

01 Introduction to the Author of the Series

Welcome to the Benty Light Garden. I am Dr. Douglass White. I am an American scholar, but I have lived many years in Asia. Most of the time I lived in Taiwan. Sometimes I have gone to China to tour or to give talks. I have done research for many years. Now I am going to give some short presentations introducing some of my research related to the nature of civilization that I have carried out over many years .

I grew up in the US, but when I entered college I began to study Chinese literature and this included the language and civilization of China. After college I lived in Asia and also spent a lot of time researching civilizations. The main question I asked is what is it that can allow a civilization to become very stable so as to allow a people to develop their own lifestyle and culture over a long period of time?

From that original question my interest further developed into a question about the future of world civilization. Because of developing media, communications, and convenience of travel, our current world is developing a world civilization. The question is whether we will develop into a unified civilization or a diversified civilization? Along the way I will discuss a number of historical issues as well as literature and culture, including science. I will also share some stories from my experiences and research.

As a start I would like to introduce a bit about myself, where I come from, and why I became involved in this research. In recent years I have begun to give lectures and workshops in Asia. Some friends have suggested that I share some of my research and make it more available on the Internet. So let me tell you a bit about how I began this research and series of discoveries.

I was born in Chicago in the Midwest, but when I was quite young our family moved to the East Coast. So I grew up on the East Coast living for some years in Pennsylvania, Maryland, New York and Massachusetts. My father was a railroad executive and so we often moved according to his work. He was an expert on railway freight tariffs. In that period the railroads (together with trucking, shipping, and airfreight operations) were developing the technology of container freight, a fantastic invention that spurred commerce worldwide.

My mother was a house wife, but she was also a musician with a career of many decades as a professional organist, choir director, and music teacher. She was also an artist. All in all though we were a fairly average middle class family.

When my father began his career he was a work-study student at the University of Chicago and was strongly influenced by a Great Books program they offered. He began to share what he had learned, and he really enjoyed reading works on history, literature, and humor together with me and my younger brother. From that experience I began to develop an interest in literature and its relation to history. One work my father introduced to us was by the earliest Greek historian, Herodotus. Later when I studied Chinese I became acquainted with China's first great historian Si-ma Qian and his **Shi-ji (Records of the Grand Historian)**. He was China's Herodotus and was the first to try to write down what in his day was considered a history of the world.

Herodotus traveled around the world of his day visiting many countries to observe their customs, culture, history, their wars, and their governmental systems, and then he recorded much of what he learned into his history. Even today many archaeologists rely on his reports to guide them in reconstructing ancient times.

Another subtle influence on my childhood was my grandfather who was a Mormon. His grandfather was a pioneer who went West with Brigham Young to found Mormon settlements. As my grandfather grew up, the Mormons asked him to serve for a time as a missionary, so he went to Germany. There he met my grandmother and brought her to the US as his bride. When I was young I went to see them, but unfortunately by that time my grandfather could not talk well because of a stroke, but I discovered he had many books about the Inca civilization in South America. The Mormons in their **Book of Mormon** believed that in ancient times there was a high civilization in the Americas and even Europeans came and settled there, but later that was wiped out. When the Mormons discovered there were very ancient ruins in Central and South America they felt that this was beginning to show archaeological evidence supporting their beliefs.

I did not have any strong belief in the Book of Mormon's tales, but I was impressed to see such ancient ruins of a high civilization in Central and

South America. So when I was in Middle School I wrote a paper stating that I wanted to become an archaeologist. All through High School and into College I was strongly interested in archaeology and literature. However, the literature aspect soon dominated and my summer job digging ditches convinced me that I perhaps was not cut out to be a dirt archaeologist.

In High School I studied American History and discovered that the US had less than 200 years of history, and the settling of Europeans in the Americas had only been for about 500 years. Compared to the histories of ancient Greece and ancient Rome, which we also studied in High School, this was really a very short history.

Of course the Americas were already populated by indigenous populations that had been there for thousands of years. They were living in various tribes throughout the continents each with their own languages and cultures. Although they sometimes formed alliances, they really each maintained their own cultural identity. As the modern nation states began to form in North America, and the US and Canada were largely formed of immigrants, I felt that their formation of a culture and civilization really lay more in the future.

So I began to look at other civilizations for contrast and comparison. In my American History class I decided to write a paper about the Treaty of Portsmouth, an event in which President Theodore Roosevelt negotiated a peace treaty between Russian and Japan. The curious thing about this event was that the two antagonists had been fighting in the northeast part of China. I thought it very odd that Russia and Japan were fighting over property and rights that properly belonged to another country. I had been studying Russian culture for a couple of years at that time, but this brought my attention to the situation unfolding in China. The Chinese empire that had lasted more or less for about 4000 years was finally coming to an end with a dynasty run by a foreign occupation (of a people called Manchus). Now two entirely uninvited imperialist powers were meddling in the affairs of "China" and attempting to carve away pieces of China and incorporate them into their own territories, or at least into their spheres of influence. I previously had no prior contact with Chinese or knowledge about China.

