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## THREE KINDS OF CULTURES IN MAINSTREAM CIVILIZATIONS

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### 1. Introduction

In *Comparative Civilizations Review* No. 49, Fall 2003, I wrote a paper: "Mainstream Civilizations – A Trial Essay." In this paper I described two kinds of cultural elements in a civilization. But when I rethought this issue, I found it a static analysis of the cultures in a civilization. If we try to observe a civilization in a dynamic way, we will realize that there is one more category of culture, namely its basic institutions of language and currency. Thereupon, I add these elements separately from other cultural elements and should like to emphasize their role in identifying Mainstream Civilizations.

### 2. Functioning Cultures (The first element)

The first category of cultures is called "Functioning." This is a core culture in a civilization. Functioning Cultures are the foundation of the civilization and form a new type of civilization. For example, in the case of Sumerian Civilization, the functioning cultures were wheat-barley cultivation and irrigation. And they built the first civilization in human history. Thus, one of the functioning cultures is the culture's production, such as skills and technologies to produce human necessities.

In the case of Judaic Civilization, Judaism (the religion itself) was the functioning culture and created Christianity, which was accepted by other civilizations. Also Confucianism was a functioning culture in Chinese Civilization for several thousand years and spread to the neighboring areas.

The creative and excellent skills and technologies which produce basic and important human necessities usually become the functioning culture and finally build a Mainstream Civilization. Also universal religions and thoughts are functioning cultures. Religions and thoughts establish social ethics and morals for a society and form a political system according to their rules. And in some case, they can form a Mainstream Civilization.

However, a question arises; which functioning cultures comprise a Mainstream Civilization, since there are many functioning cultures in civilizations? The answer is when some basic skills, technologies, reli-

gion or thought are transferred and accepted by other civilizations and also these receiving civilizations form a similar type of civilization, we recognize the sender-civilization as a Mainstream Civilization. For example, after World War II, Japan acquired liberalism, democracy, and Information Technologies from America and Japan has changed itself as though it is a second America.

In this case, Japan accepted American functioning cultures and formed a similar type of civilization. So we must recognize American Civilization as a Mainstream Civilization.

The following are typical examples of functioning cultures in Mainstream Civilization history.

- Sumerian (c.3500 B.C.) began wheat cultivation and its skills were transferred to neighboring areas and also to Indian and Chinese civilizations.
- Indus Valley (c.2500 B.C.) created its own religious element and developed it into Hinduism, Buddhism, and other faiths and then spread them to other Asian countries.
- Yellow River (c.1700 B.C.) developed its religious philosophy, Confucianism, and it was transferred to Korea, Japan and Vietnam, where similar types of civilizations were created.
- Greek (c.700B.C.) created philosophy and science, and these were accepted by Roman, Islamic and Western Europeans later.
- Judaic (c.600 B.C.) created Judaism, which gave birth to both Christianity and Islam.
- Chinese (c.500 B.C.) spread paddy-rice cultivation to the North Eastern Asia.
- \* Roman (c.300 B.C.) created a legal system and fostered Christianity, which became the foundation of modern Europe.
- \* Byzantine (c.500 A.D.) established a “bridge culture” and transferred Orthodox Christianity, Greek philosophy, and science to the Islamic world and to Slavic societies.
- Arabic (c.700 A.D.) created Islam and spread it across the world.
- French (c.800 A.D.) developed modern philosophy and a “nation-state” model which have influenced the rest of the

world.

- British (1770 A.D.) originated the Industrial Revolution, which has been accepted by the world's major nations, including Japan.
- American (1950 A.D.) transferred liberal-democracy philosophy and high technologies to other civilizations worldwide.

### 3. Enriching Cultures (The second category)

When we put aside the Functioning Cultures from a civilization, most of the rest belongs to the Enriching Cultures. Architecture, arts, music and dance, letters, medical care, food and beverage, and life styles are Enriching Cultures. And they truly enrich civilizations.

The reason that Mainstream Civilizations produced so many and more important Enriching Cultures is that they had enough accumulation of wealth to provide for both Functioning and Enriching cultures. Earlier agricultural societies produced enough wealth to build beautiful palaces and temples or cathedrals, and to decorate them with new architectures, arts, and sculptures. And usually they had performing arts there. Also, they developed sophisticated food cultures which included the use of silver and porcelains. However, those enriching cultures were produced and consumed mostly by the kings and nobles.

With the Industrial Revolution, ordinary people, including the lower class, appeared as producers and consumers of enriching cultures in Mainstream Civilizations. In the case of British Civilization, the original enriching cultures were aristocratic. But gradually they changed toward popular cultures in both quality and quantity. The typical ones were sports such as golf and football, also gardening—e.g.—raising roses and orchids. In the case of American Civilization, the enriching cultures were born as popular cultures from the beginning. Movies, music, and life styles with home appliances and widespread ownership of automobiles are typical enriching cultures. And those cultures were transferred almost worldwide. However, this kind of enriching culture has a downside: environmental degradation.

