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Thinking Ahead: The Advent of New Paradigms in International Relations Theory

“Truth unfolds in time through a communal process.” - Carroll Quigley

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Abstract

International Relations Theory is a branch of Political Science that studies International Relations from a theoretical perspective. Historically, it was dominated by two paradigms — Realism and Liberalism. Recently, though, among other theories and perspectives an influential Civilizational Paradigm has emerged. The paper contains analysis of the roots, significance, as well as discontents of those schools of thought. Looking into the future, the author of this paper proposes the Integralistic Paradigm in International Relations Theory.

Keywords: Realism, Idealism, Liberalism, Civilizationism, Integralism

1 The Evolution of Theory of International Relations

The field of International Relations is considered by many readers to be a fairly new area of expertise even though its distant roots can be traced to the legacies of such thinkers as the Ancient Greek historian and general Thucydides (c. 460 – c. 400 BC), the Italian diplomat and historian Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527), and the English philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), to name a few.

However, as a distinctive discipline, the field of International Relations emerged after the First World War fortified with new approaches. During the 20th century it was dominated by two paradigms — Realism and Liberalism, which, in turn, evolved from a Realism-Idealism polarity. The Realist Paradigm has been anchored by such works as E. H. Carr's “The Twenty Years' Crisis” (1939); Hans Morgenthau's “Politics Among Nations” (1948); Kenneth N. Waltz's “Theory of International Politics” (1979); and John Mearsheimer's “The Tragedy of Great Power Politics” (2014).

As a school of thought, Liberalism originally arose from the ideas of the French philosopher Voltaire (1694-1778), the English philosopher John Locke (1632-1704), the Scottish economist and philosopher Adam Smith (1723-1790), and the German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), among others.

One of the closer precursors to Liberalism in the field of International Relations has been the Idealistic Paradigm, espoused, along with others, by the American politician and academic Woodrow Wilson (1856-1924). The Liberal Paradigm has been later advanced by Neoliberals like the American academics Robert O. Keohane (b. 1941) and Joseph S. Nye (b. 1937).

In the post-World War II era a number of other concepts, theories, and perspectives emerged, such as, for example, Constructivism, Post-Colonialism, Global South Perspective, Green Theory, as well as a notable Civilizational Paradigm.

2 The Realist Paradigm

The Realist Paradigm is a rather grim ideological system, at the heart of which lie the concepts of state self-preservation, survival, and chance permitting, land, wealth, and power acquisition. Those geostrategic goals are more often than not achieved at the expense of moralistic and ethical principles, as well by treading on the individual rights of people and on the existing international norms. According to realists, world politics constitutes a field of perennial struggle among states, and “great powers” direct the struggle. The Realpolitik statecraft of early modern Europe, as well as the conduct of so called “civilizational states” of today exemplify this paradigm. The motto “Might is Right” rather neatly encapsulates the essence of this approach.

The theories of realism are confronted by the cooperative ideals of liberalism, especially of its “progressive” variety. John J. Mearsheimer elucidates:

In contrast to liberals, realists are pessimists when it comes to international politics. Realists agree that creating a peaceful world would be desirable, but they see no easy way to escape the harsh world of security competition and war. Creating a peaceful world is surely an attractive idea, but it is not a practical one...

He continues:

This gloomy view of international relations is based on three core beliefs.

- First, realists, like liberals, treat states as the principal actors in world politics. Realists focus mainly on great powers, however, because these states dominate and shape international politics and they also cause the deadliest wars.
- Second, realists believe that the behavior of great powers is influenced mainly by their external environment, not by their internal characteristics. The structure of the international system, which all states must deal with, largely shapes their foreign policies. ... In essence, great powers are like billiard balls that vary only in size.

- Third, realists hold that calculations about power dominate states' thinking, and that states compete for power among themselves. That competition sometimes necessitates going to war, which is considered an acceptable instrument of statecraft. To quote Carl von Clausewitz, the nineteenth-century military strategist, war is a continuation of politics by other means.
- Finally, a zero-sum quality characterizes that competition, sometimes making it intense and unforgiving. States may cooperate with each other on occasion, but at root, they have conflicting interests. (Mearsheimer, 2014: 17-18).
- Clearly, realists are not particularly interested in the historic and cultural traits of the societies under consideration. For example, John J. Mearsheimer perceives them as "billiard balls" (Mearsheimer, 2014: 18) and Zbigniew Brzezinski as "chess figures" on the planet's "grand chessboard" (Brzezinski, 1997, XIV).

