A Framework for Comparative Study of Civilizations

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In this essay, I would like to present my own view and method of the comparative study of civilizations. So far, I think, there have been two antagonistic points of view in the study of civilizational development.

One is the view of Eurocentric unilinear stages of development which was advocated by Hegel, Ranke and Marx, including the recent theory of modernization. The basic framework in this line is as follows:

Ancient Orient Civilization → Greek Civilization → Mediterranean (Roman) Civilization → Western (European) Civilization → Global Expansion of Western Civilization.

Here, other civilizations (Chinese, Indian, Islamic, etc.) are excluded from the main stream of civilizational development, or are secondary to this Eurocentric unilinear development of civilization and emphasized that Western Civilization is only one type of civilization among other civilizations which have existed in various areas in different times on the globe. They observe the parallel developments of many civilizations. Spengler acknowledged, in his work Der Untergang des Abendlandes, eight unique civilizations, i.e., Egyptian, Babylonian, Indian, Chinese, Graeco-Roman, Arabic, Mexican and the West. He maintained that these civilizations have their own unique form and value and develop just as does an organism, namely they had their own birthgrowth, decline and death. These four organic phases in civilizational development have correspondences (Gleichzeitigkeit) with the various other civilizations and are called metaphorically the four seasons, periods of spring, summer, autumn, and winter.

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Toynbee, on the other hand, in his work *A Study of History*, identified 23 civilized societies (later in his *Reconsiderations*, 14 independent civilizations and 17 satellite civilizations) and maintained these civilized societies had four steps of development, i.e., birth, growth, breakdown and disintegration; also, he claimed there are the philosophical characteristics (contemporaneity or synchronicity) to civilizational developments. The contemporaneity of Toynbee as well as *Gleichzeitigkeit* of Spengler are essentially based on the immanent rhythm of each civilization. In this sense, the development of a civilization is separate, baring no relation to developments of other civilizations.

It seems to me, however, this so-called "philosophical contemporaneity" is a sheer myth. Many civilizations developed in ways that influenced each other. Their own rhythms, if any, were considerably changed, having been influenced by other civilizations. For example, Japanese civilization changed considerably under the influences of the "Axial Revolution" of East Asia and the "Scientific Revolution" of the West. Therefore, the lateral axis comparing civilizations is not an assumed contemporaneity, but common transformations on the global scale, as I will mention later.

I also propose 23 major civilizations as shown on my diagram. These are: Babylonian, Egyptian, Aegean, Chinese, Indian, Greek, Roman Syrian, Persian, Meso-American, Andean, African, Byzantine, Arabic, European, Korean, Tibetan, Southeast Asian, Japanese, Turkish, Russian, American, and Latin American. On this point I would like to be on the side of the multiculturists like Danilevsky, Spengler, and Toynbee who criticized Eurocentric, unilinear development of civilizations.

However, I will not arrange vertically civilizations in isolation, but take into account lateral relations among them which indicate transformations which took place in human history on a global scale. I claim that neither the view of Eurocentric development nor the view of simple multiculturism is sufficient as paradigm of comparative civilizations. The former, because it is a narrow and parochial bias of Eurocentrism, the latter, because it loosens the global unity of civilizational developments by separa-
rating these from each other.

Civilizations did not develop in isolation, but underwent in common several great transformations, which are not parochial but global. Therefore, I think, it is necessary that we recognize the peculiarities of many civilizations. At the same time, we need a framework of comparative civilizations to understand common transformations of civilizational developments. Such a framework is, as a matter of fact, my thesis of the "five stages of global transformations."

I believe the mankind has come to the present having experienced in common the five great civilizational revolutions. These are: "the Anthropic Revolution," "the Agricultural Revolution," "the Urban Revolution," "the Axial Revolution" and "the Scientific Revolution." All cultural areas were to undergo these revolutions sooner or later, primarily or secondarily (i.e., originally or by influence from other areas).