### 4. “Media” Cultures (The third category)

In our cultural studies of civilizations, we have had a tendency to neglect the Media Cultures, which are language and currency in a civilization. But now we must recognize that these elements are among the most important cultures in a civilization. For example, if we take away

language from a civilization, we find that all cultures die at once. In other words, all cultures can be alive only when they are given language. Likewise, if currency is taken away from a civilization, all economic activities stop working and the economy dies. In the cases of original civilizations such as Sumerian, cereals played the role of currency. After the Industrial Revolution in British Civilization, the role of currency has been very clear. Without currency, no civilization can exist anymore.

For Mainstream Civilizations, their media – language and currency—are essential. They work as carriers of the Functioning and Enriching cultures of the Mainstream Civilizations. And those media spread the influential areas of the Mainstream Civilizations and formed their Civilization Sphere. The following are the media for Mainstream Civilizations:

- In the original civilizations such as Indus Valley and Yellow River, the influence of their language and currency (cereals) was not well known. But in the case of Sumeria, their media spread their cultures around them and formed the Mesopotamian Civilization Sphere.
- Greek language and drachma silver were used as media for the Mediterranean and Black Sea trade for hundreds of years beginning with the 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C. And Greek cultures were transferred to the world by them. Greek Civilization was very powerful and influential; after they were conquered by the Romans, the Greeks gave their vocabulary and their philosophy to the world. These were translated into Latin.
- In the early Roman Empire, people living in the eastern area of the Mediterranean used Greek as their common language. Thus, the New Testament was written in Greek, although the region was under Roman domination. As a result, Greek became the common language of Roman Byzantine Civilization.
- As a Mainstream, Judaic Civilization was the only exception--their language (Hebrew) never became the common language of the area. But the Old Testament was written in Hebrew, and although translated into local languages, serious Christian religious scholars learned Hebrew.

- In the case of Indian Civilization, Sanskrit was a core language through its history from the Aryan period. It carried the Indian cultures, including Buddhism, to the Asian countries. Sanskrit was translated into Chinese and reached Japan as the Buddhist language of Buddahism. Indian currency was not so popular in Southern Asia, because India's economy was not strong enough.
- Chinese was a common language in China from the age of the Yellow River Civilization as Chinese culture spread to neighboring countries, including Japan, which learned Chinese in order to import Chinese cultures. As a currency, silver was used in the Chinese Civilization Sphere, though within China, they used salt and paper money in the 13<sup>th</sup> century.
- Latin was the official language of the Roman Empire and when Christianity came to be the state religion, Latin became the language of the Roman Catholic Church. It meant that Latin was God's language and it worked as a common language in Western Europe. Greek and Arabic (cultures) were translated into Latin, so the European scholars could accumulate a huge amount of knowledge. Moreover they could learn and exchange their ideas and theories in Latin with each other within Western Europe, and finally they achieved the so-called "Scientific Revolution" in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Roman currency, Denarius silver and Solidus gold, were used not only in its empire but also as far away as India. It seems Roman currency was trusted, even outside of the empire.
- The language medium in Byzantine Civilization was Greek, so it should be a part of Greek Civilization. But it was not a direct successor to Greece, and was a well-developed hybrid civilization of Greek, Roman and Persian influences. Byzantine Greek transferred the Byzantine cultures to the neighboring areas, including Russia. The Solidus gold of Byzantium worked as an international currency in the 12<sup>th</sup> century in the Eastern Mediterranean world.
- Arabic was the language of the Koran and it spread Islamic cultures to the Islamicized world. Also Arabic has been an international language among Islamic counties in North Africa and the Middle East, although it was only a religious language

in the rest of the Muslim world, which continued to speak Persian, Turkish, and Hindi.

Together with Arabic, the gold Dinar circulated in the Islamic world.

- The French supplanted the role of Latin in Europe with their language from the 17<sup>th</sup> century to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was a common language among kings and nobles not only in Western Europe but also in Russia. But it was not used for international trade, because France was not primary in trade. So for the same reason, their currency (Denarius silver and Ecu gold) did not spread in Europe.
- British English came to be the common language in international trade in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. French was still culturally popular within Europe but English was spreading in the rest of the world, not only in trade but also in political and cultural activities. In the case of Japan, it imported European cultures mostly using first British English, next German, and third French.

As a Mainstream Civilization, the most important role Britain played was that it provided an international currency to the world economy. Each national or regional economy was linked by the Pound Sterling. This was the actual beginning of globalization in human history.

With the British media, Pound Sterling and English, Western European cultures, especially industrial technologies, were transferred to the rest of the world.

- The U.S. dollar acquired a position of the international key currency after World War II. Also American English gradually began to work as an international language in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. And those two media spread American cultures, both Functioning and Enriching, into the world. Those media were used not only for the transfer of American cultures to other countries but they have also been used as “international” media. For example, those media have been used in doing business between Japan and China. Thus American English and the U.S. dollar are independently used in the world. This means that the American Civilization Sphere has expanded worldwide, though not everywhere.

The U.S. dollar and American English are promoting globalization or a global civilization.

## **5. Conclusion**

A civilization is comprised of three elements. In a Mainstream Civilization, the third element (its language and currency) have a powerful influence particularly outside of the civilization. In other words, if a civilization has influential language and currency and these elements are accepted by other civilizations, it is a Mainstream Civilization.