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Keynote Address : Japanese Civilization in the
Modern World

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Keynote Address: Japanese Civilization in the Modern World

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1. A NEW DISCIPLINE

Today we open the first Symposium of Civilization Studies of the Taniguchi Symposia, and as one of the organizers, I would like to explain briefly what we hope to accomplish.

I have introduced the somewhat unfamiliar term "civilization studies," and while the term may be unfamiliar, it is precisely within "modern civilization" that we are leading our lives. The achievement of a scientific definition of "modern civilization," and a precise conceptualization of the situation in which we are placed is my constant concern. Surely it must be possible to comprehend the formation and development of our modern civilization, our contemporary situation, and the direction of future trends in terms of the dynamics of human civilization as a whole. The fundamental task of civilization studies, I believe, is to construct several well formulated, scientific theses which address such macroscopic issues. The term *civilization studies* is itself novel to us, but I hope to open up a whole new field of study by thinking along these lines.

Disciplines dealing with civilization have undertaken systematic accumulation of knowledge and information concerning civilization, and from this point of view we already have a sizable store of knowledge concerning partial and individual phenomena. We have, however, been almost entirely lacking a methodology by which these phenomena could be comprehended as a whole, as well as any understanding of what civilization in its entirety really is. Perhaps it is one of the fundamental characteristics of science always to move toward analysis. As a result, we have virtually nothing to say about the totality of things. This is not to say that there have been no such attempts, but they are few. What is the system, as a whole, within which we lead our lives? This is an important question for contemporary human sciences.

2. CIVILIZATION AND CULTURE: A DIACHRONIC RELATIONSHIP?

All those assembled here today, myself included, are, in the broadest sense cultural anthropologists, or perhaps I should say, ethnologists. How, then, is cultural anthropology different from what we are calling civilization studies, and how are the two related? This is the first question to which we must address ourselves. Cultural anthropology concerns itself with human culture, and civilization studies with civilization. I think we can all agree to this, but we are left with the question of the difference between civilization and culture.

While in English these two words are clearly distinct, in Japanese, both *bunmei* (civilization) and *bunka* (culture) contain the Chinese character *bun*, lending ambiguity to their meanings. For this reason, there are a great many debates in the attempt to clarify the distinction between them.

There are innumerable different usages of the terms *bunmei* (civilization) and *bunka* (culture), and I suspect that a careful examination of each of them would lead to incomprehensible complications. It would be very fortunate indeed if we could establish today a tentative standard for distinguishing between these two concepts.

Traditionally, cultural anthropologists have studied culture through the so-called primitive societies, which of course also fully possess culture in the sense in which cultural anthropologists mean it. And we, as cultural anthropologists or ethnologists, have accumulated extremely detailed accounts of these cultures, in which a diachronic relationship has generally been assumed between the culture of these primitive societies and our own civilizations. Some equate "civilization" with "modern civilization," and consider "culture" to be continuous from ancient times through the present. From this perspective, culture is traditional and precedes civilization and a diachronic, developmental relationship exists between the two. I have serious doubts, however, about the adequacy of this view.

3. THE SYNCHRONICITY OF CULTURE AND CIVILIZATION

My own position is quite different, and I would like to introduce a different terminology.

It is clearly contrary to common usage to regard civilization as relatively recent. In archaeological terminology one speaks of the "Bronze Age Civilization." If the lives of those who used bronze utensils in the Bronze Age constituted a civilization, then how are contemporary primitive societies different? Can we say that primitive societies have culture, whereas the Bronze Age was civilization? Even in the still older, stone age, we can speak of "neolithic civilization." In light of these usages, it seems more appropriate to consider culture and civilization synchronic and co-existent than diachronic.

In point of fact, we are all living amidst contemporary civilization, and at the same time there is no doubt about the existence of modern Japanese culture. Similarly, in the Bronze Age civilization there must have been culture. Clearly, the two must be interpreted as synchronic.

