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The Civilizational Concept

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In the first half of the 20th century, the World Wars, the Depression, and the Bomb combined to give the impression of impending crisis, perhaps leading to a great human regression, perhaps to the end of humankind. Or perhaps the crisis would lead to remarkable transformation, a better world, a world of peace and justice.

In the first decade of the 21st century, it appears that neither extreme came to pass. Though warfare and massacre have continued, with more than 20 million people killed since the World Wars, civilizations have continued to exist, and humankind has continued to multiply, though at a declining rate.

On the other hand, in many ways the world has gotten better; health and length of life have increased, although AIDS and the recurrence of malaria and tuberculosis reminds us that bacteria and viruses can adjust as well as we [McNeill 1998: 9-17]. Numerous democracies have emerged, although they are fragile, and we know that technological potentials for totalitarianism are greater than ever. The world economy has been productive, although still unstable, and mechanisms for distribution have not kept pace. Even though the Bomb not only exists, but has been improved and more widely distributed, we no longer perceive ourselves to be in crisis. But neither do we live in a world of peace and justice. We may be said to live in normal times.

Where Toynbee had urged us to look beyond our nation to our civilization, and to realize that our civilization was but one among a considerable number, now we are urged to consider the world as a whole, linked by networks of communication, trade, and monetary electronics, or in the current phrase, by globalization. Civilizations seem, by contrast, parochial, redundant, transitional. It appears that civilizations have not died; they have only merged.

For David Wilkinson, at home as either world systems analyst or civilizationist, civilizations are historical entities, to be studied as historians study the Tang Dynasty or anthropologists Mississippian Culture. Long before globalization became a term in common usage, all civilizations had merged into a single Central Civilization [Wilkinson 1978].
Questions from the Sixties

In order to reassess the civilization concept, let's defer these contemporary assumptions. Rather, let's consider the civilizational controversies that were occurring a half century ago, and then decide whether these are of historical interest, or whether, as Samuel P. Huntington [1996] believes, they have contemporary relevance.

In the 1960s I wrote a book on the subject. But since then, the ISCSC was reestablished in the United States, more civilizationists have come along, and my own views have been modified. Now I hope to make a fresh statement, briefly summing up areas of consensus and disagreement, and then stating what now seems to be probable. Throughout, with minor rearrangements, I am following the sequence of presentation in Chapter One of The Nature of Civilizations [Melko, 1969--hereafter cited as Nature].

These were the questions observed in the 1960s:

- Have civilizationists established a conceptual framework, a sufficient area of agreement on field of study or, if you are not put off by the term, have they established a paradigm?
- Do civilizations have meaningful internal relationships? Can they be said to be integrated?
- Do they have plurality? Can they be characterized? Do they have distinct cultures?
- Are civilizations real, or just methodological concepts?
- Is there agreement on the identity of the civilizations?

In Nature, I set out to present a model for the study of civilizations. I quoted Rushton Coulborn writing that the study of civilizations needed "the establishment of an outline body of doctrine for the whole field secure enough for all scholars working within it to accept." Coulborn, like Spengler, Sorokin, and Quigley, a rather dogmatic fellow, had sent me to the library to read Thomas Kuhn's The Structure of Scientific Revolutions which, by 1967, five years after its publication, was catching on as having wider applications than just to natural science. So, while I modestly wrote that I wanted to make a beginning on this task, I really wanted to establish the civilizational paradigm for future civilizationists. They would become, as Coulborn saw himself, normal scientists. I took for my own model the veneer of modesty adopted by Toynbee and Kroeber, but underneath was the arrogance of Spengler—without his knowledge [Nature 1-4].
Is There a Paradigm?

The term paradigm itself is controversial but useful. By paradigm I simply mean an area of research in which scholars have common general perceptions about which there is sufficient agreement for debate. John Hord (letter, 1997) suggests that a paradigm might be described as "a set of assumptions, usually including both events and relationships." That works well enough, if you remember that the assumptions themselves may be challenged, and sometimes this leads scholars to participate in other paradigms, or to leave altogether and attempt to establish their own.

Did Nature have this impact? More than three decades later, is there a civilizational paradigm? Yes and no. Or rather, no and yes. Nature did not have much impact. But there does appear to be a civilizational paradigm. Possibly the science has become too normal. Perhaps the paradigm has been taken too much for granted.

