

RISALE-I NUR AS THE MODEL TEXT OF ASIAN VALUE SYSTEM

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Abstrak

Artikel sederhana ini ditulis untuk menggali beberapa elemen penting dari dua peradaban, yaitu dunia Islam dan Asia Timur yang berasal dari pernyataan-pernyataan dan pemikiran-pemikiran Bediuzzaman Said Nursi. Sampai saat ini, Islam dan masyarakat muslim terutama di Asia Timur sering dipersepsikan sebagai pembentuk kebudayaan yang bertentangan dengan budaya bangsa Barat. Seorang pakar terkemuka yaitu Huntington dalam bukunya mengajukan tesis bahwa pada suatu saat nanti akan terjadi benturan peradaban. Namun ini semua akan tertepis dengan pemikiran Bediuzzaman Said Nursi. Menurut beliau ada beberapa keterkaitan antara kebudayaan Islam dan masyarakat Asia Timur selain juga kedua kebudayaan tersebut saling berinteraksi secara positif dan sinergis. Belum lagi masikannya nilai-nilai spiritual yang tinggi dengan dibuktikan banyaknya agama yang lahir dan dianut masyarakatnya. Salah satu agama yang mempunyai pengaruh kuat di Asia Timur terhadap kebudayaan adalah Islam. Inilah yang dibuktikan dalam artikel singkat ini.

تهدف الباحث إلى إظهار العناصر المهمة من الحضارتين : حضارة العالم الإسلامي وحضارة شرق آسيا منطلقاً من الأطروحة التي قدمها بديع الزمان سعيد النورسي. والمجتمع الإسلامي خصوصاً في منطقة شرق آسيا إلى عصرنا الحاضر اهتم بأنما تشكل الثقافة ضد الثقافة الغربية وصرح هانتعتون أن الحضارة الإسلامية تتصادم وتتعارض مع الحضارة الغربية، إلا أن هذا القول مرفوض لأن الحضارة الإسلامية كما قدمها النورسي ذو علاقة وثيقة مع حضارة شرق آسيا وتتفاعل وتتأثر بشكل إيجابي مع الحضارة الغربية إضافة إلى تدخل المبادئ الأخلاقية فيها لكون منطقة شرق آسيا معروفة بأرض الأنبياء ومنشأ الأديان من بينها الحنيف التي تؤثر تشكيل الحضارة في تلك المنطقة.

Keywords: *Risale-I Nur, model text, Asian value system*

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A. Introduction

Civilizations ordinarily affect and transform one another. The give and-take among civilizations is the norm of history. Civilizations always feed on the work of previous civilizations, appropriating and digesting all that fits their needs, dispensing with all that does not. In this sense, Islam also played a kind of Civilization Bridge between Eastern and Western civilizations by introducing Europeans to the achievements of Greek thought and philosophy, while by contributing a lot to the progress of East Asian culture and history. The idea of Islam as the “middle nation” is not a later invention that is made long after it has established itself as an empire, a world religion, a world civilization. That idea is also to be found in Islam’s holy book, al-Qur’ân (2:143). The notion of “middle nation” is a key concept in the understanding of the civilization nature and identity of Islam. Under the notion of “middle ness”, through the 1400 years’ Islamic history, Islam clearly showed the wisdom of ethnic and cultural pluralism, inter-cultural cooperation in the pursuit of the common good for all mankind and a common responsibility for the protection of human society. The notion of “middle ness” is the basic teaching of Confucianism¹ on which East Asian culture is absolutely relies.

B. Cultural Relations between Islam and East Asia

Cultural contact between Islamic world and East Asian countries (China proper-Korea-Japan) are believed to be initiated as early as the first Hejira century, middle of the 7th century AD, and continued till recently without showing any conflicts or antagonism. Not surprisingly, Islam in the East Asia has been characterized all through the ages by an attempt to retain its identity as a religious minority while adopting many of the outward forms of the surrounding local culture and ways of life. Only when the tension between two divergent factors has become too great, Muslim community has broken out into rebellion, particularly against Chinese regime of Ch’ing dynasty (1644-1912).

