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Editor's Note

Joseph Drew, Editor-in-Chief

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Editor's Note

Joseph Drew
Editor-in-Chief

Fall 2021

It has always seemed somewhat ironic that the International Society for the Comparative Study of Civilizations has never agreed on the exact definition of the single word arguably most central to its mission: “civilization”.

Perhaps that is why, in the many thousands of full-text downloads occurring each year of articles in this journal, the most popular one, by far, is entitled “What is the Difference Between Culture and Civilization?: Two Hundred Fifty Years of Confusion.” Written by Prof. Thorsten Botz-Bornstein, it appeared in issue number 66, published in the Spring of 2012.

In his article the author reported that the term “civilization” is drawn from the Latin *civis*, the word for a citizen of ancient Rome and also the root word for “city”. Botz-Bornstein wrote that the term was coined in eighteenth century France and later employed in English writing. He noted:

However, German scholars preferred culture, with its complex of meanings. One can draw a more or less distinctive line between civilization and culture by stating that the former refers more to material, technical, economic and social facts while the latter refers to spiritual, intellectual and artistic phenomena.

The German usage of *Zivilisation* has always alluded to a utilitarian, outer aspect of human existence subordinated to *Kultur*, which was perceived as the “real” essence of humans, society, and their achievements.

Sigmund Freud, in his masterful *Civilization and Its Discontents*, devotes many pages to his own analysis of “civilization”. The word in the title of Freud’s work is translated into English from the German “Kultur”. Most commentators, including Botz-Bornstein, maintain that Freud clearly meant civilization in the title of his book, and readers of the work are directed to a discussion of the translation of the word “Kultur” in the Editor’s Note to another famous Freud work, *The Future of an Illusion*.

Freud, on Page 73 of the 2005 Norton edition of *Civilization and Its Discontents*, introduced by Louis Menand, with translation by James Strachey and comments by Peter Gay, (ISBN 0-393-05995-2), defines “civilization” as follows:

We shall therefore content ourselves with saying once more that the word “civilization” describes the whole sum of the achievements and the regulations which distinguish our lives from those of our animal ancestors and which serve two purposes—namely to protect men against nature and to adjust their mutual relations.

Other great writers have wrestled with the usage of the term, as well.

Professor Michael Palencia-Roth, former ISCSC president, noted as much in a Spring 2012 article in this journal, and also in his essay entitled “On Giants’ Shoulders: The 1961 Salzburg Meeting of the ISCSC”, which appeared in *Civilization in Crisis: Proceedings of the 39th International Conference of the International Society for the Comparative Study of Civilizations*, edited by Laina Farhat-Holzman and Thomas Rienzo in 2009.

In both, he covered the extensive excursions into the meaning of “civilizations” during the inaugural meeting of the ISCSC, sponsored by UNESCO and hosting many of the world’s leading experts on civilizations.

The presentations included Prof. Pitirim Sorokin’s analysis of civilizations, or “great cultures”, and he also described civilizations as “social and cultural supersystems”. Sorokin, elected the first president of the newly created ISCSC at that meeting, said further that a civilization was a “spatially bounded entity somehow located within a part of the population occupying certain territory”.

There were also many allusions at the foundational meeting to Oswald Spengler’s description of civilizations as “the High Cultures”, to Nikolay Danilevsky’s view of civilizations as “culture-historical types”, and to Arnold Toynbee’s finding that civilizations were “the (largest) units and intelligible fields of historical study”.

Others explained that the word in context meant variously “the high-value culture patterns”, “cultural systems”, or “world cultures”; while several argued that there are “aesthetic” or “theoretic” civilizations; “master types or patterns of civilization”; “high civilization”; or “the great cultures”. Still others talked of the subject as incorporating universal history.

Sorokin found additionally that at this critical point in human history, knowledge of “the structural and dynamic properties of civilizations or great cultures has become particularly urgent for the very survival of the human race as well as for continuation of its creative history”. He said that the purpose of the International Society for the Comparative Study of Civilizations would be to examine the “basic problems” of civilizations or *Hochkulturen*.

What is meant, in this context, by “civilization” today? Is there one meaning or are there many? In addition, has study over these past decades advanced the world toward the goal of “one world” set by the founding fathers at Salzburg? Have the technological innovations of the past six decades — particularly the Internet — enabled progress toward a world civilization, and if so, is that civilization now evolving into a new form previously unforeseen?

