Civilization and Culture

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Abstract: **This article discusses the historical usages of "civilization" and "culture" and various definitions advanced by thinkers such as Oswald Spengler, Fernand Braudel, and Philip Bagby, while also suggesting a new way of dealing with these two terms. The argument is that "civilization" is the key term to denote groups and peoples who share a large and common geographic locus, values and social institutions, and that "culture" refers to a particular set of values or beliefs within the larger historico-cultural entity that is a civilization. If we treat "civilization" as the largest and highest socio-historical unit and "culture" as something smaller, lower, and subsumed under "civilization," we will better understand the ubiquitous phenomenon of cultural appropriation and civilizational hybridization. To further elucidate how these two terms should be understood and to disentangle them from each other, the essay provides an historical account of the context in which each term arose.**
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Keywords: **Bagby, Braudel, civilization, culture, globalization, hybridization, religion.**

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INTRODUCTION

A current and major difficulty in civilizational studies is how to deal with the concepts of "civilization" and culture." As these terms are simultaneously distinct and overlap, arose through a historical process that was key to modernity and are also at the root of a variety of disciplinary connections, they constitute a perfect case of semantic entanglement. Confusion has resulted from this entanglement and would be exacerbated should we not attempt to clarify them. Without clarification, the two concepts have already or will further become interchangeable in meaning and the use of both terms will depend to a great extent on what stance or perspective those engaged in this field of study adopt. Understandably, those engaged in civilizational studies feel free or even obliged to make up their own definition of the terms, often confounding them. If the two terms are interchangeable and their meaning confounded, it is difficult to see how we will understand the ubiquitous phenomenon of cultural appropriation or the ever closer interactions that happen daily everywhere in this increasingly globalizing age between the major geopolitical and economic powers such as America, China, Europe, the Arab world, India, Russia, and Japan. Hence, it is necessary to clarify the possible meanings of civilization and contrast them with the various meanings of culture. To achieve this, especially when there is already much confusion, the best procedure is to attempt a description rather than a definition of civilization. We may start simply by asking: What is a civilization?

In its traditional sense, a civilization is a way of thinking, a set of beliefs, or a way of life. It is a spatio-temporal continuum and long-term dynamic structure (Kroeber, 1973:1-27; Chang, 1982:365); it is also the product of human evolution as well as a new phase in this evolution, in which cities emerge. Even at its initial stage, a civilization has a large population and geographical scope. As it grows, it incorporates a huge number of ethnic groups or peoples and a variety of customs, habits, languages, and even religions.[1] A civilization possesses a particular set of values, in most cases embodied in a religion[2] and the behavioral pattern imposed by the particular religion. A civilization usually develops a complex economy[3] along with equally complex sciences and technologies. When we speak of a civilization, we denote a sophisticated writing system, literatures, arts and music, a coherent legal system, advanced social institutions and political and military organizations, with all their corresponding material manifestations.

A civilization is composed of constituent elements or "cultures" which are interwoven with one another and are in constant interaction with other civilizations and their cultures in the world outside. These elements not only make up a civilization itself but are exactly what distinguishes one civilization from another. Based on a multiplicity of cultures, a civilization provides identity to those who belong to and are committed to it. Through a common geographical locus and a common set of values and social institutions rooted in that place, a particular civilization enables those belonging to it to identify with one another while differentiating themselves from inhabitants of another civilization. Thus based on a common geographical locus, common codes of conduct, common social institutions, and a common historical memory, a civilization endows cohesion, coherence, and consistency upon its members.

Major civilizations such as China, the West and the Arab world, which took shape a long time ago and have continued all the way to the present time, exhibit a profound historico-

cultural memory in addition to their vast demographic size and extensive territory.

A major civilization may, of course, decline and disappear, but if it survives the vicissitudes of history, it is necessarily growing rather than stagnant, diversified rather than homogeneous, open-minded rather than closed-minded, inclusive and all -encompassing rather than exclusive and restricted.From the above, we can conclude that civilizations are the larger unit from which cultures derive and into which they are subsumed. In this connection, special attention must be paid to the fact that "civilization" in its current usage often denotes a historico-cultural entity or an aggregation of peoples or ethnic groups.