The next task is the clarification of the nature of this synchronic relationship. Prevailing expressions like "machine civilization (*kikai bunmei*)," material civilization (*bushitsu bunmei*)," and "technological civilization (*gijutsu bunmei*)," indicate that the term "civilization" is thought to include those tools and devices (*sōchi*) which support and maintain our lives. All the various devices from household appliances used in our daily lives, to automobiles and roads and even cities themselves, as structures, must be included in the concept of civilization. Moreover, an adequate concept of civilization must also encompass the various conventions and rules, or institutions, which exist for the purpose of operating and using these devices in conducting our daily lives.

I propose to define civilization as the entire system of daily life, a system which includes various devices and institutions. Culture, on the other hand, would designate the system of values held by those living within this whole system of civilization. Human beings always attribute meaning and spiritual (*seishin-teki*) value to their devices and institutions. Culture in this sense is a projection of devices and institutions into the spiritual dimension.

The lively activity of the human mind has led to innumerable inventions and discoveries which have produced the devices and institutions of civilization. These in turn have become the environment of our daily lives, and it is within this environment that we ourselves have built, that we conduct our daily lives. This whole system is what I would like to call "civilization."

Human beings continue to create order within their own minds in response to the environment which they have built. This order is their value system, and following a common notion in cultural anthropology, this in particular constitutes culture. Culture is in this sense, always an aspect or a part of civilization. Furthermore, the two are completely synchronic: where there is civilization there is culture, and where there is culture, there is civilization.

4. MATERIAL CULTURE?

With this approach, expressions like "Bronze Age Civilization" are given a firm

foundation. A variety of implements were created during the Bronze Age. They constitute a set of devices, and the various rules and conventions formed for their use comprise a set of institutions. The lives of the people of the Bronze Age were shaped amidst these devices and institution. It seems only reasonable to consider this entire system to be a civilization. Furthermore, even the people of the Bronze Age, being human, must have had a rich spiritual life as well, containing a value system and Bronze Age culture. Spiritual or mental life, does not unfortunately leave relics or artifacts, making it impossible to give direct, concrete proof of their existence. While the civilization of the Bronze Age is demonstrable through ruins and artifacts, the culture of this age remains inferential.

This conception of culture and civilization does not occasion any contradiction with the cultural anthropological view of culture, nor does it raise any contradiction with usage of archaeological terms. It is capable of incorporating both. This use of the terms "culture" and "civilization," however, does differ somewhat from the "material culture" terminology, in which the diverse devices and material products created by the human mind (*seishin*) are also included in the concept of culture. The chairperson of this session, Professor Ishige Naomichi, started out as a specialist in material culture. I wonder what his views are regarding the term "material culture." The term itself, seems a bit odd to me. I think it originated when cultural anthropologists, anxious to encompass everything under the concept of culture, rejected the concept of civilization, and were forced to create the term "material culture" as a last resort to deal with material phenomena. Had cultural anthropologists accepted the term "civilization" in its more ordinary sense, research on the many implements created by human beings would have been pursued with ease as research on civilization's devices. It is perhaps because they tried to understand the term "civilization" in an exceedingly narrow sense that the somewhat self-contradicting term "material culture" came into being.

Following the terminology I have suggested, we can say that culture and civilization have always existed simultaneously in human society from the beginning of the human race. At the very least, as long as human mind (*seishin*) exists, and creates through its activity something with which man forms a system to carry on his own life, there exists civilization. Moreover where there is human mind, there must also be culture. If we consider civilization as a total system, culture is a projection into that system's mental/spiritual dimension (*seishin-men*). This approach seems to clear up a good deal of confusion. Furthermore, a shift from the study of culture to the study of civilization would mean that we would concern ourselves not only with the projection of the system into the mental dimension, but also with the system itself as constituted by devices, institutions and human beings.

5. CIVILIZATION STUDIES AS COSMIC CONSCIOUSNESS

We have a wide variety of devices and institutions in our society. The material devices used in our daily lives are particularly diverse, as in this very desk, buildings,

roads, and automobiles. These are all products of the human mind, but at the same time we cannot equate them with the human mind itself, and we cannot, therefore, consider these devices themselves to be culture. Culture arises clearly and distinctly in the projection of these devices into the mental sphere.