As a general rule, in contact between cultures, material objects are taken over by the guest culture earlier than non-material characteristics. Tools and clothing, for example, are adopted by the recipient culture before religious ideas and social orga-

¹ Confucius was born in 551 BC in China. He lived during the Chou dynasty, and era known for its moral laxity. Later in life, he wandered through many states of China, giving advice to their rulers. He accumulated a small band of students during this time. The last years of his life were spent back in Lu, where he devoted himself to teaching. His writings deal primarily with individual morality and ethics, and the proper exercise of political power by the rulers. In China, and some other areas in Asia, the social ethics and moral teachings of Confucius are blended with the Taoist communion with nature and Buddhist concepts of the afterlife, to form a set of complementary, peacefully co-existent and ecumenical religions. There are approximately 6 million Confucians in the world. About 26,000 live in North America; almost all of the remainder are found throughout China, Korea and the rest of Asia.

nizations. Under the stress of the assimilatory factors, Muslims in China, Korea and Japan were responsive mainly to host culture, but were insistent on forbidding of spiritual and ideological acculturation.

Most of historians use the year of 651 AD as the first intromission of Islam in China. But it is quite possible that there were frequent intercourse between Chinese and Muslims even before 651 AD, for commercial relations between Arabia and China had been established long before ago. The best known legend among Chinese Muslims is the coming to China and burying in Canton of Sa'd bin Abi Waqqas, famous Islamic commander and the close companion of the Prophet. (But we cannot find any reliable evidence that lends credence to the above legend)

In the 9th century, the Muslim population reached more than hundred thousand along the coast of the South-East China. They could establish their own communities called Fan Fang, where they could preserve religious and ethnic identity. Qadi and Sheikh were chosen by local Muslims to live in according to the Islamic law and custom.

Further, the Chinese defeat by the Arab forces in the Talas War (751) became a historic moment upon which the Islamic religion with its culture was widely spread in China-occupied Central Asia, even in Inner China, while the Chinese technology of paper making was transmitted to the Islamic world and afterward to Europe by Chinese prisoners of the War, The relations between Muslims and Koreans can be traced back the 9th century or earlier, even some Korean sources wrote Muslim merchants arrived in Korea in 1024 AD. for the first time. In spite of the records of Korean sources, it is very likely that Korean peoples came into contact with Muslims before the 9th century through various channels.

These facts can be borne out by references to the Korean kingdom Shilla (57 BC-935 AD) found in 20 manuscripts of Islamic sources written between 9-16th century by 17 Muslim scholars such as Ibn Khurdadbih, Sulaiman al-Tajir, Mas'udi, etc. Ibn Khurdadbih was the first Muslim scholar who informed of Muslims' residence in Shilla Korea. The books of Mas'udi, Shamsuddin Dimashiqi, Ahmad al-Nuwayri and al-Maqrizi also give similar information on Muslim's activities in Korea. But nobody wrote about Muslims' return from Korea.

With the advent of Mongol empire in Asia, the great number of Central Asian Muslims was invited to the Mongol court as assistant group to Mongol masters. Through vitalized Silk-Roads under Mongol security, advanced-Islamic culture together with other Central Asian culture was introduced into China. The Yuan China was benefited to a great extent by Islamic astronomy, medicine, calendar science, architecture, weaponry, etc.

At the same time, in Korea under Mongol intervention, we understand many Turkic Muslims settled down permanently and assimilated to Korean society thanks

to the preferential treatment toward Muslims and profitable economic advantages. Muslims in Korea formed their own communities in the capital and its outskirts, where they could keep on their own cultural customs and tradition as well as Islamic religious occasions. They possessed their own shops selling native products in the main street of the capital. They even built Mosques to be called Yekung (Ceremonial Palace). Moreover Muslim leaders had exceptional honor to be invited to attend court ceremonies where they might practice their own religious rituals such as Qu'ran recitation to pray for king's long life and the prosperity of the country.