The International Society for the Comparative Study of Civilizations (ISCSC) moved from Austria to the United States in 1971. After a few years in which methods and theory papers predominated, papers presented at annual meetings covered a wide range of subjects involving comparisons of political, economic, social, cultural, aesthetic, religious, philosophical, literary and other aspects of civilizations; examinations of particular problems within a civilization, often Western; looking back to the civilizational roots; explorations of the primitive precursors of civilizations; and examinations of the interactions between civilizations.

But the civilizationists who continued to be interested in the overall processes of civilizations—e.g. David Wilkinson, David Richardson, Roger Wescott, Gordon Hewes, John Hord, Lee Snyder, Corinne Gilb, Ross Maxwell—seemed to constitute just another aspect of the normal science, and they were not getting many books published on this subject, only papers and articles.

The paradigm was sufficiently understood. We knew what we meant by civilizations, we used familiar examples. We compared philosophies and religions. When we did a session on Hadrian and I set out to look for the Chinese Hadrian (1996), I knew I was looking for an emperor who set limits on the expansion of the Han or Tang or Ming Empire, preferably one who traveled its borders. I didn't find him, but I would have recognized him if he existed. And it never occurred to me then, or at any other time, to refer back to Nature to consult a table that showed typical changes in different aspects of civilizations—political,
economic, aesthetic etc.—from origins through termination. This was accompanied by a dynamic chart, spreading across two pages, that showed these aspects whirling through space and time [Nature 101-108]. No, that chart wasn't needed for the paradigm to take hold.

Meanwhile, the World Historical Association came into existence and grew rapidly, meeting the needs, not only of researchers, but of the growing number of teachers of world history in undergraduate colleges and high schools in a time of increasing sensitivity to multiculturalism. World history text books tended to be divided into historical periods. Scholarly books, the sources for the text books, could take a section of period and area, more than a nation, less than the world, for instance considering the Asian world before industrialization [e.g. Chaudhuri, 1990].

Another area of study with a world scope was initiated in the 1970's by the world systems analysts (wearing black hats). To a civilizationist, the analysis of macrosystems relationships might be perceived as a kind of intercivilizational encounter, but after it was introduced by Immanuel Wallerstein in 1974, it developed a life of its own. While world systems analysts could teach only college classes at the major or graduate level, they were spinning off a new research area, playing off one another. Their paradigm was tighter, more coherent than that of the civilizationists, and more focused on world economy. They were much more successful at getting books published and reviewed, and were pioneers of the Internet. A pair of well known debates occurred in the nineties between civilizationists and world systems analysts [Sanderson 1994, 1996], but the real focus of the debates was world systems, with the civilizationists serving as foils to criticize the world systems approach and set up rebuttals.

The only major attention drawn to civilizations since the founding of the ISCSC was created by a civilizational outsider (though a political science insider), Samuel P. Huntington [1996], who got considerable attention by taking civilization theory and applying it to the future, warning of potential major conflicts involving the West, Islamic Civilization, and China. While some civilizationists sniffed at Huntington's more popular approach and sometimes debatable conjectures, others acknowledged that he was doing what more civilizationists should be doing: applying the lessons of the past to the contemporary world and to the future [Drew, 2001].

So, yes, there is a civilizational paradigm. By 1970 the mapping was sufficient to allow civilizationists to take off in different directions.
If there is a difficulty with this, it is that the normal science has taken so many different directions that most of us can't keep up with it. Articles appear in many journals, but comparatively few books. The net provides more areas for progress, if it is occurring, to get lost.

What might be helpful now, it seems to me, is a reconsideration of the central problems dealt with by civilizationists, a firm (nay a dogmatic) statement of probability, and--instead of a debate about the superiority of civilizational study to anything else--a linking of civilizational theory to world history and world systems analysis, perhaps under the generic heading preferred by Lee Daniel Snyder [1999]: Macrohistory.

Who Are the Civilizationists?