What, then, is the nature of the discipline which takes as its subject matter our life as a total system, encompassing both human mind and devices? Economic, legal and other social institutions each constitutes a system, and each has been studied in some depth. Similarly, investigations of devices and their material, physical, and engineering aspects abound. We do not seem to find, however, a discipline which asks what these institutions mean to human beings, what purposes communication techniques, means of transportation, roads, buildings and other devices have vis-a-vis human-beings. The reason, I suspect, is that attention to these questions would not lead to any practical application.

In this sense, I see the conventional disciplines from cultural anthropology to engineering to be very practical disciplines. Indeed, the study of our world, of the civilization in the context of which we live our lives, holds no practical value whatsoever. Conventional scholarly disciplines on the other hand, have always entailed some degree of utility.

As you can understand from my discussion, civilization studies as I envision it differs considerably from disciplines with practical purpose. In a certain sense, what is at issue is the question of world consciousness. It would be utterly pointless to think practically about the nature of the relationship between ourselves and the whole of the universe which surrounds us. I would restate this concern and ask instead about our nature as cosmic beings, making it a question of cosmic consciousness. I don't consider civilization studies to be able to advance civilization in the least. Rather, I see it as a way to comprehend what all our devices, inventions and designs mean for us as human beings. Furthermore, I intend civilization studies to pursue its research empirically, rather than philosophically.

6. FROM ECOSYSTEM TO CIVILIZATION SYSTEM

I have a continuing interest in the relationship between human beings and their natural environment. No doubt this concern is deeply rooted in my professional background as a natural scientist and zoologist. Originally my specialty was ecology, a field in which clarification of the interaction of a living entity and its environment is primary. The fundamental issue in ecology has to do with the development of systems constituted of subjects and their environments, called the "subject-environment system." This approach recognizes a system called the "human being-nature system," with human beings as organisms and nature as environment. The dynamic self-generated movement of this system is nothing less than the history of the human race.

The self-generated activity of subject-environment systems is fundamental to all living things operating throughout the billions of years since life began on earth.

Moreover, the totality acts as a system. Individual ecosystems existing as partial systems everywhere on earth, together, form the planetary ecosystem.

Human beings emerged in one part of the world of living organisms, which in turn is just one element in this ecosystem. From the beginning, human existence has been incorporated within an ecosystem, and in early periods of human history, this ecosystem was all-encompassing, constituting a "human being-nature system." Human beings thus indeed had an ecological existence.

While human beings had what we might call an ecological existence, they evolved an enormous cerebrum, and as a result came to carry on a wide variety of mental activities, the product of which was a large number of devices and institutions, amidst which they came to live. Gradually, the devices and institutions which they themselves had created came to have greater significance as human environment than nature. With this change came the shift from a "human being-nature system" to a system constituted by human beings and their devices and institutions. I propose to call this human device/institution system (*ningen sōchi-seido kei*) "civilization system," and this system replaces ecosystem.

With this definition, the development of human history and civilization is joined to the development of the "human being-nature system" as an ecosystem. The very system which was constituted by human beings and nature transformed itself into a system of human beings and their devices, and in this light, I interpret the history of the human race as a general shift from an ecosystem to a civilization system. This perspective encompasses within a single theoretical framework, everything from the beginning of life on each up to the present. This kind of discussion, however, has no practical utility, although it is quite beneficial for our mental health, in that it offers a better understanding of our planet and a sharper perception of our own existence. Whether we say there was a transformation "from a human being-nature system to a human device/institution system" or "from an ecosystem to a civilization system," what I am suggesting is that we view contemporary civilization within the context of such general, universal processes as these.

7. CIVILIZATION STUDIES AS SYSTEMS STUDIES

Turning now to the question of culture, we might ask how far back it can be traced. There is lively debate as to whether or not monkeys and apes possess culture, and with advances in primate studies, signs of what may be considered nascent culture, although not identical to human culture, have been found. If we define culture as anthropologists do, that is, as "all that is transmitted from generation to generation through means other than biological inheritance," then at the stage of the advanced anthropoid or advanced pongid, culture did indeed exist. Even if we go still further back to earlier stages of evolution, we can still find culture, and all these as culture form a continuum. But because these primates did not develop a superior cerebrum, they were unable to create devices or institutions. At that point

in time when they were able to produce devices and institutions, civilization developed along with culture.