After 1427, however, under the assimilation policy of the new dynasty of the Chosun (1392-1910), Muslim settlers in Korea shed gradually their native attire, custom and rituals. In the meantime, high cultural and scientific achievements by Muslims introduced into Korea. From 15th century, commercial dominance in East Asia passed into European's hands from Muslims, while new dynasty of Ming in China stressed the importance of indigenous identity which had a somewhat bad effect on the Muslim's upgrading. With influence of these far-reaching political and commercial changes in East Asia, no more remarkable activities of Muslims appeared until the late 19th century.

C. Modern Islamic Activities in the East Asia

Islamic activities in East Asia became again vigorous with Pan-Islamic policy of Ottoman Sultans. Since the official Ottoman delegation headed by Enver Pasha was sent to China in 1901, between 1902-1909 many Muslim high figures of the Ottoman Empire were engaged in Pan-Islamic propaganda in China and Japan. They could even open an Islamic college in Peking under Sultan's patronage. Meanwhile Abdul Rashid Ibrahim, one of the patriotic Pan-Islamist of Russian Turkistan came to Japan and Korea to initiate certain Islamic propagation. He wrote a travel account named "Alem-i Islam" (Islamic World).

Islamic activities in pre-modern times in East Asia were started with coming of Russian Turkistan came to East Asia (Manchuria, Korea, Japan) in 1920s who had escaped from pressure of Russian Bolshevik regime. Around 250 peoples of Central Asian Muslims, mostly Kazan Turks, made permanent settlement in Korea, while 400 Turks resided in Japan and several thousands of Turks scattered in every corner of Manchuria. They formed own communities, opened schools, built Mosques, possessed Muslim cemetery. They enjoyed themselves by the profitable regional trade between Manchuria - Korea - Japan.

Modern Muslim community in Korea appeared in 1955 by another group of Turkish Muslims who had participated in the Korean War (1950-1953). These Turkish soldiers, besides their duties to defend peace and freedom, propagated Islam by which the first Korean Muslims opened new era for Islam in Korea. Now in Korea,

there are 5 Mosques with 40,000 local and 50,000-60,000 Foreign Muslims.

D. Islam in Asia and the Future

Through 1400 years' Islamic history, the culture of tolerance is the hallmark of Islam, particularly in Asia. According to T.W. Arnold, in his book *The Preaching of Islam*:

“...there is evidence enough to show the existence of peaceful missionary efforts to spread the faith of Islam during the last 1400 years. Preaching and persuasion rather than force and violence have been the main characteristics of this missionary movement.”²

This peaceful and gradual Islamization gave valuable opportunity to the East Asians cosmopolitan, open-minded, tolerant and amenable to cultural diversity. So, relations between Muslims and non-Muslim Asians must be governed by moral and ethical considerations.

In East Asia, full freedom of religion is guaranteed by the constitution. It can be said that East Asian peoples are not much negative toward Muslims and their contribution to national interest. Because from the viewpoint of national interest, she needs friendly relations with Islamic countries including oil-rich Islamic world. The greatest difficulty and obstacle for Muslims in this region might be widespread misconception which is systemically fabricated by western mass-media. Islam and its culture, particularly the matter of polygamy, the status of the Prophet, militarism, Islamic fundamentalism, etc. are seriously distorted in many reference books and even official text books.

In spite of certain obstacles, the future of Islam-East Asia relations seems to be very optimistic due to such several reasons as Islamic and Confucian tolerance toward other civilization, the notion of Muslim Brotherhood, economic-political concern on Muslim world with more than 1.5 billion population, growing keen interest in Islamic value system as alternative to capitalism or socialism. Moreover, many aspects of the East Asian Confucian tradition value system are in agreement with Islamic principles, furthermore historically there has existed friendly relations between East Asia and Islamic world from the first Hijra century.

E. Common Values Described in the Risale-i Nur

1. Key points of the Teachings of Risale-i Nur

Risale-i Nur is a Qur'anic commentary providing the truths of beliefs by a method developed by Bediuzzaman Said Nursi. It blends science and the truths of

² T.W. Arnold (n.d), *The Preaching of Islam*.

religion and uniquely addressed the mentality of modern men. The Risale-i Nur had unparalleled success in strengthening belief and combating atheism and materialist philosophy, so that by the 1950's it had hundreds of thousands of "Nur Talebeleri" in Turkey and abroad.