It should be noted that the five great revolutions did not occur evenly over the whole globe, but there were some primary cultural spheres where these revolutions were independently (without influence from others) carried out. The primary accomplishments of these revolutions were attained in several areas of the globe. I call these areas "the pioneer areas" of these civilizational transformations. The "revolutions" which occurred in the "pioneer areas" began to spread their influence to many other areas of the globe and were involved in civilizational transformations. The pioneer areas which carried the load of the revolutions shifted to different areas as a result of each of the five historical turning points. Thus, the forerunners of civilizational development in human history changed from one area to another. The transformations of human civilizations were not accomplished by the people of any one area, but were alternately shared by a variety of people in different areas of the world.

Now, I would like to set forth what these revolutions are, where their pioneer areas are, and when they took place: namely, the "what," "when," and "where" of the five great revolutions in human history.
What is the Anthropic Revolution? It refers to the evolutionary process in which apes were transformed to humans. This was the turning point in which humans really became humans. So, there can be no denying that this was the first revolution in human history.

The birth of humans was once considered to date back to about 500,000 years ago based on the Peking man and the Java man, but after 1927 many human bones, *australopithecus*, were discovered in East Africa. In 1961, L. S. B. Leakey discovered the so-called *homo habilis* at Olduvai, between Kenya and Tanzania; these remains date back two million years. In 1974, D. C. Johanson found at Hadar in Ethiopia *australopithecus afarensis*, which dates back 3.5 million years. More recently (1992), Tim White and Hajime Suwa discovered *ardipithecus ramidus* at Aramis in North Ethiopia, which date back 4.5 million years. Current research thus dates the origin of mankind to about 5 million years before the present day, which coincides with recent research based on the analysis of DNA in molecular anthropology.

Next, the Agricultural Revolution forms the second epoch of human history. Since human first appeared on the earth, their economies in 99.8% of history have been that of gathering, fishing, and hunting. More recently, men discovered agriculture and began to form sedentary groups, cultivating wild plants and actively producing food. In most cases, they began to domesticate wild animals in order to expand and secure food sources. These efforts signify a great revolution, in which humans made a departure from the state of passively accepting natural conditions to actively securing subsistence by means of production.

In fact, this agricultural revolution made it possible for humans to have a settled living in villages and conduct a larger, more stable community life. The basic material cultural necessities—dwellings, clothing, and earthenware—were made for the first time during this stage. This revolution in cultural history, which S. Lilly called "the first industrial revolution," is extremely important for human cultural history.
Where were the pioneer areas of this agricultural revolution? Until some years ago, the area of Mesopotamia was considered to be the only place where the agricultural revolution occurred independently. Recently, however, extensive studies in various parts of the world indicate several pioneer areas of agricultural revolution, namely, North Syria (before Mesopotamia - wheat), Southeast Asia (continental fringe - roots), South China (Yangtze River before Yellow River - rice), Meso-America (Teuacan - corns) and West Africa (Niger - cereals). These were all pioneer areas in agricultural revolution, occurring between 11,000 and 5,000 years ago, and from which agriculture diffused to other parts of the globe.

Now, let us talk about the Urban Revolution which created the third great turning point in human history on the global scale. That is the formation of cities, city-states, the creation of urban life. The conditions for the turning point differed from area to area, but what was common to all areas was that they had successfully proceeded with the Agricultural Revolution, had developed irrigation techniques, and had stored abundant surplus food to support an urban population which was not directly engaged in agriculture. The development of agriculture based on large scale irrigation systems took place by large rivers. It follows that the urban revolutions in old continents occurred in regions alongside large rivers, giving the name "great river civilizations."

The undertaking of large scale collective systems in such great river areas required a powerful ruler. Thus, the early urban civilizations were characterized by the establishment of a powerful royal authority and also by the stratification of social classes into priests, scribes, warriors, craftsmen, and merchants.