Much begins with Oswald Spengler. He had his predecessors, but he put together the first civilizational theory. He stressed the plurality and autonomy of high cultures, which we now call civilizations. He placed great emphasis on what A. L. Kroeber would call style and David Richardson, worldview. And he perceived a pattern of rise and fall that would be accepted and modified by other civilizationists. He has been much maligned as a dogmatic, racist Nazi, but in Charles Atkinson's translation, his *Decline of the West* [1980, (1932)] still reads well and often leaves the reader saying, yes, that's how it is (not every reader in the same sections, of course). Recently, Spengler has been incisively reassessed by John Farrenkopf [2001].

Arnold J. Toynbee's famous (or infamous) *Study* [1934-1961] expanded and rounded off Spengler's ideas. He insisted that his approach was different, but civilizationists have linked the two. It could be said that most civilizationists who have written since Spengler have been expanding on or reacting to the perceptions of these two scholars. Toynbee wrote at great length and seemed to have had an aversion to editing. But his much amended list of civilizations comes closer to the lists we accept today, his theory of peripheral domination has proved valuable to civilizationists and world systems analysts alike, his concept of general war has invoked a lively sub-discipline in political science. His variations on Spengler's ideas, e.g. Times of Troubles and Universal States, seem to have been more acceptable to English writing successors. Both Spengler and Toynbee, damned in their own time, seem to have provided fruitful hypotheses that are still being explored.

While Pitirim A. Sorokin's *Social and Cultural Dynamics* (1937-41, 1957) strongly discounted the whole civilizational idea, much that he has written can be fitted into the civilizational paradigm. Ironically,
Sorokin first attempted to establish a paradigm [1963, (1950)], though it wouldn't have been so called at the time it was published, reviewing the work of authors who pursued broad social philosophies. His own basic model, however, provided a broader cyclical perception, a different macrohistorical interpretation. He did agree with Spengler that there were cyclical patterns in history, and that historical epochs, like Spengler's cultures, had distinctive characteristics.

A. L. Kroeber, in *Configurations of Culture Growth* [1944], presented a cooler, less dogmatic approach to civilizational questions. His concept of pattern or style was closer to Spengler's presentation of cultural creativity, and he was interested in the rise and decline of such patterns. But he was less insistent on finding recurrent durations. Like Sorokin, he also wrote about what we would now call a paradigm of historical writing [1957]. Indeed, it could be argued that Kuhn's paradigm for science, which we all love to expand, is an example of a Kroeberian pattern, which the latter used to describe configurations of related work in art, literature and philosophy.

Carroll Quigley, intending to take a fresh and incisive approach to civilizational questions, also provided a brief and clear summary of civilizational problems. His answers, like Spengler's and Sorokin's, were dogmatic but clarifying. Probably his *Evolution of Civilizations* [1979 (1961)], which he said he thought about for 30 years and wrote in six weeks, is the best starting point for anyone who would like a readable introduction to the study of civilizations.

Rushton Coulborn, a student of Kroeber's and friend of Toynbee and Sorokin, applying Kuhn's idea of paradigm, in retrospect saw himself as an early normal scientist focusing on the initial stages of civilizational development [1969]. But, like Quigley, he was also one of the paradigm creators [1956, 1958, 1966].

**Defining Civilizations**

Two assumptions were made in Nature that now seem surprising. Civilizations were defined in the plural, seemingly taking for granted that neither the qualities nor the plurality of civilizations needed to be explored. In reconsidering these questions, it now seems that definition and integration ought to be considered separately. Plurality, on the other hand, depends on both integration and characterization, so it needs to be considered in relation to both.

Civilizationists tend to agree that civilizations are distinct from primitive cultures. Spengler saw these high cultures being born, having
a soul, emerging in a very short period of time. Others have insisted that it is not a matter of civilizations gradually evolving from primitive cultures. Coulborn sees them on several occasions emerging relatively quickly and decisively, replacing a multiplicity of primitive societies on several occasions with unified cultures that are entirely different [1958: 3-30]. Civilizations are perceived to be a great deal larger than primitive cultures, usually incorporating a great number of primitive cultures, but in so doing, transforming them.

Civilizations are characterized by new religious forms, "higher religions" that contribute to civilizational unity, religions that are qualitatively different from those of primitive cultures [e.g. Spengler 1980: I, 399-402; Toynbee 1934-1961: XII, 68-102; Coulborn 1958: 129-171; 1966: 412-413, 417-421].