3 The Liberalist Paradigm

The name of this school of thought derives from the Latin word "liber," which means "free", and its roots extend to the Europe-centered Age of Enlightenment (17th -18th centuries). The Liberal Paradigm in International Relations Theory is predicated on the proposition of a peaceful world order. Therefore, the central issues that it is concerned about are the problems of achieving lasting peace and cooperation in international relations.

The examples of its doctrines are "democratic peace theory," "economic interdependence theory," and "liberal institutionalism theory." John J. Mearsheimer explains:

The liberal tradition has its roots in the Enlightenment, that period in eighteenth-century Europe when intellectuals and political leaders had a powerful sense that reason could be employed to make the world a better place.

Accordingly, liberals tend to be hopeful about the prospects of making the world safer and more peaceful. Most liberals believe that it is possible to substantially reduce the scourge of war and to increase international prosperity. For this reason, liberal theories are sometimes labelled "utopian" or "idealist."

He further states:

Liberalism's optimistic view of international politics is based on three core beliefs, which are common to almost all of the theories in the paradigm. First, liberals consider states to be the main actors in international politics.

Second, they emphasize that the internal characteristics of states vary considerably, and that these differences have profound effects on state behavior.

Furthermore, liberal theorists often believe that some internal arrangements (e.g., democracy) are inherently preferable to others (e.g., dictatorship). For liberals, therefore, there are “good” and “bad” states in the international system. Good states pursue cooperative policies and hardly ever start wars on their own, whereas bad states cause conflicts with other states and are prone to use force to get their way. Thus, the key to peace is to populate the world with good states.

Third, liberals believe that calculations about power matter little for explaining the behavior of good states. (Mearsheimer, 2014: 15-16)

Spreading liberalism, especially its “progressive” variety, while “making world safe for democracy”¹ may face formidable challenges, and not only from the so-called “rogue states.” If the West will continue to play from the “progressive liberalist playbook,” and the so-called “civilizational states” (China, Russia, and others) from the “realist playbook,” there may be troubles ahead.

John J. Mearsheimer insists: “Within countries, I believe liberalism is a genuine force for good, and it is highly desirable to live in a country that privileges and protects individual rights...” Liberalism at the international level, however, is a different matter. States that pursue ambitious liberal foreign policies, as the United States has done in recent years, end up making the world less peaceful. Moreover, they risk undermining liberalism at home...” (Mearsheimer, 2018: 11-12)

4 The Civilizational Paradigm

4.1 “Civilizations” in International Relations Theory

The first serious efforts to critically analyze the protean phenomenon of “civilization” were attempted in mid-19 century by the Russian philosopher and historian Nikolay Danilevsky (1822-1885) and the Russian philosopher and diplomat Konstantin N. Leontiev (1831-1891). Those attempts were continued by the German historian and philosopher of history Oswald Spengler (1880-1936), the English historian and philosopher of history Arnold J. Toynbee (1889-1975), and by the American historian and theorist of the evolution of civilizations Carroll Quigley (1910-1977), as well as by others.

¹ On April 2, 1917, President Woodrow Wilson (1913-1921) went before a joint session of Congress to seek a Declaration of War against Germany in order that the world “be made safe for democracy.” (Author’s note).

Through the years, members of the International Society for the Comparative Study of Civilizations (ISCSC) have made major theoretical contributions.² The Founder and First President of the International Society, Pitirim A. Sorokin, laid the foundations for the scientific analysis of the phenomenon of civilization and other macro-level sociocultural entities. One of his most fundamental and prescient conclusions posits that no one theory or paradigm can reflect and/or encompass the whole totality of a given sociocultural universe, and, therefore, with time, they are inevitably destined to be replaced by other, more adequate ones (Sorokin, 1991).

The author of this paper thoroughly analyzed the ever-elusive phenomenon of civilization, and postulated that it is, in fact, a construct, i.e., a conceptual “shell” which every subsequent thinker fills with theoretical content (Alalykin-Izvekov, Vladimir, 2011; Alalykin-Izvekov, Satkiewicz, 2014; Alalykin-Izvekov, 2017; Alalykin-Izvekov, 2020; Alalykin-Izvekov, 2022).