Such primary "urban civilizations" developed in four areas. First, the Sumerian urban civilization occurred on the Tigris-Euphrates delta about 3,500 B.C., followed by the Egyptian urban civilization about 3,000 B.C. on the Nile. The Indus civilization developed along the Indus River about 2,500 B.C. Then came the Chinese urban civilization (South, Liang zhu) about the same time, and the Shang Civilization (North, on the Yellow River)
about 1,500 B.C. In the New World, there arose two Urban Revolutions, in Meso-America and in the Andes. The "Urban Revolution" defines civilization par excellence, because civilization means to become civil, to have an urban way of life. Urbanization spread to other places from these core areas.

The fourth revolution of human civilization took place in the period K. Jaspers called "Axenzeit." I would name it the "Axial Revolution" or the "Spiritual Revolution." This revolution saw the birth of philosophy and world religions. The Anthropic Revolution was based on the physical transformation to up-right walking from which tool-making and language developed, while the Agricultural Revolution rested upon an economic revolution based on the active production of food. The "Urban Revolution" was essentially a revolution of social systems. In comparison with such physical, economic, and social revolutions, the basic revolution took place this time in the human spirit. It happened almost in parallel in four areas of the globe from the 8th century B.C. to the 4th century B.C.

The pioneer areas of this Axial Revolution were Israel, Greece, China and India. If we add Zoroastrianism in Persia, there were five pioneer areas of the Axial Revolution. In Israel, the great prophets of the Old Testament, Amon, Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the second Isaiah appeared and preached to people to believe in their unique god. This legacy was later transformed in the New Testament into the new religion of Jesus Christ. In Greece, beginning with Thales and other philosophers of the Miletian School, a series of great thinkers — Pythagoras, Parmenides, Anaxagoras, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle — appeared. In India, philosophical thought began with the Upanishads; later came the so-called Six Masters, Ajita, Pakudha, Purana, Gosala, Sanjaya, and Mahavira, paralleled by Sakya-muni of Buddhism. In China, great thinkers like Confucius, Lao-tzu, Mo-tzu, Mencius and Chuang-tzu came to prominence and wrote on the human way of life (tao). These four pioneer areas of the Axial Revolution advanced in parallel. Independently they carried different types of the spiritual revolution and became the
origins of the spiritualization of the world by propagating their thought to other areas of the globe.

The fifth and final revolution of human civilizational history was the "Scientific Revolution." It occurred in the Seventeenth Century and featured the creation of modern science. It rested upon the most of Francis Bacon, René Descartes, Galileo Galilei and Isaac Newton, and so on. In comparison with the earlier Agricultural, Urban and Axial Revolutions, each of which took place in diverse regions of the world almost in parallel, it is a notable fact that the creation of modern science took place exclusively in the region of Western Europe. Still, the historical significance of this event was world-wide. The results and methods of this revolution were transmitted to other areas and brought about profound transformational effects on other civilizations, paving the way directly for the space, nuclear and computer age of today. This revolution created, in this sense, the fifth epoch of human global history.

The Scientific Revolution which took place in the Seventeenth Century in Western Europe can be characterized as follows: The Scientific Revolution destroyed the Aristotelian concept of the world which had dominated European thought for over 2,000 years and replaced it with Descartes' mechanization of the world. Unlike the Greek *theoria* (mere contemplation), science and technology were to be linked on the basis of practical and effective knowledge. As Francis Bacon said, *scientia potentia* (knowledge is power). The Baconian idea made it possible to carry on the Industrial Revolution in the latter half of the next century, which led to the establishment of modern industrial society. Coupled with the expansive strength of capitalism, the Industrial Revolution became the motivating power of the European domination of other countries of the globe. Other areas also had to accept those revolutions and modernize themselves. Otherwise, they would perish or be colonized. The only pioneering areas of the Scientific-Industrial Revolution were Europe and America, the latter having inherited European civilization and made further developments. America and Japan are now initiat-
ing the Informational Revolution, which is the third stage of the Scientific Revolution following the Industrial Revolution.

