

## A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS BETWEEN CLASH OF CIVILIZATIONS AND THE GLOBAL CIVILIZATION INITIATIVE

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### ABSTRACT

*Civilizational debate is not a new phenomenon in international politics. Civilizational states try to promote civilizations in a bid to foster civilizational values, cultural values and soft power resulting in the acceleration of their political and diplomatic clout. The Clash of Civilizations theory opined by Samuel P. Huntington triggered an intriguing debate in international politics. He reckons that in the post-Cold War world, the primary source of conflict among the states would be on culture and civilization, arguing ideological war between the Western world underpinned by the US and the Eastern world supported by the Soviet Union. To counter the Clash of Civilizations theory and the US ideational war, China has initiated the Global Civilization Initiative (GCI). It underscores the promotion of civilizational values and eschewing imposing ideologies or values on others. This paper, thus, shed slight on Western and Eastern discourses regarding the civilizations. The study also attempts to give a new insight by drawing a comparison between Clash of Civilizations and GCI.*

**Keywords:** *Western Civilization, Eastern Civilization, Democracy, Autocracy, Openness, Dignity.*

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## INTRODUCTION

The word civilization originates from the Latin word 'civilis', which means citizen and applies to those living in one social and political order. Civilization is an oldest form of human social order (Rabie, 2013). It includes culture, traditions, norms, attitudes, social institutions, and customs such thoughts are developed over time and passed from generation to generation. Civilization leans towards material and non-material aspects of life. Since civilization is an interaction among large sums of people, it also belongs to all people rather than culture or norms, which are limited to fewer people. It comprises of large population, multicultural, multi-ethnic, which develops modern yet complex political, economic and social institutions (Suleiman, 2010).

Trade and conflict are also the key components of civilizations, which are important for civilizations to grow and persist for a longer period. About the conflicts of civilizations, Samuel P. Huntington developed his thesis from his lecture at the American Enterprise Institute in 1992. He detailed that the major world wars were fought based on the balance of power. The Cold War was an ideological war between liberal democratic values and capitalism led by the US with the socialist ideologies of the Soviet Union. The Cold War ended with the triumph of Western liberal values vis-à-vis communism. Huntington explains that the 21<sup>st</sup> century will be complicated, the new structure of global will be formed on the basis of similar civilizations among the states while these civilizations will also be the source of conflict among the nations. To examine the 'Clash of Civilizations' heedfully it can be argued that it provokes the West to wage civilizational war with the East that would certainly cause further destruction and differences in international politics. On the other hand, Global Civilization Initiative (GCI) led by China appears to be fostering openness, inclusivity, pluralism and civilizational ties, which are desperately needed in the prevailing polarized world (Cox, 2000).

## RESEARCH METHOD

The research employs qualitative comparative method to find out the answer of research question. The main question the paper addresses is that whether the Clash of Civilizations provokes the West to wage civilizational war with the East and the newly emerged Chinese concept 'Global Civilization Initiative' (GCI) fosters openness, inclusivity, pluralism and civilizational ties, which are desperately needed in the prevailing polarized world. Authors have tried to find out the key difference between the two through the content analysis of various research articles and books on the 'clash of Civilization' and 'Global Civilization Initiative'.

## DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

### Clash of Civilizations

Samuel P. Huntington Clash of Civilization theory (1996) argues that the world in the new era will not be multipolar it will rather remain multi-civilizational. Although the global political system has become unipolar after the end of the Cold War the conflicts among the nations would be based on civilizational differences. Huntington describes civilization as opposite to barbarianism, as the highest cultural grouping sharing the same belief, race, ethnicity, norms, values, institutions and genesis (Huntington, 1996). According to him, eight civilizations are present at the current juncture known as Western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin American and African civilizations.

His thesis gives a new insight that in the post-Cold War era, Western Civilization would start to dominate the world with their supremacy of scientific technology. Western civilization has a goal of unifying all human beings under one civilization but this led to the division of the world community against the Western values and imposition of Western values on others. Arguably, the religious conflicts between the states escalated over some time. Western dominance as far as civilization is concerned currently seems to be declining (Nye, 2011).

Huntington also explains that the West is on its decline. He believes that the declination is a slow process where states tend to slowly decline before switching towards complete decline (Haynes, 2019). The reason that Western decline is slow is that Western civilization is headed by European countries as well as the US (Betts & Christensen, 2017). Secondly, decline is also a result of the growing decline of resources. Presently, resources are scarce in the Western countries. Resources also mean military strength, economic strength, skilled population, natural resources etc.