It is to the study of this perplexing, controversial topic of civilizations that our journal and this organization has been dedicated. We cannot conduct a summative evaluation of the entire corpus of work, however, because many scholars continue in the work of unraveling the meaning of “civilization” and the implications for the future of humanity. So, a formative evaluation will have to do. It is clear that the clash of civilizations — however we describe them — continues. It is also clear that a new form of civilization, described by former President Andrew Targowski, as “the virtual civilization,” is on the immediate horizon.

A tentative conclusion has to be that the term “civilization” is a vast screen or map of intellectual effort upon which many themes play.

We can report that, happily, the organization continues to function with vigor, having been convened, in conjunction with the Asian Politics and History Association, for its 50th annual meeting, entitled “Civilization at a Crossroads,” early in September of this year. The gathering was held, appropriately enough, at the Dimitrie Cantemir Christian University in Bucharest, Romania. If the meaning of “crossroads” is geographic, or ideological, or intellectual, surely Romania, a member of the European Union which has long seen itself as a Latin island in a Slavic sea, meets that description.

So, too, has the Dimitrie Cantemir Christian University been a perfect sponsor this year; among other attributes, this university hosts a prominent center on Comparative Civilizational Studies, one unique in Europe. It will continue to cooperate with the ISCSC via a variety of programs in the near future.

Congratulations are extended to DCCU for hosting a successful conference, with excellent speakers and avid attendees from around the world and participation not only by those who appeared in person but also for those who tuned in from across the globe via Zoom.

Congratulations, too, to President Lynn Rhodes, who coordinated the organization and entire operation of the conference on behalf of the ISCSC; to the journal’s Executive Editor, Prof. John Berteaux, who served as Program Chair; to Dr. Corina Adriana Dumitrescu, President of the Senate, and Professor, who played the lead role at the conference; and to Dr. Ramona Mihaila, Vice Rector for International Relations, and Professor, for outstanding work coordinating the conference.

These leaders carried out the entire program brilliantly, even if under extremely difficult circumstances brought about the coronavirus sweeping our world.

Errata

On another front, we at the journal may commit errors from time to time. Three command our attention now.

First, please note that in the last issue, Number 84, published in Spring, 2021, the lead article was entitled “Do All Roads Lead to Rome? Exploring the Underlying Logics of Similar Policies and Practices of Recruiting Barbarian Soldiers in Roman and Early Chinese Empires”. The author listed was Pengfei Su; inadvertently omitted was the name of the co-author, Professor Shen Wei of Shanghai Jiao Tong University. He “made valuable contributions by providing his own insights on the topic and by reviewing and commenting on the manuscript,” notes Mr. Su.

As a result, the Recommended Citation for the above article is now revised to be the following:

Su, Pengfei & Shen, Wei (2021). “Do All Roads Lead to Rome? Exploring the Underlying Logics of Similar Policies and Practices of Recruiting Barbarian Soldiers in Roman and Early Chinese Empires”, *Comparative Civilizations Review*: Vol. 84: No. 84, Article 5.

Prof. Shen is the KoGuan Distinguished Professor of Law at Shanghai Jiao Tong University, where he has served as Dean of the Law School since 2016. His academic credentials include a PhD from the London School of Economics and Political Science, and he holds Master of Law degrees from Cambridge University, the University of Michigan, and the East China University of Political Science and Law.

Second, in the last issue of this journal we ran on pages 112 to 115 a letter to the editor written by Prof. Ardavan Khoshnood of Lund University in Sweden. It was entitled “The Pahlavis and the Other Side of the Coins” and it was a response to an article in the previous issue by Janos Jany entitled “Political Power of Iranian Hierocracies.” Unfortunately, the references cited in the letter by Prof. Khosnood were dropped inexplicably. To remedy this situation, we run in the present issue the letter with the references attached.

We apologize for the error.

Finally, we received an email recently from Chih-yu Shih. He noted that he was delighted to read the article he co-wrote with Chiung-chiu Huang, entitled “Bridging Civilizations Through Nothingness: Manchuria as Nishida Kitaro’s ‘Place’” that had been published in Number 65, in the fall of 2011. It can be found online at <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/ccr/vol65/iss65/>. We misspelled Mr. Shih’s first name. The names should have been spelled as Chih-yu Shih and Chiung-chiu Huang.

Again, we regret the error.

Farewell: Ross Maxwell

In this issue you will find a *festschrift* spotlighting the late Ross Maxwell of San Francisco. He was a stalwart member of the International Society for the Comparative Study of Civilizations and a long-time friend of everyone who attended the annual meetings. His lectures were eye-openers for many of us. We on the journal miss Ross Maxwell, and we hope that the selections we have included in this issue will prove to be of interest to all readers.



In Honor
of
Ross Maxwell