Economically civilizations exercise greater control of the environment, practicing agriculture, domesticating animals, employing metals, building surpluses. Civilizations are also characterized by new political forms that unify much larger areas and bring about more centralized political unification which is often not to the benefit of most of the people who experience this transformation. It is a matter of debate whether the building of economic surplus is a cause of the political transformation, or whether the religious, economic and political transformations are themselves integrated responses to another challenge, such as desiccation or population pressure.

The developing political and economic forms enable civilizations to build cities and lead them to develop methods of record keeping that often, but not always, include writing. Invariably the development of cities, and the intense change involved in the whole process induces a need for new expressions of art, manifested particularly in the architecture of the cities, which in turn provide scope and need for sculpture, engraving and painting.

Warfare, as a means of controlling territory, was seen as a phenomenon of civilization. Primitive societies did fight one another, but not for the control or acquisition of territory.

Civilizations have much more elaborate systems of stratification, with a small minority of religious and political leaders dominating a powerless and subordinate majority.

Regardless of civilizational characteristics, there must be universals. Technologies, irrigation for instance, can be operated only in a limited way, or they will not work.

Much of the difficulty with definition has come from the critical
thinking capacities of our scholars. If you start to list the characteristics of a civilization, the critical thinker will show you that primitive societies have these characteristics, they have horticulture if not agriculture, centers if not cities, often war over similar issues to those of civilizations, some way of keeping records if not writing.

But civilizations have a mass, style, economy and sets of internal relationships that make them distinctly different from primitive cultures. There may be marginal cases, primitive cultures that were coalescing and on their way to becoming civilizations, but for one reason or another didn't get there. We debate about these, but that need not get in the way of our acceptance of a number of mainstream civilizations, not only by civilizationists, but by librarians in their cataloging, by journalists in their reporting, by all of us. And this shows that I still cannot get away from the plurality of civilizations, even while trying to frame a definition.

For now, then, let's say a civilization is a large society possessing a degree of autonomy and internal integration, an agricultural economy, religion, stratification, warfare, usually cities and writing, or some other method of keeping long term records, and central government at least at a regional or urban level.

**Are Civilizations Integrated?**

It is difficult to develop a civilizational theory without civilizations. Spengler didn't use the term as we use it now, but it was central to his thesis that the "high cultures" he wrote about were very large, autonomous, durable societies that had their own histories. Toynbee agreed with Spengler about the identity of several of these societies, but he called them civilizations and that is the name that has come to be used. Toynbee agreed with Spengler, however, that these civilizations had considerable autonomy, lasted for many centuries, and had their own histories.

Spengler was more insistent on this autonomy, arguing that once established, these societies were virtually impenetrable. Others have modified this, but the idea that a civilization maintains its identity over a long period of time, resisting or transforming external influences, is crucial to civilizational theory, and one area in which it is distinct from world systems analysis.

Spengler, much more than Toynbee, saw the unity of a civilization formed around its soul, what later Kroeber would describe as pattern or style. It was this internal style that distinguished a civilization and gave
it the power to resist the influence of others. If one civilization borrowed ideas from another, the borrowed idea or technology would be modified so as to fit the pattern of the borrowing civilization. If the boundaries of civilizations were not always clear, the styles were.

The idea of individual civilizational styles suggests that civilizations have a degree of internal integration. This is perceived to be particularly strong in the early centuries of a civilization's development. Members of the civilization are ordinarily more influenced by the internal patterns of the civilization than they are by external events. As Toynbee put it, civilizations are institutions "that comprehend without being comprehended by others" [1934-61: I: 455 n. 1].

The extent and intensity of integration varies. In times of transition, the integration is looser, as change in core area requires change in other areas. Does the loosening follow change or does change follow loosening? This seems like a 19th Century question. Even if we could determine the change that preceded others, this would not tell us whether it caused the loosening or was permitted by the loosening, not to mention that the determination of the precipitating event leading to the first change depends so much on the observer's theoretical framework.