Civilization has existed for a long time. I think we can properly speak, for instance, of "paleolithic civilization" in that human beings of that period had devices called paleolithic tools. Just what paleolithic culture was like, however, is very difficult for us to know. The difficulty of obtaining knowledge about ancient cultures leads us to study devices like stone implements, and apply the word "culture" to them. This, however, is overstepping the appropriate boundaries of the word "culture." We do not in fact know anything about their culture. We do know that a civilization existed because there is evidence of a system of devices. We know, therefore, that we can view ancient civilization consistently as a system of devices.

Viewing civilization in this way necessitates the analysis of all civilizations, including contemporary civilizations, using a single conceptual framework. How, then, can this be accomplished?

This symposium, "Japanese Civilization in the Modern World," bears the subtitle, "Life and Society." We may have some controversy over the definitions of "life" and "society" but it is possible to do an analysis focusing on either life or on society, or for that matter on any number of other topics. It is, indeed, possible to approach research on civilization through a certain aspect, but if we lose the holistic perspective, we will accomplish nothing new nor will we be working within civilization studies. While acknowledging the system of detailed and accurate knowledge generated by research on various institutions and devices, civilization studies does not intend to return to it. Rather, our own civilization studies perspective must entail comprehension of the totality of the system of human beings and their devices as a system, while at the same time maintaining a focus on the purposes and meaning of, for example, law or engineering inventions.

8. CONTEMPORARY JAPANESE CIVILIZATION

I expect that we will often debate the question: "What is Japanese Civilization?" during this symposium. Japanese culture has often been a subject of discussion but discourse on Japanese civilization is extremely rare. While there is a large body of work in the field of *Nihon bunkaron* (Japanese cultural theory,) I find few precedents for a "theory of Japanese civilization." On such example is *Bunmeiron no Gairyaku* ("A General Theory of Civilization") by Fukuzawa Yukichi, but this work does not interpret civilization in the sense we do.

When discussing contemporary Japanese civilization, it is impossible to ignore the gigantic scientific technology which Japan has mastered. *Nihon bunkaron*, however, scarcely mentions technology. How, then, shall we view Japan's enormous set of devices, and its truly incredible quantity, assiduously accumulated in this very small country over thousands of years from the Jōmon period through the present. Amidst these devices, Japanese people, speaking Japanese, and carrying on Japanese

mental/spiritual traditions, continue to live their lives. It seems to me essential that all this be interpreted as a totality. Regardless of how well we can theorize about Japanese culture focusing solely on the mental/spiritual dimension, I believe it is impossible to appreciate contemporary Japan from such a perspective.

Furthermore, Japan has an exceedingly intricate network of institutions as the consequence of a process of accumulation which can be traced at least as far as far back as the Ritsuryō period (645–1185), even setting aside the prehistoric Jomon (–300 B.C.) and Yayoi (300 B.C.–300 A.D.) periods. While the title of this symposium contains the phrase “...in the Modern World,” any understanding of Japanese civilization as it exists in the modern world necessitates a return at least to the Ritsuryō period. The intricate web of institutions developed in the seventh and eighth centuries must be examined, and our contemporary lives viewed, from a perspective developed within the context of such a system. In short, the question: “what is contemporary Japan?” can only be addressed in the context of a totality including such concrete phenomena as scientific technology, the legal system and economic and social institutions.

9. THE ECOSYSTEM AND THE CIVILIZATION SYSTEM

It is my view that the perspective gained from the history of civilization is always necessary even in looking at history. The significance of the civilization perspective is its unvarying focus not merely on diachronic but also on synchronic relationships. In any given era, various cultural elements, as well as institutions and devices, all exist synchronically, constituting a single whole system, and history is the temporal change of this synchronic system. Examination, therefore, of its diachronic change alone will be inadequate. I do not intend to criticize historians, but the history of individual events and phenomena has been primarily a tracing of the diachronic changes of exceedingly simplified elements of the whole. The perspective of civilization would change things greatly. All the events and phenomena of a given period would be seen as inter-connected and it would be recognized that this system of interrelated elements operates as a whole. This perspective shares a great deal with ecology.