The non-Western powers possess more population than the Western nations having ample manpower too. The non-Western states are also manufacturing enough economic products to surpass the Western products (Betts & Christensen, 2017). As far as military capacity is concerned, it comes from various factors such as number of troops, technological advancement, levels of organization and the willingness of a society to use force. Against this backdrop, the West still dominates the world especially the US that spends more than USD 700 billion annually on its military expenditure. Nuclear capacity, on the other hand, is achieved by non-Western powers such as India, Russia, Pakistan and China. This is also true that when non-Western states gained military power, it was natural for them to exert their cultural influence on other smaller states. Joseph Nye calls it 'Hard power' and 'Soft power'. The combination of both hard and soft powers is called 'smart power' (Martino, 2021).

Huntington argues the West is likely to face challenges from two fronts, emanating from Islam and Asia, his idea stokes civilizational conflict showcasing that Western civilization is superior to Eastern civilization. It feels threatened by Asian states with a rapid economic development like the rise of China. On the other hand, Muslim countries are also showing their political and cultural assertiveness and identification with Islam entirely different from those of Western ideas. In Muslim societies, the younger population is literate and well aware of the differences between Islamic culture and Western ones. This population in the years to come will dominate future politics in

their respective areas which seem to be a threat to Western liberal ideas (Hooker & Saikal, 2005). Huntington maintains that the relationship between Islam and the West will remain conflictual and together with growing Asian states (including East Asian states) will continue to discredit Western dominance. It is a matter of concern that many Muslim countries already have a bad perception of the West.

During the Cold War, states had choices either to join Capitalist or Communist blocs. On the contrary, in the contemporary world, a great deal of focus is given to civilization where states do not have the choice to align with. The nations they want because currently, it is not the question of 'with whom you are?' rather it is a question of 'who are you'? This idea makes a civilization more important. For instance, the North American Treaty Organization (NATO) is based on similar civilizational states, making it one of the most successful military alliances of the similar civilizational states. The Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) is rather a weaker institution because that involves states from different civilizations such as Islamic and Confucian due to which no action could be taken during the crises.

After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the US believed that the end of the Cold War embarked on a path to the consolidation of Western liberal democracy. The US since the end of the Cold War left no stone unturned to spread Western values. The main contesters of the US and its universal values remained to be seen in China and Islamic civilizations. They are proud of their values. The Islamic and Sinic civilizations show resistance to adhering to the Western values that the US or the West promotes (Mazrui, 1998).

The West is believed to have been facing challenges in dominating its values in the world due to the Islamic-Sinic alliance. Both China and Iran signed a 25-year strategic cooperation agreement in 2021 that, by and large, would strengthen their economic, political and defence ties in the Middle East. China also opposes the US sanctions on Iran and was seen staunch pursuer of supporting the Iranian nuclear program in Vienna negotiations (Green, 2022). Beijing also has cordial relations with Islamabad, Gulf countries and Central Asian Republics.

Meanwhile, in terms of military, the US developed nuclear weapons to deter the Soviet Union during the Cold War. In the post-Cold War era, Asian nations also developed nuclear weapons like China to deter the US. These weapons are likely to be shifting the balance of power in the favour of Asian states.

As far as human rights are concerned, the West talks about the promotion of human rights and institutions. Islamic and Sinic civilizations are sceptical of the human rights standards of Western states. For example, the West does not have relations with North Korea on human rights grounds. China and Muslim countries tend to have relations with North Korea, ignoring the standards of human rights set by the Western nations. Western civilization wrongly thinks it is one of the best civilizations. Its decay is around the corner, from economy to military and increasing decline in population. Its stance on human rights is also questionable.

There has been a huge gap between what the West does in practice and what it propagates for human rights. Western states since the end of World War II, the establishment of the United Nations, International Court of Justice, and Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), have been talking about human rights. Human rights in practice remained compromised by the West. The atrocities of the US in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya are known to the world. Washington took the unilateral step of attacking Iraq as the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) opposed the invasion of Iraq. The atrocities of the West in Libya, Sudan, Afghanistan and Palestine clearly show the Western double standards (Baofu, 2023).

The Western states claim they have been the biggest adherents of democracy. Free speech, freedom of expression, freedom of movement, and freedom of the press are considered to be the main tenets of democracy. In the current arena in the West right to free speech, and freedom to press, are suppressed by leaps and bounds. The victorious powers of World War II held conventions on various issues, which are currently part of international law. One of the laws is known as the principle of non-intervention in internal matters of

other states. Ironically, the West does not adhere to international law and intervenes in the internal affairs of the other states with impunity. The West does not respect differences of opinion. It believes in the imposition of its norms on other states regardless of their history, norms and politics. Paradoxically, it wants to see democracy in the world but also supports dictators in Gulf countries.