When the distinction between the larger unit of civilization and its subsidiary constituent elements such as values and institutions is obliterated, the term "civilization" overlaps with the meaning of the term "culture" (in the sense of "cross-cultural studies"). In other words, apart from denoting a particular set of values, or a particular "culture,"

For example, when Samuel Huntington sets forth his "clashes of civilizations" or "civilizational wars" scenario, his argument does not refer to conflicts or hostilities between Islamic, Western, or Confucian value systems as such, but conflicts or wars between the Islamic, Western, and Confucian societies. In fact, he does not take much of an interest in the actual differences between the values, habits and customs of the peoples of these historico-cultural entities, but is perversely fascinated by what he believes to be the imminent wars between major "civilizations" or congeries of peoples sharing common geographic loci and values. Given the advances of technoscience and the accessibility of the means of mass destruction, an argument such as Huntington's courts the suicide of mankind as a species.

The Origins of the Modern Usages of "Civilization" and "Culture"

The difference between civilization and culture and an incorrect definition of civilization that confounds it with its subsidiary elements should, I hope, be relatively clear at this point. So why, one may ask, has the confusion between the two terms persisted? To a great extent, this has to do with the historical origins of the two terms, that is, how, when, where, and why they arose and the semantic confusion that has always been and remains a feature of current use. For instance, when the specific thinking and behavioral modes of a people or an aggregation of peoples or ethnic groups are discussed, both "culture" and "civilization" are frequently used interchangeably and this usage is perfectly acceptable. We see this today when writers or scholars talk about both "Indian Culture" and "Indian Civilization," so that both culture and civilization denote exactly the same geographic and historico-cultural entities. And we find precisely the same confusion historically, as when Hegel, the philosopher of world history who may be considered

the founder of civilizational studies, used the two words interchangeably in his lectures in the 1830s (Braudel, 1994:5).

According to the French historian Fernand Braudel, "civilization" in its modern sense was first used in 1752 by the French scholar Anne- Robert-Jacques Turgot, who was then writing a history of mankind. Prior to this, expressions like "civilized" and "to civilize" can be found as far back as the 16th century. These words came into use during the Renaissance in the Romance languages, "probably French and derived from the verb *civiliser*, meaning to achieve or impart refined manners, urbanization, and improvement" (Kroeber and Kluckhohn, 1952:145, cited by Schäfer,2001:305). In its received sense at the time, a "civilized man" was the diametrical opposite of savages. According to Immanuel Wallerstein, two Enlightenment scholars in the middle of the 18th century – Honoré Mirabeau and Adam Ferguson – began to use "civilization" and "civilized" in comparison with and contrast to "savagery" and "savage" (1994:216). Indeed, this apposition of civilization and savagery had become so deeply rooted in the minds of the French at the time that not even the "savages," of whom Jean-Jacques Rousseau was so enthusiastic in his praise, were seen as "civilized" (Wallerstein, 1994:3-4). At the same time, the word "culture," which was semantically almost equivalent with "civilization," was circulating together with the latter, despite the fact that in Roman times Cicero, the republican politician and philosopher and an essential author in the eighteenth-century educational canon, had used "culture" in the sense of *cultura animi* or cultivation of the soul (Wallerstein, 1994:5).

To complicate things further, around 1819 the hitherto singular "civilization" began to be used in the plural as "civilizations." Though this usage was inconspicuous at the time, it marks a major semantic shift. "Civilization" in the singular implied propriety and elegance of manners considered as the result of one's upbringing and cultivation, whereas "civilization" in the plural could mean the specific way of life of a specific nation or nations at a specific time (Bagby, 1963:74-75; Braudel, 1994:6 -7). It is exactly this usage of civilizations that constitutes a key concept in civilizational studies at present, and which can be found in theories advanced by important thinkers like Oswald Spengler, Arnold Toynbee, Fernand Braudel, Immanuel Wallerstein, Philip Bagby, Samuel Huntington, etc. Using this concept, it became perfectly all right to speak of "civilizations" when discussing not only Chinese, Indian, and Arab civilizations, but those of Cyrus' Persia or Medieval Europe.

One of the founders of anthropology, Edward Burnett Tylor, published his *Primitive Cultures* in 1874 in which he makes no distinction between "civilization" and "culture" and is heavily dependent upon "culture" for his argument, because "his concept of civilization would not have allowed him to construct a progressive historical narrative from simple beginnings to higher forms of development" and because "civilization would have implied too high a stage of human

society in the beginning" (Schäfer, 2001:306). Ever since, anthropologists and ethnographers in the West have used "culture" in discussing the primitive societies they study, while "civilization" has to a large extent been reserved for describing modern society. Hence the current situation in which it is unproblematic to say "Western Civilization" and "Western Culture" and, to some extent, even "primitive culture" or "primitive cultures," but unacceptable to speak of "primitive civilization" or "primitive civilizations" (Braudel, 1994:6; Bagby, 1963:74-76).