The Principles and basic thought of Risale-i Nur written by Bediuzaman Said Nursi in many parts are parallel with East Asian value system.

Divine Guidance of Islamic civilization includes following virtues which are almost same virtue of East Asian's based on Confucian basic teachings (Canan:53).

1. Work in the heart
2. Illuminates the spirits
3. Develops the potentialities
4. Illuminates nature
5. Expands the spiritual capacities
6. Makes the zealous into angels
7. Makes the soul and the body servants
8. Produces happiness in this world and the next.

For Said Nursi, the enemy of human happiness and ethical uprightness is unbelief and irreligion. It is people deciding to find their own path through life, not seeking Divine Guidance, not caring about God's will or wise design for human-kind, not wishing to give up their own pet desires and ideas to submit to God's teaching about human nature and destiny.

As is clear, Bediuzzaman recommends not absolute freedom, but freedom within the limits of Islam. According to him, this beneficial freedom can be entered upon by five doors:

First Door: the union of hearts, that is, union of belief and hearts.

Second Door: love of the nation.

Third Door: education.

Fourth Door: human endeavor.

Fifth Door: the giving up of dissipation."

2. The Damascus Sermon

Bediuzzaman visited Damascus in early 1911, where he gave historic sermon to ten thousand people, including one hundred ulema. The text of the sermon was afterwards printed twice in one week. The Sermon is in the form of "Six Words" taken from "the pharmacy of the Qur'an", which constitute the cure or medicine for the "six dire sicknesses" which Bediuzzaman had diagnosed as having arrested the development of the Islamic world. He described it as follows:

"In the conditions of the present time in these lands, I have learnt a lesson in the school of mankind's social life and I have realized that what has allowed

Europeans to fly towards the future on progress while it arrested us and kept us, in respect of material development, in the Middle Ages are six dire sicknesses.

The sicknesses are these:

“First, the coming to life and rise of despair and hopelessness in social life. Second, the death of truthfulness in social and political life. Third, love of enmity. Fourth, not knowing the luminous bonds that bind the believers to one another. Fifth, despotism, which spreads like various contagious diseases. Sixth, restricting endeavor to what is personally beneficial.”

Bediuzzaman had started by quoting the verse: Do not despair of God’s mercy, and the Hadith: “I came to perfect good moral qualities”, which provide the theme of the six Words of which the Sermon is composed.

In a short, in the Damascus Sermon, Said Nursi pointed out the importance of truthfulness at his the Third Word. This, says Bediuzzaman, is the basis and foundation of Islam. Truthfulness and honesty are the principles of Islam’s social life. Hypocrisy, flattery and artifice, duplicity and double-dealing are all forms of lying. Unbelief in all its varieties is lying and falsehood, while belief is truthfulness and honesty. For this reason, there is limitless distance between truth and falsehood. Like fire and light, they should not enter one another. But politics and propaganda have mixed and confused them, and as a result have confused man’s achievements. Also salvation, he told them, is only to be found through honesty.³

3. Confucian Basic thought comparing to Risale-i Nur

The core of Confucianism is all attributed to the Master. The range of topics is wide, Ritual and Sacrifice; The Individual Path; Goodness; Aesthetics; Government and A Gentleman’s Conduct. A few excerpts and paraphrases follow:

“Just as lavishness leads easily to presumption, so does frugality to meanness. But meanness is a far less serious fault than presumption.”

“Is courage to be prized by a gentleman? A gentleman gives the first place to Right. If a gentleman has courage but neglects Right, he becomes turbulent. If a small man has courage but neglects Right, he becomes a thief.”

“It is Goodness that gives to a neighborhood its beauty. ... Imperturbable, resolute, tree-like, slow to speak - such a one is near to Goodness. Neither the scholar who has truly the heart of a scholar nor the man of good stock who has the qualities that belong to good stock, will ever seek life at the expense of Goodness, and it may be that he has to give his life in order to achieve Goodness.”

³ Sukran Vahide (1992), *Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*, Istanbul, p.102.