The rapid rise of Civilizational Paradigm within International Relations Theory consummated in a journal article and, subsequently, a book by the late American scholar Samuel Huntington entitled “The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order.” As a part of his analysis, the author suggested that the roots of future conflicts would lie in fundamental differences of the core values of various “civilizations.” He also developed the field of the Civilizational Paradigm in International Relations Theory, including its principles and essential terminology.

He writes:

In the Cold War, countries related to the superpowers as allies, satellites, clients, neutrals, and nonaligned. In the post-Cold War world, countries relate to civilizations as member states, core states³, lone countries, cleft countries, and torn countries. (Huntington, 1996: 135)

According to Huntington, even though civilizations are essentially “cultures writ large,” they possess their own political structures. He elaborates:

...civilizations are cultural, not political entities, they do not, as such, maintain order, establish justice, collect taxes, fight wars, negotiate treaties, or do any of the other things which governments do.

² For more on ISCSC scholarly legacy see The Comparative Civilizations Review (CCR) homepage at <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/ccr/> (Author’s note).

³ The roots of the “core state” (or a “core country”) concept extend to World-Systems Theory (Immanuel Wallerstein, et al), and even beyond, to the legacy of the prominent French historian Fernand Braudel. See Alalykin-Izvekov, Vladimir (2020) "Honoring A Giant: Immanuel Wallerstein and His Contributions to Social Sciences," *Comparative Civilizations Review*: Vol. 82: No. 82, Article 8. <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/ccr/vol82/iss82/8>

The political composition of civilizations varies between civilizations and varies over time within a civilization. A civilization may thus contain one or many political units. Those units may be city states, empires, federations, confederations, nation states, multinational states, all of which may have varying forms of government. As a civilization evolves, changes normally occur in the number and nature of its constituent political units.

At one extreme, a civilization and a political entity may coincide. China, Lucian Pye has commented, is a ‘civilization pretending to be a state.’⁴ Japan is a civilization that is a state.⁵ Most civilizations, however, contain more than one state or other political entity. In the modern world, most civilizations contain two or more states. (Huntington, 1996: 44)

Huntington’s analysis of the Civilizational Paradigm is convincing since it is based on a solid scientific analysis.

4.2 “Civilizational State” and International Relations Theory

The concept of “civilizational state” (a.k.a. “civilization-state”) has emerged recently. The term was coined by the American political scholar Lucian W. Pye (Pye, 1992: 235). The concept was then expanded upon by the British historian Martin Jacques in the book entitled “When China Rules the World: The End of the Western World and the Birth of a New Global Order.” (Jacques, 2008; 2009).

According to Jacques, the identification of a “state-civilization” is based on the principles of historical continuity and cultural syncretism that have become widespread throughout a significant geographical area.

The book’s synopsis outlines the author’s discourse:

(He) argues that far from becoming a western-style society, China will remain highly distinctive. It is already having a far-reaching and much-discussed economic impact, but its political and cultural influence, which has hitherto been greatly neglected, will be at least as significant.

Continental in size and mentality, and accounting for one fifth of humanity, China is not even a conventional nation-state but a ‘civilization-state’ whose imperatives, priorities and values are quite different.

⁴ The concept of the “civilizational state” is analyzed in the next section of this paper (Author’s note).

⁵ By stating that “Japan is a civilization that is a state,” Samuel Huntington, apparently, means that the Japanese civilization’s outer limits are also borders of its nation-state. (Author’s note).

As it rapidly reassumes its traditional place at the center of East Asia, the old tributary system will resurface in a modern form, contemporary ideas of racial hierarchy will be redrawn, and China's ages-old sense of superiority will reassert itself.

China's rise signals the end of the global dominance of the west and the emergence of a world which it will come to shape in a host of different ways and which will become increasingly disconcerting and unfamiliar to those who live in the west.⁶

The next stage of debates about the concept of the "civilizational state" came with appearance of a book entitled "The China Wave: Rise of a Civilizational State" by the Chinese political scholar Zhang Weiwei. According to the author, China is unique and exceptional because it is a "civilizational state", its "rise" is a new model of development, and therefore a new political discourse is needed. He questions the Western assumptions about democracy, governance, and human rights.

He summarizes: "I have argued in this book that China's rise is not the rise of an ordinary country, but the rise of a country *sui generis*, a civilizational state, a new model of development and a new political discourse, and all this is bringing a wave of change unprecedented in human history." (Weiwei, 2011: 174).