The West promotes democracy and portrays it as the only form of human emancipation from the shackles of authoritarianism. In this context, Peter Boufu suggests authoritarianism represents a more developed phase within the framework of liberal democracy and categorizes Western democracy as an authoritarian form of liberal democracy. The West suppresses the right of people to express themselves or to practice the religion of their choice (Masferrer, 2021). Amnesty International has recently criticized the West for condemning human rights abuses committed by hostile countries while turning a blind eye to human rights abuses committed by their allies. An ongoing carnage of Gazans in Israel, supported by the West, is one of the glaring examples where the West overlooks the human rights violation and violation of International Law by its ally. In short, the theory of Huntington and the Western world order are extremely likely to be generating divisive politics, and populism resulting in consolidating further division between the West and the East (Stinus-Cabugon, 2023).

### **Global Civilization Initiative (GCI)**

Chinese President Xi Jinping introduced the Global Development Initiative (GDI), the Global Security Initiative (GSI), and the Global Civilization Initiative (GCI). These initiatives have triggered an intriguing debate among experts. They are of the view that such initiatives, broadly speaking, would alter the complexion of international politics. Among these three initiatives, the GCI is designed to counter the so-called Clash of Civilizations, which is attributed to annihilating others disturbing the peace and tranquility of the world. Unlike the Clash of Civilizations, GCI proposes four crucial elements, encompassing fostering diversity and respect

among different civilizations, promoting robust cooperation and exchanges among the people, advocacy for shared values among humanity and acknowledgement of the significance of both preserving and innovating civilizations (Khalid, 2023).

In contemporary world politics, xenophobia, populism, political polarization and ultra-nationalism are stoking ideological confrontation, hatred and differences. Under such delicate circumstances, GCI would play a catalyst role in eroding political polarization, and ultra-nationalism pushing the world towards a win-win situation and mutual respect. The history of humanity is a tangible testimony, over thousands of years different civilizations fostered the development of human society and mutual respect. Every civilization accentuated diversity nor could a civilization live in isolation. Despite having differences in histories, political systems, and cultures, states instead of promoting differences advocated peace, equality, justice, freedom and development including the common values of humanity (Xinhua, 2023).

China, historically, advocated the collaboration of civilizations, mutual learning and people-to-people exchanges, which can be observed from its ancient Silk Road to the transformative Belt and Road Initiative BRI. At the current juncture, China holds significant importance for global peace, promoting stability and leaving no stone unturned to share its modernization journey with the rest of the world (Nawab, 2023). As the adage of Chinese President Jinping goes 'A single flower does not make spring, while one hundred flowers in full blossom bring spring to the garden'. The saying of XI reflects China's national revitalization, the world's modernization, coexistence, openness, tolerance, mutual learning and connectivity (Xinhua, 2022).

GCI focuses on international cooperation, ensuing in a win-win situation for each party. It underscores the promotion of civilizational values and eschewing imposing ideologies or values on others. There have been overlapping similarities between GCI and the sustainable development goals set by the United Nations UN. The UN

sustainable development goals could be accomplished by implementing GCI. Socialism with the Chinese characteristics under GCI would promote international cooperation resulting in countering the dominance of capitalist forces in international affairs (Ahmad, 2023). Against this backdrop, Chinese President XI argued that nations had to embrace the values of equality mutual learning dialogue and inclusivity among civilizations allowing cultural exchanges to overcome division, mutual learning to go beyond conflicts and inclusiveness to eliminate any notions of superiority (Yundong, 2023).

Wang Xuebin, a professor at the Party School of the CPC Central Committee says it is prerequisite to preserve civilizations' diversity and diversity would play a catalyst role for dialogue among the nations. He further maintains that due to the so-called Western hegemony, many states were trapped in a conflict of civilization that further caused polarization and hatred. (Liuliu, Qian & Yuwie, 2023). As an adage of Chinese goes 'Without achieving the good of one hundred various schools, the uniqueness of one individual cannot be achieved.' China, thus, under GCI tries to get nourishment from different civilizations to get spiritual support with the aim of addressing the mounting challenges being faced by humanity (The Global Civilization Initiative, 2023).

Climate change no doubt is an existential threat to mankind. Xi Jinping is fully cognizant of the effects of climate change and is ready to address this pressing issue. China under his leadership took momentous steps to transition to a greener and more sustainable economy. By abiding by the Paris Agreement, Beijing followed the ambitious goals encompassing peaking carbon emissions by 2030 and trying to achieve carbon neutrality by 2060. The above-mentioned pragmatic measures showcase Beijing's promise of being an environmental leader and trying to foster sustainable development on a global scale. Preserving plants for future generations remains to be seen as a top priority of Xi Jinping.