At all times, but especially when integration is tight, there tends to be a relationship of components. Aesthetics relate to one another, so that if forms of literature become freer, and more latitude is allowed in verse forms, this is likely to be reflected in art and music. Economic forms relate to political forms. If central government is powerful, economies are likely to be more tightly controlled, as are religions. If, like Southeast Asia and Europe, a civilization tends to be organized in state systems, it is likely to experience more organized internal wars [e.g. Melko, 2001a, Table 10].

Sorokin's contention [1963: 209-217] that civilizations are mere conglomerates seems considerably exaggerated. These internal relationships become obvious when considered from the perspective of another civilization. The perception of a plurality of civilizations owes much to the integrating of internal relationships.

Each civilization has a culture. Within the civilization are subcultures, French and German, or Hindu and Muslim, that will be perceived as cultures within the civilization, but appear as variants from without. Culture helps maintain integration and provides limitations on change. It is extremely powerful in a civilization, may seemingly disappear for decades, and then reemerge, as we have seen recently in the case of Russian Orthodox religion.
Worldview is an aspect of culture, and it can be said that each civilization has a worldview that is determined by that culture. Even political and economic choices are determined by culture. The Chinese worldview limited the capacity for trade in the Ming Empire. Even though the Chinese had ocean-going ships more than a century before the West, and even though they actually got to India rather than to islands off a continent in another hemisphere, the West and not China experienced a great burst of world trade.

How deep into a civilization does culture penetrate? Quigley mentions that in the case of Classical civilization, only superficially, only to a small elite. It affected the upper classes who built the buildings and wrote the writings, but the peasants and proletariat, who cared about neither, were everywhere pretty much alike [1979: 276-278].

Does this apply to all civilizations? Certainly poverty and illiteracy continue to create a world population in the 21st century that has many features in common. But if comparative studies are made of peasant or poor rural populations, it becomes apparent that the peasants of one civilization do differ from those of another in many significant ways, and those ways usually relate to the respective integrations of the civilizations. (Uh, what studies did you have in mind?)

No doubt we can find correspondences in the lives of the poor. All must solve problems of subsistence, and there are probably limited ways to solve these. And it is hard to say whether the lower classes represented in the comedies of Shakespeare compared to those represented by Aristophanes are accurate, or only an upper class representation. Still the groundlings appear to have been amused by Shakespeare's buffoons (as often we bourgeoisie are not), so they must have recognized them. And we know that folk music doesn't travel easily from one civilization to another, though we can learn to appreciate it, or at least say we do. The probability would seem to be that the patterns of civilizations penetrate deeply, indeed, they are the components of the civilizations.

Can Civilizations Be Characterized?

It follows that if civilizations can be considered in the plural and each has a history around its integration, then each will have a unique culture. If that is so, then each can be characterized in terms of its culture. While we can find many components shared by all civilizations, such as writing and class differentiation, and while we can find changes that spread throughout the world, such as airplanes and democracy, still we can characterize each civilization as distinct. The comparative study
of civilizations, therefore, involves the familiar undergraduate examination instruction: compare and contrast.

Spengler's image of a civilizational "soul" suggests that, like a person, the personality of the civilization, its culture, appears very early in its history [1980: I, 179-180]. Kroeber sees this soul as a summary of the relatedness, the integration of the civilization's cultural patterns. Once these patterns become established, they provide each civilization with the qualities that make it unique and immediately identifiable. The style, moreover, lasts for very long periods of time, so that we perceive the civilization of Gandhi to be the civilization Asoka.

Spengler wrote of a weltanschauung, which David Richardson [1995, 1999] and others translate as worldview, a way of seeing the world that is shared by participants in a culture. This greatly influences the way collective information is interpreted. The worldview reflects the soul of the culture, is consistent with its style.

Toynbee is on the right track (a 19th century metaphor?) when he says each civilization has a history. In any history of China there will be a lot more to write about East and Inner Asian neighbors than about relations with other civilizations. These are the materials of the history, whether it is political, economic, social, intellectual or aesthetic.

World systems analysts can add to our perspective when they focus on economic and political relations with other civilizations, but they are probably off the Silk Road and into the tundra if they assert that such studies give the true picture of the history of China.