In his article "The Attack of the Civilization-State" (Maçães, 2020), Portuguese political scholar Bruno Maçães asserts: "As a civilization-state, China is organized around culture rather than politics. Linked to a civilization, the state has the paramount task of protecting a specific cultural tradition. Its reach encompasses all the regions where that culture is dominant."⁷

Yet, despite those attempts to theoretically ground the idea of the "civilizational state," it remains conceptually moot. Cultures and societies are distinct categories with different structures and dynamics of development. One cannot simply say: we share the same culture, therefore we belong to the same society.

Let us illustrate this peculiar process. Below are two diagrams. The one depicted in Figure 1 represents a "civilization" as a "society," while the one on Figure 2, as a "culture." As can be clearly seen, their structures and dynamics are quite different. Then, what we witness in the propaganda of bad geopolitical actors could be a deliberate mix-up of terminology, i.e., the notion of "society" is being intentionally interchanged with a notion of "culture."

⁶ Martin Jacques homepage. *When China Rules the World*. Key Arguments & Synopsis. Electronic Resource. Retrieved 08.13.22. <http://www.martinjacques.com/books/when-china-rules-the-world/synopsis/>

⁷ Maçães, B. (2020). *The Attack of the Civilization-State*. June 15, 2020. Noema Magazine. Electronic Resource. Retrieved 08.13.22

Model of “Civilization” Perceived as “Society”

Integrated Model of Societies and Civilizations-Societies Evolution

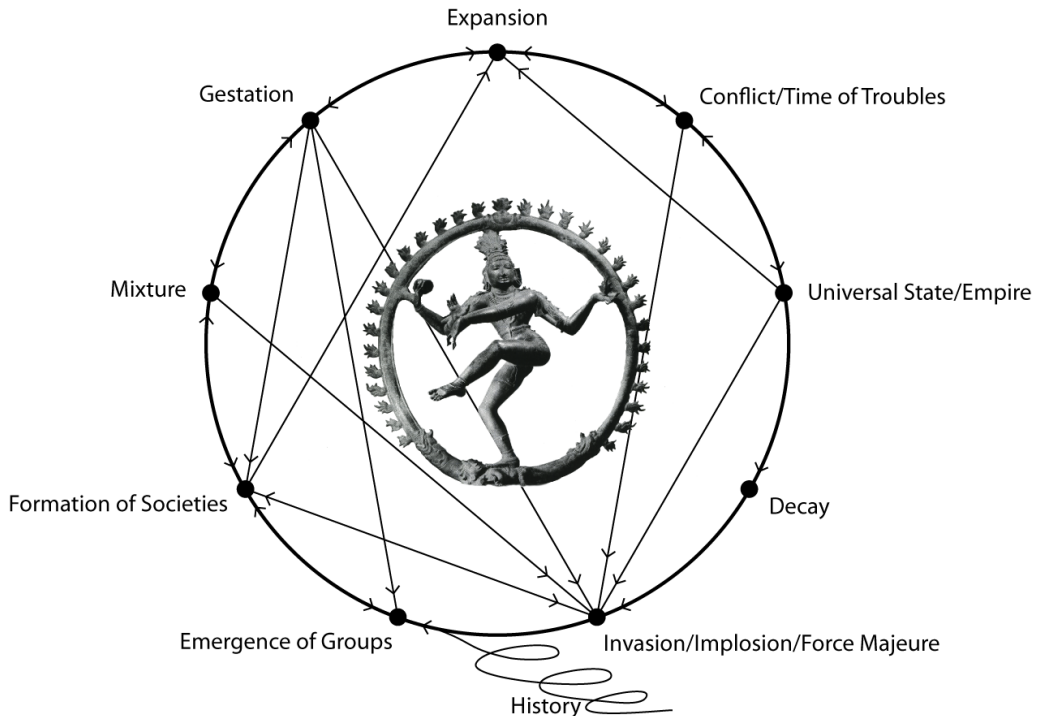


Fig. 1. Model of “Civilization” perceived as “Society”

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Furthermore, in his book entitled “The Rise of the Civilizational State,” the British political philosopher Christopher Coker presciently warns that while “civilizations” (understood as cultures) themselves may not clash, the “civilizational states” may do just that.