China is believed to have been a champion of eradicating poverty. More than 800 million Chinese have been lifted out of poverty, which happened first time in mankind's history. China under GCI has been applying an inclusive approach by eradicating poverty across the globe. It has been assisting and sharing experiences with the developing countries to alleviate the poverty. By fostering equitable growth and promoting inclusive policies, Beijing tries to build a global civilization to serve humanity. The prevailing era is an era of regional connectivity and robust economic growth. The GCI attaches great importance to economic integration. To promote investment trade and development the initiative is attributed to generating opportunities for economic stimulation proving instrumental in providing economic dividends to both developed and developing nations resulting in improving living standards, poverty, reduction and refining the well-being of the people across the globe (Pathak, 2023).

Beijing under GCI is playing an instrumental role in ending conflicts and moving the African nations and violent regions of the world towards peace. Beijing has more embassies than Washington in African continent and invested more than the US in the region. The African nations since the end of the Cold War entered into globalization but did not experience peace. Beijing is committed to nurturing fairness, harmony, win-win collaboration, and empathy among civilizations and negating external expansion and plundering.

The African continent was colonized by the West witnessed exploitation and persecution of the West. The continent at the current juncture desperately needs peace and development, which could be implemented by promoting GCI. Beijing's vision of the community with a shared future for humankind under GCI would embark on a path to lasting peace and human advancement for the African continent in general and the world in particular (Liu, 2023). The idea appeared in 2011 in Chinese diplomacy that later obtained content and substance and presented innovative interpretations since 2017 when Chinese President Xi Jinping's speech at the United Nations

named Work Together to Build a Community of Shared Future for Mankind (Jinping, 2017).

The phrase in 2017 was incorporated in the Constitution of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). It turned out to be the main component of China's foreign policy. The Chinese political discourse believes that the phrase encompasses the idea of building an inclusive, open, spectacular and clear world that enjoys common prosperity, lasting peace and universal security. It also gives instructive and persuasive answers to the international community that is confronted with growing turbulence, polarization, inequality, fragmentation and xenophobia (Xinhua, 2020). China has vigorously been projecting this vision in public diplomacy. The vision, most considerably, has been endorsed in various UN resolutions correlated with international peace and security. China regards it as a milestone and believes that its vision is being translated into international consensus. The vision of China is believed to have been the latest concept of China's grand strategy of peaceful rise and is also recognized to promote its soft power (Zhang, 2023).

### **Democracy vs Autocracy: Battle of the West and East**

Like the Clash of Civilizations, the West has mostly been embroiled in waging an ideational war vis-à-vis China. The US during the Cold War disintegrated the Soviet Union based on ideational war by triggering the battle of Capitalism vs Communism. Presently, authoritarian regimes of China and Russia are the only game in the town in the US foreign policy. Washington is unwilling to shun the Cold War mentality and has been actively engaged in an ideational war against China calling it an authoritarian regime posing grave threat to the Western values. The US President Biden while addressing his countrymen expressed that I predict that your children or grandchildren may find themselves researching for their doctoral theses on the question of which prevailed, autocracy or democracy as that is the central issue in question (Sanger, 2023). He is of the view that democratic capitalism is still an applicable system and is superior to other systems. Biden believes that China under the leadership of XI

has been ruthlessly trying to impose autocracy at home and extending its system across the world. Biden has morphed ideational war into material war and is trying to counter China's Belt and Road Initiative BRI by initiating Build Back Better World (B3W).

Mr. Biden argues democratic countries are supposed to have similar initiative supporting democratic communities across the globe. To be fair, BRI is solely funded by China. In this mega project, there are more than 154 signatories, those who are not in BRI are perceived to be in the minority. B3D compared to BRI faces many hardships in its execution and is funded by different players having divergence of interests. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century winning the battle of democracy vs autocracy remains to be seen as the top priority of Biden to revitalise democracy and rebuild the nation. Resultantly, it will pave the way for political polarization between East and West and is likely to espouse the trajectory of the Cold War either to join the capitalist or communist bloc. The 21<sup>st</sup> century cannot be ruled by implementing the canon of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Promoting ideational war against the East in the era of globalization would prove counterproductive for the US. John Ikenberry rightly argues that the US under the patronage of promoting liberal international order intervened too much but unfortunately regulated too little and delivered less than it pledged. The innovative idea of promoting a world safe for democracy needs a thorough reassessment and requires more concentration for collective institutions in a bid to protect modern societies from violent storms of modernity (Ikenberry, 2020).