In ecology, the system to be conceptualized is an ecosystem. Constituent elements of an ecosystem, for example, are the individual trees and shrubs of the forest and grasses of the prairie. Every species of grass and every tree and shrub was created through evolutionary change, and has evolved into its present form following certain changes. This is a fact. It is also true, however, that particular trees and particular grasses, all co-exist in a given area, and that because of their coexistence at a certain period of time, they all interact through an exchange of oxygen and other matter. Furthermore, the totality which encompasses them forms a tightly knit system, the comprehension of which as a whole system is the fundamental approach of ecology. Ecology offers an awareness of the evolution of an immense ecosystem in its entirety over tens of thousands of years, and shows how this is distinct from the evolution of a single tree.

If civilization studies can be established as a discipline, it will be a discipline concerned essentially with systems. It first analyzes the structure of a system as a synchronic system, and on the basis of that analysis considers historical change.

10. "PURPOSE" IN SYSTEMS

Systems studies emerged after the Second World War, and thus has a short history of no more than a few decades. Today, we have Dr. Sugita in attendance from our Museum. His background is in engineering and he has been involved in systems studies in a broad sense. I wonder if he agrees that systems studies is a very new field. Even in engineering, I don't think the conceptualization in terms of systems studies can be traced back further than about 30 years at the most.

Where did this idea come from? We find that in engineering fields the term "systems engineering" is used more commonly than "systems studies." The difference between systems engineering and general systems studies, in my interpretation, is that whereas systems engineering sees purpose in systems, systems studies does not necessarily do so. A system, then, may exist without purpose. If an ecosystem were to have purpose, we would be forced to create it, and isn't it all right, after all, without one? Isn't it more appropriate to allow for systems without purpose?

Contemporary civilization approaches closely such a purposeless system. All those within a civilization are not exerting persistent effort toward a commonly held goal. What we have is the self-generated development of a certain kind of system, one which has been handed down from the Paleolithic age, or from even before. Even if we were to allow for purpose, could we extract that purpose?

I have said that civilization studies has no real utility, by which I mean that it does not concern itself with purpose. It is instead an inquiry into the way in which we may comprehend with ease the world which exists around us, and within which we conduct our lives. This type of understanding can be achieved rather well by looking at our world as a system. This may sound quite abstract or even common-sensical, but it is a surprisingly rare perspective.

In our last symposium, entitled "For the Construction of Civilization Studies," I was shocked to hear from Professor Sugita that the solar system has a purpose! Naturally, the solar system is a system, and according to Professor Sugita, "The purpose of the solar system is maintenance of its own stability."

This method of establishing purpose is an extremely interesting creation of engineering, and that is fine, as far as it goes. However, does the definition of a purpose for the solar system have any practical meaning? This same question may be raised with regard to civilization: that is, even if we establish a purpose for civilization, has it any real practical meaning? To say that a system's purpose is in its own self-generated development is a tautology, and therefore has no real meaning. The ecosystem, whether it has a purpose or not, does pursue its own development. In a previous book I wrote that we have arrived at the culmination of an endless journey,

and we are asking about the meaning of our presence here and now in the history of the universe. This is what we wish to comprehend.

11. A LINGUISTIC ANALOGY

In talking about the study of civilization as a system, I have been using the linguistic terms, "synchronic" and "diachronic." Indeed the study of civilizations is in some respects analogous to the study of linguistic systems.

Since de Saussure, both the diachronic and synchronic study of linguistic phenomena have been main currents in linguistics. A certain vocabulary and grammar constitute a system in a certain period and this constitutes a synchronic relationship. Each word has its own evolution too, its own etymological career which can be demonstrated empirically. Furthermore, a particular language changes in and of itself, while maintaining a synchronic system.

I consider civilization to be such a phenomenon as well. Language may, in fact, be considered a projection of civilization. But as a methodology, isn't it possible to construct an analogy between civilization and language?

In the study of a certain type of civilization, couldn't we, for instance, speak of the syntax of civilization? It is precisely the task of civilization studies to investigate how the various elements within a civilization are integrated, and to ask by what principle this integration is achieved. The study of the evolution of individual elements of civilization—what might be called the etymology of the vocabulary of civilization—also has its place. At the same time, one of the very important tasks of civilization studies is the derivation of a syntax of civilization, which we might also call a "grammar" of civilization.