“There are three things that a gentleman fears: he fears the will of Heaven, he fears great men, and he fears the words of the Divine Sages. The small man does not know the will of Heaven and so does not fear it. He treats great men with contempt, and he scoffs at the words of the Divine Sages.”

“Wealth and rank are what every man desires, but if they can only be retained to the detriment of the Way he professes, he must relinquish them. Poverty and obscurity are what every man detests, but if they can only be avoided to the detriment of the Way he professes, he must accept them. ... Never for a moment does a gentleman quit the way of Goodness. He is never so harried but that he cleaves to this; never so tottering but that he cleaves to this.”

In short, Confucian ethical teachings include the following values:

1. Li: includes ritual, propriety, etiquette, etc.
2. Hsiao: love within the family: love of parents for their children and of children for their parents
3. Yi: righteousness
4. Xin: honesty and trustworthiness
5. Jen: benevolence, humaneness towards others; the highest Confucian virtue
6. Chung: loyalty to the state, etc.

The keynote of Confucian ethics is jen, variously translated as “love,” “goodness,” “humanity,” and “human-heartedness.” Jen is a supreme virtue representing human qualities at their best. In human relations, construed as those between one person and another, jen is manifested in chung, or faithfulness to oneself and others, and shu, or altruism, best expressed in the Confucian golden rule, “Do not do to others what you do not want done to yourself.” Other important Confucian virtues include righteousness, propriety, integrity, and filial piety. One who possesses all these virtues becomes a chun-tzu (perfect gentleman).

In the practical daily life East Asian peoples still under strong influence of Confucian philosophy and basic maxim. The essence of relationships is fivefold, and fundamental to his social order: ruler and subject; father and son; husband and wife; older brother and younger brother; older friend and younger friend. The ideal of conduct, ordering all human relationships and resulting in an ideal social structure and harmony is: li.

His disciples later on developed ten attitudes that are to govern the five relationships: love in father and filial piety in the son; gentility in the oldest brother and humility and respect in the younger; righteous behavior in the husband and obedience in the wife; humane consideration elders and deference in juniors; benevolence in rulers and loyalty in subjects.

Confucian philosophy is somewhat similar to that of Plato, which held that

the universe constituted of li or abstract form and ch'i, matter. One might think of this dualism as similar to the concepts of soul and body of Western philosophy and religion. Li, however, did not consist of individual souls, but was a group of archetypes, one for each form of existence. In applying this doctrine to practical affairs, Chu Hsi, the great Chinese scholar of Confucian philosophy, said that li of man's nature is basically good, and that it can be cultivated through education to produce virtuous conduct. This in bare outline was the philosophy on which Korean thinkers speculated.

F. Progress of Modern Science and Preservation of Spiritual Value

1. From Western Model to East Asian Model in the Progress on Science and Technology

Said Nursi argued strongly that science and technology, which are beneficial for mankind, should be acquired in civilization, and he opposed vice and evils, which are harmful, to the same degree:

“You should understand that what I mean are the good things that are civilization's virtues and its benefits for mankind. Not its iniquities and evils that idiots have imagined to be its virtues and imitating them have devastated our possessions. And even giving religion as a bribe they have not gained the world.”⁴

It must not be thought that Said Nursi is some kind of anti-modern traditionalist who seeks to turn back the clock. He recognizes that there are numerous virtues in modern civilization. These positive values were not solely the products of Europe, but are the property of all humankind and arise from the combined thought of East and West and Islamic world. With such positive values of modern civilization, religious people have no quarrel. Rather, they accept and rejoice in the benefits this civilization brings to humankind. According to Said Nursi, however, Western civilization which is based on philosophy and emerges from the human genius, and Islamic civilization which springs from Divine Revelation, are different and separate in such a way that they cannot be reconciled in their basic principles and have no shared sides. He suggested such five fundamental wheels to make civilization turn as point of support, aim, principle of life, tie between communities, fruits by which he characterized western civilization.

1. Its point of support is force.
2. Its aim is benefit and self-interest
3. Its principle of life is conflicts

⁴Tarice-i Hayat, p.79

4. Its tie between communities is racialism and negative nationalism
5. Its fruits are gratifying the appetites of the soul and increasing the needs of human kind, and facilitating the satisfaction of those needs.

