborative project between Professor Eisenstadt and a team of Nichibunken researchers, represented by Professor Kashioka, Dr. Satomi Kurosu and myself. We spent quite some time planning and inviting participants to the symposium by communicating between Kyoto and Jerusalem. It was unfortunate that some members originally invited could not make it due to personal reasons or obligations at their universities. The Symposium, however, produced meaningful discussion, and I am very proud of its outcome.

In fact, the discussion we held at the symposium continues. Is it "civilization" which forms unique characteristics of societies in Japan and elsewhere in the world? What is a "civilization" in that context? To what extent can the distinction between "culture" and "civilization" be maintained when detailed analyses of historical experiences are made? We need to pursue this discussion further, with the concept of "civilization" as our departure point.

Professor Eisenstadt pointed out that "Japan is the only existing non-axial civilization," and he referred to the remark made by Samuel Huntington in *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* that Japan is "one country, one civilization." (1996) How should Japanese scholars reply to this

characterization of Japan as isolated civilization, a notion shared by scholars of Western civilization? This is the most difficult question that is cast to contemporary Japanese scholarship.

I hope readers will enjoy this product of the intellectual efforts of the Symposium scholars who gathered in Kyoto in the winter of 1998.