

Health and Civilization

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As all know, we had Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) 2 years ago and have unprecedented transmission of avian flu from last year. Are these just coincidences or are these something we should have anticipated long ago?

Some authors have pointed out that the emergences of major diseases had been related to events related to the development of civilizations. Outbreaks of different infectious diseases occurred when hunters and gatherers settled into agrarian villages in the prehistoric time; when different civilizations contacted with each other between 2,500 and 700 years ago; and when the trans-oceanic movement of seafarers occurred around 700 years ago. The civilizations brought about epidemic diseases, but in some cases, diseases ruined civilization.

Today's civilization is characterized by globalization, urbanization, consumerism and pervasiveness of science and technology. These characteristics of the civilization affect human health, resulting in health issues, such as emergence and re-emergence of infectious diseases, rising noncommunicable diseases and mental disorders and problems associated with the safety and quality of health care services. These health-related issues in turn affect the civilization.

Civilization will continue and is considered to be irreversible. However, we can and should modify its negative impacts while building on its positive aspects. In order to address the above-mentioned health issues brought about by the today's civilization, this paper proposes the following seven actions:

- Redefine the ways in which humans co-exist with other species.
- Strengthen cross-boundary cooperation.
- Balance between individual interests and public health.
- Build up a “common forum” which includes representatives of civil society, the aged, scholars, NGOs, private companies and public organizations.
- Acquire knowledge, skill and wisdom as a tool to fight new predicaments.
- Build strong basis of ethical value so that Individuals can say “No” to social movements that may cause human health hazard.

Furthermore, we need to change the ways we think and act. We need to depart from narrow vision, fragmented approach and turf mentality. We ought to shift emphasis from economy-driven to human-centred society. And we must be bold in creating new systems and institutions to meet new challenges.