“However, the mark of force is aggression. The mark of benefit (since it is insufficient for every desire) is jostling and tussling. While the mark of conflict is strife. And the mark of racialism (since it is to be nourished by devouring others) is aggression. Thus, it is for these reasons that it has negated the happiness of mankind.”⁵

“As for other religions, it is quite to the contrary. That is to say, history shows that just as they increased in civilization and progressed in relation to their weakness in adhering to their religions and bigotry, so were they also subject to decline and revolution to the degree of their strength in adhering to them”

Thus in contradistinction to other religions, Islam has the capacity to progress, it contains within it everything necessary to achieve true civilization. And it is significant that this acute observation was made not only by a non-Muslim, but Japanese. For the Japanese were held up many supporters of constitutionalism as an example to be followed in their taking only science and technology from the west in their drive for progress and civilization while retaining their own culture and morality. Following this, Bediuzzaman continued his argument by stating that history presents no evidence for any Muslims having embraced other religions on the strength of reason, whereas as a result of “reasoned argument and certain proof”, the followers of other religions are “gradually close to and entering Islam”.

Bediuzzaman then lays this challenge before the believers pointing out the great possibility of Islamization of world peoples, in particular Asian peoples on the ways of morality and seeking truth.

“If we were to display through our actions the perfections of the moral qualities of Islam and the truth of belief, without doubt, the followers of other religions would enter Islam in whole communities; rather, some entire regions and states, even, on the globe of the earth would take refuge in Islam.”

“Europe and America are pregnant with Islam. One day, they will rise birth to an Islamic state. Just as the Ottomans were pregnant with Europe and give birth to a European state.”

Continuing he says;

“Powerful indication and means to the future supremacy of Asian civilization are the fact that European civilization is founded on the negative virtues of lust and passion, rivalry and oppression, rather than virtue and guidance, that its evils have predominated over its virtues, and that it has been infiltrated by revolutionary societies like a worm-eaten tree.”

⁵ Ibrahim Canan (1993), *“Bediuzzaman Said Nursi’s View of Civilization”* Panel 1: Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, Istanbul.P.50

2. Said Nursi's saying on Korea and Korean Value

In addition to continuing the struggle against communism and irreligion within Turkey, Bediuzzaman supported the decision to send Turkish troops to Korea to fight the communist invasion from the north, and was delighted when his close student Bayram Yuksel was to be sent there in 1951 during his military service, saying; "I wanted to send a Risale-i Nur Student to Korea, and was thinking of either you or Ceylan. It is necessary to go to Korea to fight against atheism there." Bediuzzaman also supported Turkey joining NATO. He gave Bayram Yuksel his own *Cevsenu'l-Kebir* prayer book and some parts of the *Risale-i Nur* to give to the Commander-in-Chief of the Japanese army Yuksel went to Korea with Bediuzzaman's blessing, and fighting in some of the fiercest battles of the war, came out unscathed. He also visited Japan, and gave the parts of the *Risale-i Nur* to the National Library in Tokyo, since the Commander-in-Chief had departed this life some years previously.

In traditional Korea, the typical family was large with several generations usually living together. Many children were desired for stability and security and there were often a dozen or more family members. With modernization, however, such large families are disappearing,

Said Nursi says that because Western civilization is based on these negative foundations it has brought bad characteristics like wastefulness, poverty, idleness, egotism.

Islamic civilization had to be raised to life again. While doing this, we should take the virtues of the West, like science and technology, but we should not take their way of life, their vices, and their immorality. He called out like this:

"O sons of this land! Do not try to imitate Europeans! How can you reasonably trust in and follow the vice and invalid, worthless though of Europe after the boundless tyranny and enmity it has shown you? No! No! You who imitate them in dissipation, you are not following them, but unconsciously joining their ranks and putting to death both yourselves and your brothers. Know that the more you follow them in immorality the more you lie in claiming to be patriots! Because your following them in this way is to hold the nation up to ridicule!"