For me the crucial factor in bounding a civilization is close to Kroeber's idea of the pattern or the style of the civilization (1944, 1957). It takes a dull eye to recognize it: a sharp one will make too many distinctions. Gordon Hewes remarked once that East Asian Civilization could be delimited from South Asian by chopsticks. (The line is roughly in the middle of Vietnam.) In other words, if a civilization is relatively integrated, and aspects of the culture relate, then if you can take a single cultural aspect that is characteristic of one civilization and not the other, that will roughly follow other characteristics.

When Stedman Noble considers diffusion among the four earliest civilizations: Mesopotamian, Egyptian, South Asian and East Asian, he notes that nevertheless they each have different stories. Ideas and techniques diffuse, and influence where a civilization will start its development. "There are some stories, however, that seem to indicate that the group developed without outside contacts." And the possession of such stories, he thinks, represents the difference between civilizations and
regions within the sphere of a civilization [Noble, 2000:2].

Now it is true that the same thing might be said of the history of France. There is more to say about the interior development of France than its relation to Europe and the West, but an understanding of these is far more important to that history than an understanding of world trade is to Western history.

Moreover, you can write Western or Chinese or even Islamic history sequentially, but that becomes a problem if you try to write world history. At best, if you want to write sequentially, you can take the history by millennia or some not very much smaller unit of time, and even then you must move regionally around the world. If you try to write the history of Asia by units of time, you have chaos; if you try to tell it regionally, the Mongols keep invading you.

The terms "society" and "culture" have long caused difficulty among sociologists and anthropologists. A society may be thought of as a relationship of individuals, its culture is whatever gives the society a special character. One might say society is to the person as culture is to personality.

Particular species of ants or termites have societies, but since they are everywhere alike, they are not distinguished by any culture. But all human societies have a culture. Since they do, however, anthropologists often refer to a primitive culture as short for the culture of this particular society, and from that they expand to primitive cultures, meaning that each is different, though all are societies.

Civilizationists likewise have this problem, at least implicitly, since every civilization has a culture. So Spengler refers to high cultures, while Coulborn prefers to write about civilized societies, Spengler looking for uniqueness, Coulborn for "regularities."

If global civilization came into existence to the extent that it incorporated all civilized and primitive cultures, it might become redundant to refer to global culture since humans, like species of termites, would share the same culture.

Are Civilizations Real?

In Nature [4], the reality question was dealt with as a long footnote, but it seems to be worth main text consideration. That civilizations are initially described as "exclusive, durable, mortal macrocultures" betrays the author's bias. If these social entities have a culture, they must be real. If they do not, they are not civilizations.

The question of the reality of civilizational culture provided the
basis of Sorokin's attack on the civilizational concept. He saw civilizations as "congeries" lacking a common culture. So if the definition required a culture, there simply would be no entities that would meet that criterion. Kroeber's reservation was different. He thought the whole concept of civilization might be intermediate. The next generation might have a more meaningful way of looking at history [1948: 252-265]. And, two generations later, we can see that world history and world systems analysis might provide two approaches that appear to many scholars to be more meaningful ways of perceiving history.

As it happens, a more recent challenge to the reality of civilizations comes from world systems analyst Andre Gunder Frank. Like Sorokin, and consistent with his own name, Frank is blunt: "In reality there are and have been no civilizations, societies, cultures, ethnicities and even states in and of themselves. There are NO essentialist intrinsically self contained entities. To claim, identify, and study any such makes NO sense whatever and only beclouds reality. There are only connections and relations within and among such alleged civilizations." [Frank, 2001].

Breathtaking. I wish I could achieve this level of certainty in writing "The Final Word." All of these ways of looking are based on realities. The economic and political connections that concern world systems analysts are real. The world as a whole is real. And there really are long range cultural connections that are durable and provide exclusivity.

But the ways of seeing are numerous, and preferences change over time, often because someone writes something that strikes a chord, seems meaningful for the time, as Toynbee's three volumes did in 1934, or Wallerstein's in 1974.

Europe is real in that you can visit it, see Paris and Vienna, the Rhine and the Danube, Canterbury Cathedral and St. Peter's. But as a geographical location, it does not seem justified to call it a continent. We contrast China and a West that includes Europe, North America, Australia, New Zealand and sometimes South Africa. All these places can really be seen and experienced, but whether they are linked as "the West" is of course conceptual. The concept can be useful in one instance, and ignored in another. But without these concepts, we have difficulty finding meaning, communicating, making our way, writing history at all.