The cover synopsis of the book explains: “...while civilizations themselves may not clash; civilizational states appear to be set on challenging the rules of the international order that the West takes for granted. China seems anxious to revise them, Russia to break them, while Islamists would like to throw away the rule book altogether.”

“When seen in the round, these challenges could be enough to give birth to a new post-liberal international order.” (Coker, 2019).

Model of “Civilization” Perceived as “Culture”

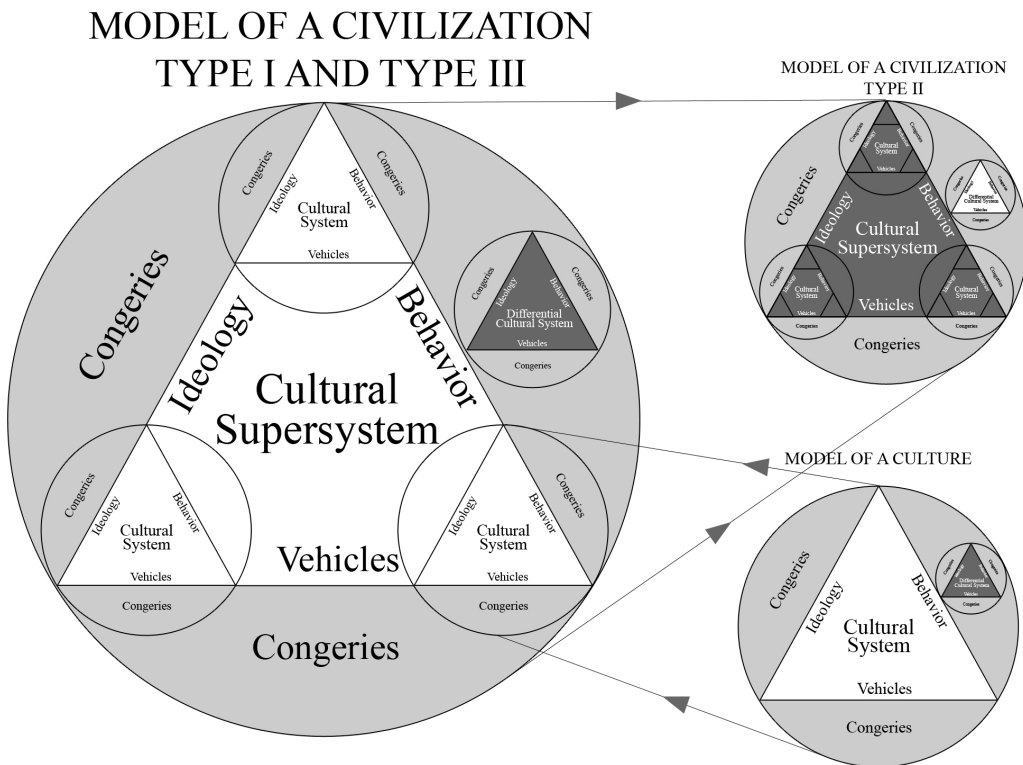


Fig. 2. Model of “Civilization” perceived as “Culture.”

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5 Looking into the Future: Towards the Integralistic Paradigm

In one of his recent publications the author of this paper wrote about the necessity of new Great Sociocultural Systems which would provide humanity with advanced tools, instruments, and vehicles for overcoming or, at least, alleviating rapidly emerging existential threats. Reflecting universal aspirations of humankind, those powerful new systems would encompass insights, discoveries, innovations, and creative breakthroughs in medicine and public health, science and technology, literature and art, politics and management, education and philosophy, law and religion in a range covering Greek Philosophy, Roman Law, Renaissance Humanism, Enlightenment Ideas, European Rationalism, Romanticism, and Russian Classical Literature and Musical Art. (Alalykin-Izvekov, 2020)

Thus, the field of International Relations Theory would be where one of those new systems is presently most sorely needed.

Before the First World War, the world has been mostly ruled by a handful of empires. After the Second World War for several decades the world was “bipolar.” After the implosion of the Soviet Union, for a brief period of time, the world was “unipolar.” Presently, we are witnessing a transition to the “multipolar” and “multicivilizational” world (Huntington, 1996: 21).