We can explain Bediuzzaman frequently discussing a civilization that will embrace humanity through his belief that it will come about. According to him, mankind will enter Islam in masses, the skies of the future and the continent of Asia will surrender to Islam's clean and stainless hand. The events that the Prophet told of, "Hazret-i Isa will descend to the earth, kill the Dajjal, and perform the prayers behind the Mehdi," are the Christian world entering Islam. According to Bediuzzaman, those days are close, and he was preparing the ground for such a

future. In which case, he did not see his mission is being limited to the Muslims of Turkey or the Islam world. He understood it to embrace all humanity. The treatises, *Tabiat Risalesi* (Nature: Cause or Effect) and *Ayetu'l-Kubra* (The Supreme Sign) do not address only Muslims; they address mankind needy for universal peace and form a few of the foundation stones of mankind's civilization of the future.

3. Japan Model and Islamic Possibilities in Asia By Said Nursi

Said Nursi stressed and advocated following the Japanese model in taking what is beneficial from western civilization. He wanted the Japanese to be taken as examples in progress. He noted that in taking science and technology they had remained bound to their own national customs and practice. His ideas on Japan and Asian Value can be found some official quarters addressed in the famous Damascus Sermon:

“We have to follow the Japanese in acquiring civilization, for together with taking from Europe the virtues of civilization, they preserved their national customs which are every people's means of perpetuating themselves. Since our national customs developed within Islam, we have to embrace them in two respects”⁶

In many parts of *Risale-i Nur*, he admired the East Asian thinking and ways of life quoting the Commander-in-Chief of the Japanese army, who in 1905 had defeated Russia at war.

“History shows that the Muslims increased in civilization and progressed in relation to the strength of the truth of Islam; that is, to the degree that they acted in accordance with that strength. And history also shows that they fell into savagery and decline, and disaster and defeat amidst utter confusion to the degree of their weakness in adhering to the truth of Islam. Said Nursi then points out;

In a Korea home, the head of the family was traditionally regarded as the source of authority. The head of the family issued strict instructions and others obeyed them without demur. Obedience to the superior was considered natural and one of the most admirable virtues. It was understood that the patriarch of the family would be fair in dealing with all family members.

Koreans have traditionally believed that a man must first cultivate himself and manage his family properly before he can govern the nation. Men have traditionally been given the responsibility of representing, supporting and protecting the family, as well as the nation. Men have traditionally been given the family, as well as the power to command. Order at home is maintained through obedience to superi-

⁶ *Asar-i Bediiyye*, p. 350.

ors, that is, children obeying parents, the wife the husband, the servants the master, and so on. This Confucian decorum has dominated Korea life and way of thinking over the centuries and is still respected in all forms of human relations.

Korea still place great emphasis on filial piety to parents and ancestors, fidelity to spouse and faithfulness to friends, although loyalty to the ruler and respect for teachers appear to have more or less lost their reigning importance among the five most esteemed ethical values in traditional society. Korean fables and legends abound with episodes of filial sons and daughters as well as faithful wives who even risked their lives to prove their loyalty to family.

4. Education Reform of Said Nursi and Educational Priority In East Asia

Education is key point in the East Asian value system. The first teaching of Confucius is the education, saying, "Learning and practice are not compared with any other joyfulness and satisfaction". Lee Hwang, the great Korean Confucian scholar of 16th century asserted that the proper cultivation of II through education would automatically produce the five Confucian virtues: love, uprightness, propriety, knowledge, and reliability.

Education is the most important national policy in Korea and Japan. This was true for many centuries in the past when the states examination was the main venue for recruiting government officials. Success in the exam was the most honorable and surest road to success. In modern Korea and Japan, education is still considered as of prime importance because it produces the manpower needed for economic and technological advancement.

For Said Nursi, education is also the most essential element to cultivate people, since the people remain in a primitive state, uncivilized and blindly imitating, they become prey to doubt and suspicions. Moreover these disorder and ignorance invites the West to rejoice at their misfortune⁷. Said Nursi's ideas on educational reform which were presented to Sultan Abdulhamid II were far reaching and innovative.