In pursuing civilization studies, methodologically speaking, it is not very profitable to proceed from an *a priori* mental image of civilization and then to base abstract and philosophical speculation on it. The systematic analysis, as empirical science, of each specific civilization is a necessity. This is systems analysis. This methodology enables us to discern the form taken by the integration of elements which shape the civilization in question, or the way in which synthesis has been achieved, in short, the "grammar" of civilization. This is one of the theoretical tasks of civilization studies, a task which it is very necessary to undertake.

12. METHODS OF COMPARISON

The best way to extract this grammar is to use a comparative approach. The theory of comparative studies of civilization is a very significant methodology in civilization studies. To isolate what is distinctive about Japanese civilization, for example, it is necessary to compare it with others. The methodology of civilization studies demands that the abstraction of the particular characteristics of a certain civilization always be accomplished using the techniques of comparison.

A large number of theses have been issued under the heading of civilization

theory. In Japan, too, a whole variety of them are available. I do not think, however, that these are really theories of civilization. They are, for the most part, actually critical essays on civilization (*bunmei hihyō*). Some merely offer impressions of civilization. The ideas of their writers stem from criticism of modern civilization. This approach can be traced back to seventeenth and eighteenth century Europe, where cultural anthropology itself was generated by this kind of critical motivation. In examining cultures other than their own, Europeans found something quite different—naïve but healthy—and made a great point of being shocked at such discovery. This sort of thing is still appearing under the name of civilization theory, and I think the same is true in Japan even now, where the majority of what is done under the rubric of civilization theory seems to be of this nature. My own interests lie elsewhere, and I am certainly not proposing civilization studies for the purpose of pursuing this sort of endeavor. Rather, my purpose is motivated by a desire to attain a realistic perception of our place within the endless process of our universe. Our purpose is not to apply a superficial scale designed to judge the civilization which surrounds us as good or bad.

Furthermore, even when dealing with Japan, I haven't the slightest intention of making claims like, "the twenty-first century belongs to Japan." I do think Japan is a fascinating civilization with various special qualities, and I propose that we do comparative studies with other civilizations and clarify at least to some extent the meaning of Japanese civilization within the history of the human race. Surely it must be possible to establish civilization studies as an academic discipline rather than as criticism. Is it not possible to distance ourselves a bit from value judgements, look at contemporary civilization and its future developments and gain insight into its future?

13. DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The establishment of the perspective on civilization about which I have been speaking requires the development of a theory. Unless a given study works toward production of a theory, it cannot be considered civilization studies. Furthermore, I do not think this theory can result from mere speculation; it must be derived from empirical comparative research on actual civilizations.

We cultural anthropologists or ethnologists have described and analyzed the cultures of diverse peoples of the world, but I'm afraid the methodology, or to use a currently popular term, the "paradigm" which we have used in describing and analyzing primitive peoples is not applicable to contemporary civilizations or to the analysis and description of civilization in general. We need a somewhat different methodology.

Just what this new methodology entails is still not completely clear to me. Something quite different from conventional methodology may well emerge. Cultural anthropology has a method of describing cultures as a whole by extracting what Ruth Benedict and others have called "cultural patterns." But that is not what

I have in mind for the methodology of civilization studies. Even if we could extract such "patterns" and intuitively give a modern civilization a distinguishing label, the degree of its validity is questionable.

What I have in mind is a more analytical, more scientific methodology. I do not think it is a matter of "patterns." What I am searching for is the afore-mentioned "grammar" or "syntax" of civilization, that is, the principle for the integration of culture.

This approach differs from ideographic descriptions of particular cultural traits. While it is extremely analytical and detailed, its results have a universalistic quality. It facilitates comparison with others and thus permits definition of the relationship of one civilization to another. What I have in mind is civilization studies as a study of theory. It must be more than simply a description of particular characteristics, it must attempt to grasp in its entirety the set of relationships encompassed by human civilization as global civilization. Unless we take this approach, civilization studies cannot be coordinated with the development of civilization out of the earth's ecosystem. The issue is, in the end, the entire system of global civilization.