Our day needs an adequate theoretical foundation for a peaceful, harmonious, and prosperous international system, and, therefore, it needs an adequate theoretical foundation. Such a conceptual platform may be the Integralistic Paradigm of International Relations Theory. This will allow the building of a new architecture of global communication, cooperation, and collective security.

Let us turn to our own brain for an analogy. There is a popular neurological theory that human brain has two halves, called the left and right hemispheres. According to the theory, each side has a certain specialization.

- The “left brain” is said to be more verbal and analytical than the right brain, and that is why it is even sometimes called the “digital brain.” It excels at things like reading, writing, computations, logic, sequencing, linear thinking, mathematics, facts, and thinking in words.
- The “right brain” is said to be more visual and intuitive, and therefore it is even sometimes referred to as the “analog brain.” The “right brain” has a more creative and less organized way of thinking, and it is mostly concerned with imagination, holistic thinking, intuition, arts, rhythm, nonverbal cues, feelings visualization, and even daydreaming.

Also, deep within our brain is an organ called the amygdala.⁸ The function of this ancient cluster of neurons is to process and regulate primal emotions, such as fear, aggression, and pleasure. The amygdala has connections to many other brain structures, which allows it to trigger certain physiological reactions, such as, for example, the “fight-or-flight response.” Only working together are the brain organs capable of adequately assessing, processing, and reacting to the challenges of the sociocultural and natural environment.

Similarly, only by combining the best ideas of existing paradigms may we address adequately and successfully the exponentially multiplying problems of our rapidly globalizing humanity.

⁸ The name “amygdala” is a derivative from the Greek word “amygdale” which means “almond.” (Author’s note).

The Integralistic Paradigm would easily incorporate all of the best features of the existing paradigms of International Relations Theory; if emulating the workings of the brain, it would allow for a coherent and complete picture of the world.

Its key features are demonstrated on Figure 3 below, entitled the “Model of Integralistic Paradigm.” As evident from Figure 3, the Integralistic paradigm would be “anchored” by the fundamental Realism, Liberalism, and Civilizational Paradigms. Nonetheless, it may easily incorporate the best features of other existing, as well as emerging, paradigms.

Model of Integralistic Paradigm

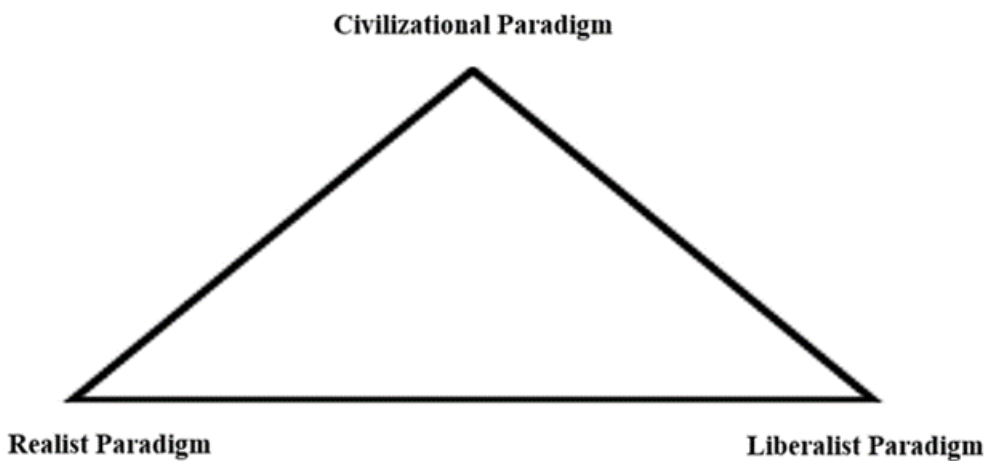


Figure 3. Model of Integralistic Paradigm Copyright © 2022 by Vlad Alalykin-Izvekov

The Integralistic Paradigm could also prove to be a reliable prognostication tool. Back in 2014, this author attempted a forecast of the future events in Ukraine. Sadly, the prognosis strongly resembles the news of today:

During a prolonged civil war in Ukraine and in Russia, sparked in part by rivalry between the West and Russia, both Ukraine and Russia disintegrate into multiple separate ethnic regions. In the process Russia (or some of its parts) becomes a Sparta-like “petro-dictatorship” with a warrior mentality, aggressive, “trigger-happy,” competing for vital resources.

All of northern Eurasia becomes a geopolitical “black hole,” reminiscent of Europe during the era of the religious wars in the 16th and 17th centuries or the Balkans during the 19th century.