On a human level, Bediuzzaman saw religion as representing the heart and conscience, and science, the reason. Both were necessary for true progress to be attained. He explained as follows:

"The religious sciences are the light of the conscience, and the modern sciences are the light of the reason. The truth becomes manifest through the combining the two. The students' endeavor will take flight on these two wings. When they are separated it gives rise to bigotry in the one, and wiles and skepticism in the other."

Furthermore Bediuzzaman stressed the importance of public opinion among

⁷Vahide, *Ibid*, p,19.

ulemas and students. He believed scholastic despotism as an offspring of political despotism may open the way to blind imitation (*taqlid*), and barred the way to searching for the truth.

G. Concluding Remarks

Through history, Islam played a central mediating role by introducing East Asians to the highest scientific and academic achievement of Muslims. At the same time, East Asian technology and philosophy penetrated into Muslim world through the Silk Roads. Thus Islamic-East Asian interactions were mostly peaceful. Thus, Samuel Huntington argues that an Islamic-Confucian alliance is likely to emerge in the future to challenge western civilization. This argument is partially tenable. Huntington is not far away from reality when he claims that there are similarities and potential common interests between the Muslim world and the East Asian world. For centuries, both worlds interacted with each other in a positive framework as we evaluated the historical mutual relations. This was essential point for mutual cooperation because of the common cultural values and trade interests. Further, the Asians and Muslims both experienced the consequences of the Western imperialist scramble on Asia in the century, and fought similar battles against different forms of imperialism. So, one may understand the grounds on which Huntington believes that Islamic-East Asian connection may emerge. This result may threaten the westerners. In our view, however, Huntington is mistaken. The context of contemporary relations between East Asia and the Islamic world, will not be necessarily directed against the West or militate against Western interests. Many East Asian nations and Muslim countries have benefited from Western technology and experience, and they still have a lot to learn from the West. The Muslim-East Asian worlds have nothing to gain from an all-out confrontation with the West.

Now days, however, the challenge of environmental decay, population explosion, new epidemic diseases and poverty, call for a new approach based upon dialogue rather than confrontation. The most prominent contribution in this respect is the call initiated by UN and some Muslim leaders for the sake of tolerance and dialogue among civilization. This emphasis on tolerance and dialogue being one of the most crucial mechanisms for defending peace.

Today, when much of the rest of the world is laboring under a cloud of pessimism, Asia is fired by new sense of confidence. The economic rise of Asia is only a dimension of a much deeper, more profound and far-reaching reawakening of the continent which may be called the Asian Renaissance. In fact, Asia's economic progress is a boon because it has enabled Asia to rediscover its soul and to reconstruct its civilizations. Inevitably this process will necessitate civilization dialogue between the east and the West.

For all the above, Islam is a religion of tolerance and Islamic civilization usually respects the rights of others and freedom and has a positive attitude toward others. In this concern, it is the very time to review and reflect mutual relations and cultural confluence in history between Islamic world and East Asia. Surely it leads to mutual benefit and world peace.

Surprisingly, these basic philosophy and guidance can be found in the Risale-i Nur to a great extent. The Risale-i Nur is almost comprehensive source book for the East Asia for his most desirable direction to new life. Islamic principles explained by Said Nursi in the Risale-i Nur are more attractive than any other traditional ways of old ulemas.

In the Damascus Sermon, "the First word is Hope", Badiuzzaman sets forth the reasons his optimism concerning the future of the Islamic world. It consists of "one and a half preliminary arguments" to support his "firm conviction" that "the future shall be Islam's and Islam's alone, and the truths of the Qur'an and belief shall be sovereign." The premises of his arguments are that "the truths of Islam are able to progress both materially, and in moral and non-material matters, and possess a perfect capacity to do so."

That is to say, Said Nursi is saying that Islamic supremacy will be won through the material and technological progress achieved through the unity and cooperation of all the different components, that is, the groups and peoples that make up the Islamic world.

It is very time to rediscover and reinterpret the teachings of the great Ustadz Said Nursi, by which we would secure strong foundation for Islamic upgrading in the East Asia and new cooperation with Asian counterparts. Thanks.

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