There is a deeply embedded crisis in liberal democracy like polarization, populism, inequality, corruption, and xenophobia. The exclusionary approach of the West has been damaging Western values. The 'America First' slogan by former US president Trump and exiting the US from the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPP), withdrawal from the Paris Climate Agreement, and threatening and leaving WHO spawned a leadership crisis in the international arena. Joseph Nye said that he was unconcerned about the rise of China and was more worried about the rise of Trump.

(Allison, 2018). Meanwhile, Fukuyama said that the US political decay ostensibly was augmented in the presidency of Trump (Fukuyama, 2021).

Lind and Wohlforth advised the US policymakers to shun the revisionist post-Cold War liberal order and urged them to make the liberal order more conservative to address the growing crisis in liberal democracy. Persevering the gains achieved by the US and its partners is more important than expanding the liberal order as it is confronted with innumerable challenges. A renowned offensive realist John Mearsheimer maintains to remake the world, liberal democracies have no choice but to make tiny steps to promote their liberal democracy as they are witnessing a fiasco in the liberal political order in the post-Cold War era.

Mearsheimer reiterates the US should be more concerned about serving its national interest. President Biden in the Summit of Democracy in December 2021 demonstrated an exclusive alliance of democracies would work together to make a viable global order. Arguably, such an exclusive and divisive alliance would cause damage to democracy and also threaten global order and remain to be seen as unsuccessful in solving major challenges humanity is facing. Divisive democracy is unable to flourish due to the climate change that has engulfed the entire world in its grip. It requires an inclusive and pragmatic approach that is lacking in the US political discourse (Mearsheimer, 2019). The so-called Biden Doctrine to win the momentous battle with autocracies in the 21<sup>st</sup> century would stoke further insecurity for those outside the charmed sphere of so-called self-identified liberal democracies intensifying the US rivalry with China and Russia cementing populism, divisive politics and slogan of 'us or against with us' (Slaughter, 2021).

John Ikenberry is of the view that the projection of illiberal ways outside the boundaries of liberal democracies dominating and interfering and embroiling in battle with autocracy will pave the way for countering initiatives of the authoritarian powers impelling them to forge alliances to make the world unsafe for democracy (Manning,

2021). Meanwhile, a Pew Research Centre survey conducted in March 2021 claimed that merely 20 per cent of people in the US were in support of projecting liberal democracy across the globe. Admittedly, the world is no longer dominated by the West in terms of ideationally and materially. The East dominates the world in the above-mentioned domains. The rising China advocates a distinctive form of capitalism for the mankind first time witnessing such an economic and political system. The West must bring home the reality and learn from China that world politics is shifting from West to East and should mutually address the issues of international politics (Ikenberry, 2020).

## CONCLUSION

The Clash of Civilizations theory possesses many shortcomings. It has been castigated by the experts by oversimplifying international politics revolving merely around waging clashes among civilizations, overlooking the role of economy, politics and military in international politics. The excessive deliberation of cultural essentialism in the theory could lead to stereotypes and misunderstandings about the Eastern and Islamic civilizations. Admittedly, the theory lacks empirical evidence to support the arguments with concrete data. The over-estimation and biased Western-centric approach and showcasing the Western civilization as the protagonist would lead to misapprehension about other civilizations. Most worrisomely, the theory instead of providing mutual understanding among civilizations to resolve international issues amicably gives misunderstanding and misperception about non-Western civilizations. The great power competition is underway between the US and China. None of the international issues remains immune to their rivalry. The Clash of Civilizations will further exacerbate the ties of Beijing and Washington reinforcing conflict between the West and the East that will have a great deal of ramification for the international politics.

Meanwhile, the GCI is designed to counter the so-called Clash of Civilizations which is attributed to annihilating others disturbing the

peace and tranquillity of the world. Unlike the Clash of Civilizations, GCI proposes four crucial elements, encompassing fostering diversity and respect among different civilizations, promoting robust cooperation and exchanges among the people, advocacy for shared values among humanity and acknowledgement of the significance of both preserving and innovating civilizations. GCI focuses on international cooperation, resulting in a win-win situation for each party. It underscores the promotion of civilizational values and eschewing imposing ideologies or values on others. There have been overlapping similarities between GCI and the sustainable development goals set by the United Nations UN. In short, the Clash of Civilizations is posited to create, civilizational differences, over-estimation of Western values, divisive politics, and xenophobia. While, GCI fosters civilizational ties, openness, plurality and shunning imposing ideologies or values on others.

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