The Overlapping of "Civilization" and "Culture"

In general, words remain relatively stable in meaning or pick up new meanings, yet semantic change or stasis relating to the entangled word pair "civilization" and "culture" remains puzzling. For instance, it is perfectly all right to say that a "civilization" is the sum total of "cultures" it contains; that the geographic locus of a "civilization" is the territory of its "cultural" domain; that the history of a "civilization" is the history of its "cultures;" and that elements of one "civilization" that manage to diffuse into another are its "cultural" heritage. However, in contrast to such changes in meaning, the German adjective *kulturell,*" which originated in the 1850s, has remained immune to the semantic transformations affecting corresponding adjectives in other major European languages (Braudel, 1994:6).

One of the reasons for the semantic entanglement of "civilization" and "culture" is that when theorists try to define "civilization," they consciously or unconsciously envisage "culture." It is true, to be sure, that some part of the semantic content of "culture" coincides with that of "civilization," but the former cannot be used to define the latter. What is ignored here is that the use of "culture" to explain "civilization" would entail the necessity to define "culture" itself, which would seem impossible without defining "civilization" first. Thus, when Huntington offers his definition, he not only places the two terms on a par, but defines one with the other: "Civilization is culture writ large" (1998:22-23; Schäfer, 2001:303). Similarly, Wallerstein uses "culture" to define "civilization" and believes that a civilization is "a combination of world outlooks, customs, structures and cultures" (Wallerstein, 1994: 215). Braudel, too, regards culture as a specific stage in the overall evolution of mankind, which is lower than civilization. As a matter of fact, he even believes that culture could be seen as a "semi-civilization" (Braudel, 1979:114-116).

Even though the content of "civilization" heavily overlaps with that of "culture," there are some theorists for whom the differences between the terms are too conspicuous to be dismissed. Apart from an almost unanimous preference for "civilization" when representing modern societies while favoring "culture" when reporting primitive societies, these theorists tend to distinguish the meanings of the terms in another sense: to place "civilization" above "culture" in a kind of conceptual hierarchy. Simply put, these theorists tend to

include the semantic content of "culture" in that of "civilization," rather than the other way round.

The Dichotomy of "Civilization" and "Culture"

The conceptual hierarchy between "civilization" and "culture" that Dawson establishes is important and useful; it is the key distinction that highlights the difference between the two terms and asserts both the encompassing nature of "civilization" and the subsidiary character of "culture." Nonetheless Wallerstein disagrees with Dawson's view and reverses his hierarchy. Wallerstein maintains that in certain non-English usages, "civilization" refers to quotidian affairs, whereas "culture" indicates whatever is refined and elegant (Wallerstein, 1994:202). In making this point, Wallerstein recalls another historical conceptual hierarchy, the 18th- and 19th-century German antithesis of culture and civilization in which the former enjoys the prestigious position of higher moral goals, whereas the latter indicates mere proper behavior (Schäfer, 2001:307).

Philip Bagby's Definition of "Civilization"

The most provocative distinction between "culture" and "civilization" is that proposed by the American anthropologist Philip Bagby. His approach is etymological. He believes that civilization is the kind of culture found in cities,[6] or that "culture" is rooted in places where cities arise (1963:162f.). If this definition were to be adopted, the essential characteristics of civilization would be the urban built environment and dense urban demography. Meaningful and useful as this definition may be to civilizational studies, one question immediately arises: what is a city? Obviously, a village or a small town cannot be considered a city since its population is too small. If this is the case, then how large a population could meet the criterion for a city? Shall we take 5,000, 10,000, 20,000, 30,000, or 100,000 to be the tipping point that indicates the existence of an urban environment? There is also the matter of population density, for if a certain number of people, say 30,000, are scattered over too wide an area, it would be difficult to determine if a city has emerged or whether we are mistaking a principally rural area with only a few small villages or settlements scattered around as a city. In addition, dearth of archaeological and written evidence precludes a feasible criterion to estimate if what we see is a bona fide city or merely a cluster of settlements.