However, today, I think we are facing the sixth great turning point of human history following the Scientific Revolution. The Scientific, Industrial and Information Revolutions are all continuous. While the modern scientific and technological civilizations, which originated in Europe, brought many fruits for human welfare, it also brought many serious problems such as environmental pollution, ecological destruction, the exhaustion of natural resources, the stockpile of nuclear arms, and increasing numbers of mentally ill people, among other negative effects. We cannot now allow the linear extension of the current civilization. Humans are exposed to the danger of annihilation, should these negative effects continue. We have now a responsibility to create a new civilization where we overcome this environmental crisis. I would call this sixth revolution the Environmental Revolution.

I would call this sixth revolution the "Environmental Revolution." However, this is not a topic of my lecture today.

Allow me to go back to my framework of comparative civilizations. As shown in the diagram (Table One, next page), I propose 23 major civilizations: the major civilizations are defined here as follows:

(i) They have their own individuality, style and system.
(ii) Their development is essentially autonomous even though influenced by others.
(iii) The spans of their development are of considerable duration (over one thousand years).

What should be noted in this diagram is that these major civilizations are civilizations after the Urban Revolutions, for I define "civilizations" par excellence as those after the Urban Revolution. Previous to these civilizations, there existed the stages of the Agricultural Revolution. For example, the Mesopotamian civilization was preceded by the Ubaid agricultural period which prepared the Urban Revolution in Sumer. Before the Egyptian civilization there was the Gerzeh agricultural period.
which made possible the Urban Revolution on Lower Nile. These stages of the Agricultural Revolution as well as the Anthropic Revolutions do not appear in the diagram, not because I neglect them, but because I treat "civilizations" par excellence following my definition. Of course, there exist many peripheral civilizations around the major civilizations shown in the diagram.

Therefore, the upper limits of these major civilizations coincide with the point where the Urban Revolutions took place. The pioneer areas of the Urban Revolutions are shown by the mark ∆ (triangle): Egyptian, Mesopotamian (Sumar), Indian
(Indus), Chinese (Liang zhu), Meso-American (Teotihuacan), Andean (Tiahuanaco). These were the origins of the Urban Revolution from where urbanization diffused to various places, by direct or indirect (stimulus) diffusion. The pioneer areas of the Axial Revolution (Spiritual Revolution) are denoted by the mark O (circle): Greek, Syrian, Persian (Zoroaster), Indian, and Chinese. They were the origins of the Spiritual Revolution, namely, the birth place of philosophy and higher religions, from which the results of the Axial Revolutions diffused world-wide. The origin of the Scientific Revolution is indicated by the mark © (double circle) which took place in the Seventeenth Century Europe only, as I mentioned earlier.

Starting from some pioneer areas, three revolutions (Urban, Axial and Scientific) transformed the civilizations world-wide, having tremendous impacts on other areas. Twenty-three major civilizations, so to speak, "ordinate" (on mathematical term) of my framework of comparative civilizations and the five stages of revolutions (here appear only three revolutions) its "abssisa."

Warp and woofs complete a flexile of my framework of comparative civilizations. In a manner of speaking, Hegel, Ranke and Marx took into consideration only woofs and neglected warps, while Spengler and Toynbee took note of warps but neglected woofs. I think both are necessary, and integrated they elucidate the real aspects of civilizational developments on the global scale. The second point which should be noted in this diagram is the fact that major civilizations keep their proper identity even after being influenced by other civilizations. For example, Japanese civilization was affected by Chinese civilization in the Spiritual Revolution but still has its own civilizational identity. European civilization, influenced by Greek and Arabic civilization, has developed its proper form of civilization. The same phenomena can be said concerning other major civilizations. "Influence" or "indigenous" is too simple bifurcation to account for civilizational developments. What really has taken place is the retention of identity despite influence from others. This is a
real aspect of civilizational intercourse which comparative civilizations should make clear.

Thus, my framework of comparative civilizations is intended to overcome the shortcomings of both the Eurocentric, unilinear theory of Hegel and others and the theory of the multiculturizationist Toynbee and others. By offering a new paradigm, we may approach the real aspects of civilizational development in proper perspective.

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