14. ETHNOLOGY AND CIVILIZATION STUDIES

Civilization studies seems so grandiose in scale that it comes very close to being a tall tale. Why must those with ethnological background, which includes all of us present here today, take on this task? Because of various historical factors, the only contemporary discipline capable of handling civilization as a large system is cultural anthropology, or ethnology. Other disciplines could never manage. Ethnology evolved as a holistic discipline and ethnologists have long been trained in handling cultures as totalities. To be sure, their premise has always been that culture is a projection into the mental domain. Nevertheless, ethnologists have always had a proficiency in dealing with culture in its entirety, including all of what comprises human life, everything from food and clothing to spiritual life and religion. Furthermore, they use analytical methods in approaching cultures. No other disciplines offer this approach. While adopting extremely concrete, empirical, and analytical methods, ethnologists yet attempt to capture the total picture.

Another very significant aspect of anthropology is its tradition of emphasizing relativism, resulting in a certain freedom from value judgements, which allows us to see a culture as a totality.

One may have the impression that the subject matter of research in ethnology or cultural anthropology is delimited in some way. In fact, however, as you know, if you have ever looked through the items in the Human Relations Area Files, the whole spectrum of human life is included. We cultural anthropologists, however, have been put under a magical spell and made to believe that our only subject for research is primitive society, and our subject matter has been limited for this reason. The moment we break that spell, however we can take up contemporary civilizations. Although, as I have said, the same methodology will not work for both primitive

societies and contemporary civilizations, I do believe that the perspectives and techniques developed by cultural anthropology and ethnology are applicable to a substantial degree to the study of modern civilizations. In this sense the transition from ethnology or cultural anthropology to civilization studies is a very natural process. I think, in fact, that it would be quite reasonable for civilization studies to emerge as a sub-field of ethnology and cultural anthropology.

15. "THEORIES" OF JAPANESE CULTURE AND THEORIES OF JAPANESE CIVILIZATION

The title of our symposium, "Japanese Civilization in the Modern World," takes Japan as its focus. I would like to say a few words about this.

As you all know, already a truly enormous volume of literature has been published on the "theory" of Japanese culture (*Nihon bunkaron*). Not all of it is written by Japanese. Europeans, Americans, and writers from various Asian countries have argued their own theories of Japanese culture. I myself have participated extensively in such discussions both through speaking engagements and publications. This field does have a tendency, at least to some extent, to emphasize the distinctiveness of Japanese culture. This is related to the historical development of the nation, the people, and the society of Japan. Japanese history saw frequent occasions where the uniqueness of Japanese culture in some respect had to be emphasized.

What motivated me to organize this symposium on "Japanese Civilization in the Modern World" was a desire to move beyond "theories" of Japanese culture, to escape from this field and pursue theories of Japanese civilization in a different context. What I am suggesting is that we turn from "theories" of Japanese culture to theories of Japanese civilization.

Japanese civilization is, in fact, a very difficult one to locate. Looking at Japanese civilization in the context of the historical development of the various civilizations of the world, Japan is situated at some distance from what is considered the mainstream. I earlier alluded to the place of scientific technology in civilization. Japan embraces the most advanced technology on earth, and this fact alone makes Japanese civilization very difficult to handle. Japanese civilization is not a subject which can be dealt with adequately within the traditional Europe-centered theories of civilization. It is precisely for this reason that I hoped we might focus our attention on Japan, compare and contrast it with other civilizations, and thereby uncover at least to some extent a way to comprehend what civilization is. I believe the techniques of comparative civilization studies promise to be very effective here as well and I think it is productive to focus on Japanese civilization, make detailed comparisons with other civilization, and derive general propositions.

16. COMPARATIVE CIVILIZATION AND JAPAN

I have several civilizations in mind which are appropriate for direct comparison with Japanese civilization. One of these is Chinese civilization. A comparison based on actual, concrete data would reveal veritable differences between Chinese and Japanese civilization, which would in turn throw light on the theory of civilization and the nature of civilization in the contemporary world. In cultural terms, Japanese and Chinese cultures are often considered to be extremely similar, and this is in fact true. Since Chinese cultural elements have flowed in great quantity into Japanese culture, this similarity is to be expected. If we look at Japan and China as civilizations, however, they are vastly different. While they contain a wealth of similar elements, their systems are different.