As I studied the question I was impressed by how over the centuries certain dominant societies tended to extend their influence and even occupy and annex other societies enforcing their hegemony over them. This came to be known as “imperialism”. The Roman Empire was a famous example. More recently the European powers of England, France, Spain, and Portugal had extended empires into Africa, Asia, and then the Americas. Russia held a sprawling empire from Eastern Europe through Central Asia all the way to the Pacific. China was no exception and practiced imperialism from the Shang dynasty to the Qing dynasty, only periodically being subjected to the imperialism imposed by others. Oddly, when Mao and the Communists took power in China, they declared they were liberating China from imperialism (the annoying attempts of European and Asian imperialists to gnaw away at the Chinese Empire), and yet they simply re-established the old Qing Empire folding the Manchus, Mongols, Tibetans and Islamic tribes as well as many smaller minorities into a hegemony dominated by the majority “Han” Chinese. This is fairly obvious if one simply looks at the flag of the overly insistent country that calls itself “The People’s Republic of China”. There is one big star for the Han and four little stars for the largest minorities. The smaller minorities do not even get stars. “Republic” goes back to the old form of Roman government before it became an “Empire” and means “the thing of the **people**”. Actually China’s empire ended in 1911, long before the Communists arrived on the scene with any noticeable influence. China then disintegrated into warlords jockeying to see who would become the next emperor. Chiang Kai-shek and Mao Tse-tung were only the two warlords who emerged as the strongest contenders and survived while mixing it up with the Japanese imperial ambitions to take advantage of China’s disunity and annex it to its own Empire. These discouraging patterns in world history inspired me to dig deeper into the foundations of civilization to find what really works rather than political shams aimed at bullying less dominant cultures. I saw that my own homeland (the US) was just as much an imperialist power as any others although it posted a facade as a democratic republic. Any exertion of hegemony by a dominant society over less dominant cultures inevitably makes “the natives restless” and ultimately leads to dissatisfaction and disintegration of the “Empire”.

In my first year of college I selected a course on the history of Buddhism in East Asia. The spread of Buddhism from India to all parts of Asia

seemed like a reflection of the way Christianity spread in Europe and beyond as well as the spread of Islam from the Middle East to many parts of the world. These were cosmopolitan religions that in many ways detached themselves from the ties of a local ethnic tradition such as Judaism and Hinduism maintained. Thus they were able to proselytize their teachings into many cultures. The question arose in my mind whether religious fervor was perhaps just a cover for another form of cultural imperialism. History seemed to record lots of religious wars and mutual suppression by competing sects and beliefs.

Seeing all the languages with Oriental characters in the East Asian Library at Harvard inspired me to begin an intensive course in the Chinese language so I could begin to explore a culture with a long tradition that was very different from everything I had been exposed to.

This led me into an ever deeper exploration of Chinese literature and civilization. This course of study had the added advantage that there were only a few students studying with a professor rather than just occasionally meeting with a teaching assistant for a large lecture course with hundreds of students and no personal instruction from the professors.

After graduating I decided to go spend time in Asia to experience the culture first-hand. So I spent four years in Taiwan, a place I previously knew almost nothing about, because my Chinese studies focused on ancient China. In Taiwan I learned to speak Chinese fairly well and studied at Taiwan University to complete a Master's Degree in Chinese Literature. Then I returned to Harvard to continue graduate studies, completing a second Master's Degree and a Ph.D. in East Asian Languages and Civilizations. I also taught there for a couple of years as a teaching assistant and instructor and then also began teaching at other colleges.

During my time in Taiwan I also met a number of very interesting professors. One very special experience was with Nan Huai-jin. He was quite different from other professors. He was very interested in Western culture and science. His knowledge of the traditional Chinese Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist traditions was vast and did not just rest on intellectual knowledge. He practiced what he taught in his every day life. He inspired me also to begin gaining direct experience in

practices such as meditation and Daoist health exercises as well as just absorbing knowledge and information.

Through such practices I began to develop a vision of how a civilization may achieve lasting stability. We must face the decision of what the US, and Europe and Asia, and their various cultures really want for their future. This requires a lot of cultural interaction, but in the end as we evolve a world civilization we face the decision of whether we want a single unified civilization or do we prefer for each local region to have its own special particular flavor of culture.

My personal opinion is that we will head toward a world that is unified in terms of communication, travel and commerce, but remains diversified in terms of local cultures retaining their own autonomy and special characteristics. That way we will have a lot of diversity.

Some say that the course of human civilization is decided by elite groups of influential people. However, I believe this is an issue that we as citizens of the world must each discuss with each other and decide as a group. Our actions will create the reality that emerges. So in these articles I will present a variety of information for everyone to consider with regard to our future evolution of civilization on our planet reflecting the lessons passed on to us from ancient Egypt.

Study Questions

- * What childhood experiences encouraged Dr. White to become interested in the study of civilizations?
- * What can allow a civilization to become very stable so as to allow a society to develop a unique lifestyle and culture over a long period of time?
- * Will human society on our planet develop into a unified civilization or a diversified civilization? What do you think? Give your reasons.
- * What was so unusual about the Treaty of Portsmouth?

- * What is imperialism?
- * Why is imperialism not a recommended recipe for stable civilizations?
- * Are cosmopolitan religious movements a source of long-term stability in a civilization?
- * Is knowledge sufficient in an educational system?
- * Who decides what kind of civilization mankind will have on this planet?
- * What decides a future outcome?