Given that there has been considerable disagreement about the number and identity of the civilizations, could it be that they are them-
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selves products of the collective historical imagination? Do they really exist, or are they merely reifications, systems imposed by historians as a matter of convenience? On one hand they are reifications, since the civilizational perspective is only one of a number of possible approaches to studying world history. On the other hand, there is considerable agreement about their identity. Most people would agree that there is a country called China, that it has a long history, and that it has a style, partly shared by some of its neighbors, that we in the West identify as that of The Far East. When we spend a great deal of money to fly to Beijing or Tokyo or Seoul, we certainly expect to arrive at a real destination.

That historians tend to specialize in and write about East Asia separately from South Asia, and that libraries so classify them, suggests both reality and convenience. Other divisions are possible: one may write about Asia as a whole (deleting Europe for cultural rather than geographical or economic reasons), and this too can be perceived as either real or reification. Or, if you are writing about the spread of agriculture, it makes more sense to consider Eurasia as a geographical unit [e.g. Diamond 1997: 176-187]. It is nearly impossible to write history without, as G. M. Young [1964] says, making use of "what the Germans, in their terse and sparkling way, call the hypostatization of methodological categories," which is to say, making a reality out of a matter of convenience.

So, yes, civilizations are as real as Santa Claus, and the world would be less interesting without them. But whether and how they are perceived has varied, will vary. The same is true of world history, world systems and, for that matter, globalization.

Agreement on Civilizational Identities

In *Nature* [15] an appraisal of delineations by earlier civilizationists (Spengler, Toynbee, Kroeber, Philip Bagby, Coulborn and Quigley) showed that all listed civilizations in the Far East, India, Egypt, the Middle East, the Mediterranean, Western Europe, Central America and (except for Spengler) Western South America. Toynbee, Coulborn and Quigley also perceived a separate civilization in Eastern Europe. In 2000, at the ISCSC meeting in Mobile, a group of ISCSC members, working from an expanded table, agreed that there was at least one civilization in each of the eight areas on which the pioneers had agreed. About Islamic Civilization and Byzantine Civilization, they were almost equally divided, the doubters considering that these might be
included in larger entities.

So it appears there is considerable agreement on what have been provisionally called "mainstream" civilizations [Melko 2001b].

Conclusions

Have civilizationists established a conceptual framework, a sufficient area of agreement on field of study, a paradigm? Yes. It is well established, and civilizationists may be too much engaged in normal science. Can civilizations be defined?

In 1981, Vern Bullough organized and chaired a session that was to provide a one paragraph ISCSC definition of civilization. We couldn't agree on a phrase, let alone a paragraph. But yes, they can be defined, though somewhat differently by each civilizationist. They differ from primitive cultures in many ways, though for almost every individual civilizational characteristic Gordon Hewes would have been able to find you a primitive culture that possessed it. And though the 1981 ISCSC session could not define civilization, any civilizationist can do it, as I have done in this paper. Is my definition better than anyone else's? I would not want to say that. Publicly.

Do civilizations have meaningful internal relationships? Can they be said to be integrated? Yes, unquestionably. It is the internal relationships that call our attention to their plurality.

Do they have plurality? Can they be characterized? Do they have distinct cultures? Yes, they have plurality, and since they do, and they are different in style, we can characterize them in general terms, and there can't be a characterization if there is no overriding culture.

Are civilizations real, or just methodological concepts? They are methodological concepts, reifications, and real. If Europe is real, civilizations are real. But Europe is also a reification. We cannot think, perceive, organize without methodological concepts.

Is there agreement on the identity of the civilizations? There is impressive agreement among civilizationists on the identity of the major civilizations. At an ISCSC session last year, in contrast to the 1981 session on definition, a group of thirteen ISCSC members agreed by acclamation on the identity of eight civilizations [Melko, 2001b]. So the answer to these questions is yes, yes, yes, yes, yes.

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Andre Gunder Frank, quotation on the unreality of civilizations, relayed by e-mail from David Richardson, from someone else who read it in a review by Frank of a reader on world history. This source has been lost.


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*The ISCSC Archives are located in the Spahr Library, Dickinson College, Carlisle PA.