Turning to a comparison of the civilizations of Europe and Japan we find that we are able to derive a different and very interesting set of propositions. We can establish many facts. For example, while their constituent cultural elements are completely different, their principles of integration are startlingly similar. Of course, there are also numerous differences, but as a whole, many parallels are revealed, and we want to know how to explain this.

We also have Indian, Russian, and various other civilization. By accumulating comparative data on each of these, might we not develop a viewpoint which incorporates the totality of our civilization into its field of vision? By taking Japan as the subject matter we hope to develop a theory of comparative civilization.

Regardless, then, of the topic it is possible to discuss and analyze it from the perspective of civilization theory. In this respect, civilization theory is, I think, quite different from cultural theory (*bunkaron*). The results, too, will be very different from those produced by conventional Japanese cultural theory. I am suggesting that we pioneer studies in this unexplored territory. It promises to be well worth our efforts.

17. THE FORMATION OF MODERN JAPANESE CIVILIZATION

Japanese civilization has absorbed a large number of elements from Chinese culture, and in the modern period, from European cultures. Naturally, there are also a large quantity of indigenous Japanese elements. All these foreign and indigenous elements have been integrated into a new synchronic system of daily life by means of some principle. I want to speculate about this principle. This will be a civilization theory derived from the Japanese experience. What is at issue here is the "grammar" of Japanese civilization, or to continue the linguistic analogy, it is a question of the syntax of Japanese civilization. I hope we can work in this direction.

I have been discussing the synchronic dimension of Japanese civilization. Looking at the diachronic dimension will raise the issue of continuity between the syntax of contemporary Japanese civilization and the grammar of the previous era. From the perspective of civilization theory—though one could say much from the stand-

point of Japanese cultural theory, too—prior to the one hundred years of modern, or contemporary Japan, there were 250 years of the Edo Period (1603–1868). In understanding the meaning of these 250 years, the syntax of Japanese civilization is of great importance. Naturally changes took place in these years, but if we think in terms of the synchronic system, its prototype had already emerged, nearly complete, in the eighteenth century. By re-examining and re-assessing the nature of Japanese civilization in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, we will be able to recognize a certain dynamism or continuum of this synchronic system.

This is what I had in mind when I spoke of “Japanese Civilization in the Modern World.” The idea that Japanese civilization began in 1868 is generally accepted. More specifically it was after the 1904 Russo-Japanese War that Japanese civilization gained worldwide recognition, and it was then that Japan suddenly appeared on the world scene. When we ask, “Why did war break out between Japan and Russia?” or “Why did Japan win a victory in this war?” it is impossible to answer with reference only to Japanese civilization at that point in time. A background of historical development over several hundred years—even dating as far back as the Ritsuryō period—of the system of Japanese civilization was vital in Japan’s victory in the Russo-Japanese war. I think we need to introduce this kind of perspective into the investigation of cultural change.

To take the linguistic analogy to its logical extreme, we might say that cultural changes are like changes in the meaning of a word, that is, they are minor variations in the larger context of syntactic stability. In trying to take cognizance of civilization, we must focus on characteristics and changes of this larger structure itself. From this perspective, the conventional view of modern Japan as a recent phenomenon is incorrect.

It is commonly said of Japan worldwide that “Japan’s traditional civilization was an imitation of China and Japan’s modern civilization is a copy of Western Europe. This simplistic view, however, does not afford a proper understanding of the structure of the world. I submit that from this perspective we cannot comprehend the meaning of the Russo-Japanese War, nor can we offer a satisfactory explanation of subsequent changes in the world, or the place of Japan in the Far East. Is there any civilization which has managed to form anything original without borrowing from a foreign civilization? All civilizations are copies. However, while foreign elements are adopted, the principle by which these elements are integrated is unique. Herein lies the basis for the formation of a particular civilization.

From the standpoint of cultural history, a large portion of the elements within Japanese culture are indeed foreign. But in my view we should, and should be able to, move beyond the perspective of cultural history and create by our own initiative a perspective of the history of civilizations.