The West is greatly weakened by this struggle. Already, there are predictions that the E7 countries (a group of seven countries with emerging economies) may have larger economic output than the G7 countries by 2020. (Dunkley: 2013)

As a result, resurgent civilizations with large populations and cohesive cultural unity (China, or India, or others) rule the day. (Alalykin-Izvekov, Satkiewicz, 2014: 86-87)

Conclusions

- I. Despite its distant roots in Antiquity, the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, as well as to the “Progressive Era,” the field of International Relations is a new area of expertise. During the 20th century it has been dominated by two paradigms - Realism and Liberalism. In the post-World War II era a number of other concepts, theories, and perspectives have emerged, such as Constructivism, Post-Colonialism, the Global South Perspective, Green Theory, as well as an influential Civilizational Paradigm.
- II. At the heart of the Realist Paradigm lie the concepts of self-preservation, survival, and land, wealth, and power acquisition. Those geostrategic goals are more often than not achieved at the expense of the moralistic and ethical principles of others, as well by treading on the individual rights of people and on the existing international norms. According to realists, world politics is a field of perennial struggle among states, with so-called “great powers” ruling the day. The Realpolitik statecraft of early modern Europe, as well as the conduct of the so-called “civilizational states” of today, exemplify this paradigm.
- III. The Liberalist Paradigm roots extend to the Europe-centered Age of Enlightenment (the Seventeenth and the Eighteenth centuries). The Liberal Paradigm in International Relations Theory is based on the proposition of a peaceful world order. Therefore, the central issues that it is concerned about are the problems of achieving lasting peace and cooperation in international relations.
- IV. Examples of its doctrines are “democratic peace theory,” “economic interdependence theory,” and the “liberal institutionalism theory.” Spreading liberalism, especially in its “progressive” version, while making world safe for democracy, may bring formidable challenges, and not only from the so-called “rogue states.” If the West continues to play from the progressive liberalist playbook, and the so-called “civilizational states” (China, Russia, and others) opt for the realist playbook, there may be troubles ahead.

- V. Studies of the ever-elusive phenomenon of “civilization” have been conducted by some of the best minds. Pitirim A. Sorokin laid the foundations for the scientific analysis of the phenomenon of “civilization,” as well as other macro-level sociocultural entities. One of his most fundamental and prescient conclusions posits that no one theory or paradigm can reflect and/or encompass the whole totality of a given sociocultural universe, and, therefore, with time, these theories are inevitably destined to be replaced by other, more adequate ones. This author agrees with the concept that “civilization” is a construct, i.e., a conceptual “shell.” It is one which every subsequent thinker fills with this or that theoretical content.
- VI. The rapid rise of the Civilizational Paradigm within International Relations Theory culminated in Samuel Huntington’s theory of the “Clash of Civilizations.” That theory postulated that the roots of future conflicts would lie in the fundamental differences of the core values of various civilizations. Huntington also developed a civilizational paradigm, including its principles and essential terminology. Huntington’s analysis of the Civilizational Paradigm is convincing since it is based on a solid scientific analysis.
- VII. The concept of a “civilizational state” has recently emerged. Despite the efforts by various thinkers to ground the concept scientifically, it remains theoretically moot. Cultures and societies are distinct categories, carried in different structures and conveying alternative dynamics of development.
- VIII. One cannot simply say: we share the same culture, therefore we belong to the same society. What we may witness in the propaganda and actions of bad geopolitical actors, could be a deliberate mix-up of terminology, for example the notion of “society” being intentionally identified with a notion of “culture.” Furthermore, as the British political philosopher Christopher Coker warns, while the “civilizations” (understood as cultures) themselves may not clash, the “civilizational states” may do just that.
- IX. In one of his recent publications the author of this paper wrote about the necessity of new Great Sociocultural Systems which would provide humanity with advanced tools, instruments, and vehicles for overcoming or, at least, alleviating rapidly emerging existential threats.
- X. For a more peaceful, harmonious, and prosperous co-existence, geopolitical actors in our increasingly “multipolar” and “multicivilizational” world need a new theoretical platform. Such platform may be the Integralistic Paradigm of International Relations Theory, one which will allow the building of an adequate architecture of global communication, cooperation, and collective security, while serving as a reliable prognostication tool.

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