To solve the aforementioned dilemma, Bagby proposes that if the majority of the inhabitants of an area are not directly engaged in the production of food, the essential criterion of a city is met. According to him, in pre-historical times it was of paramount importance to be liberated from the time-consuming task of acquiring or producing food. The desired liberation was achieved through division of labor which,However elementary at first, would yield increased productivity. In turn, increased productivity would in one way or another and sooner or later lead to greater refinement and sophistication of life. The newly-acquired freedom and leisure would enable the

inhabitants of a certain area to travel around, conduct commercial, technological, military, religious, or intellectual activities, and thus disseminate their ways of thinking and living or "values" to a much broader area. This process culminated in the emergence of civilization. Although writing could possibly have been invented outside a city, it could be improved upon and perfected only by experts within it, people who did not have to spend their time and energy finding or growing food. Cities were also necessary to sustained and systematic rational thought; thinking required that those so engaged not be subject to the changing moods of nature. In short, the culture of the city is how Bagby defines "civilization." As an anthropologist, Bagby believes that there is sufficient evidence to prove that the historical rise of the city coincided with the rise of the new "cultures" or the epoch-breaking new values and institutional practices usually associated with the "Axial Age" hypothesis. Cities and civilization are thus synonymous (1963:63).

"secondary civilizations" as Europe, America, Russia and Latin America; below them, there are the "tertiary civilizations" such as France, Britain, Germany; again, below these, there is an even lower order, that is, the "civilizations" of Scotland, Ireland, Catalonia etc. (1994:12). Yet obviously, even when such a complicated and tedious classification system is adopted, it is insufficient for the purpose of representing "civilization."

Some further consideration demonstrates the unyielding nature of the task. For instance, Russia is the most important successor to the Byzantine Eastern Orthodox society, and the latter shares a close family resemblance to the Occidental Christian Civilization of the late Roman Empire (West Rome), which in turn is the predecessor of the Western civilization of today, to which both West European and American civilizations are successors. Taking all this into consideration, is it not justified to put the Byzantine Eastern Orthodox civilization and Western civilization in a common category, i.e., Christian civilization? If so, is it not reasonable as well to put a mainly Christian country like the Philippines in this super civilization?

Again, by the same logic, should we not argue that there was once a Nestorian Civilization in the Middle East and Central Asia in the sense that other major Christian denominations formed in ancient times like the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church are seen as closely associated with the Western and Eastern Orthodox civilizations? (Bagby, 1963:167)

Another way to get at the complexity and richness of civilization relates to globalization and technoscience. As Wolf Schäfer suggests, it might be useful to distinguish between *one* civilization and *many* cultures and categorize all civilizations that we traditionally describe as "pre-global" and subsume them under one singular "global civilization" ruled by technoscience (Schäfer, 2001:310-312). Schäfer maintains that "the fact that technoscience is on a global romp means that

civilization is progressing from a local to a planetary scale. We can situate the emerging global civilization in the pluriverse of local cultures, and all local cultures in the universe of a global civilization" (310). This globality hypothesis is valid to the extent that civilizations on this planet are all undergoing a profound technoscientific revolution, which is undeniable and will change the future of mankind in a way as never experienced before.

Cultural Appropriation And Civilizational Hybridization

Dawson's distinction between the terms "civilization" and "culture" is more explicit than what is found elsewhere. He depicts "civilization" as the largest and highest socio-historical phenomenon, whereas "culture" is something smaller, lower and subsumed under "civilization." Dawson's distinction aids the search for a meaningful explanation of the manifold interaction between civilizations and the appropriation by one civilization of the cultures of another without jeopardy to its own identity.

To illustrate the point, we may consider China's import of Buddhism.China's adoption of Buddhism is the appropriation not merely of a religion but of Indian cultures via religion. Ancient Indian civilization had no other way of disseminating its cultures to other parts of Asia than through Buddhism. If we examine the Buddhist doctrines in China, we will find abundant evidence of Indian cultural elements. These elements are not limited to Buddhism, inasmuch as Buddhism itself is influenced by other religions of ancient India: Brahmanism, Lokayata, Ajivakism, and Jainism (Warder, 1980:14); and it is clear that key concepts like *dharma*, *atman*, and *vimoksa* and a variety of mythologies, legends and customs are not confined to Buddhism, but are found in Indian civilization as a whole. On the other hand, after Buddhism and its accompanying Indian cultures had gained a foothold in China, it would eventually be sinicized as it happened with Zen, which is a sinicized Buddhist denomination. Thus, the introduction of Indian cultures enriched Chinese civilization, without making it any less Chinese in character. Similarly, Buddhismized Confucianism and Daoism kept their integrity as Confucianism and Daoism. Christianity integrated two ancient civilizations to form a new religion from whence a new civilization derived. Christianity is generally seen as arising out of two earlier civilizations, one Greco-Roman and the other Hebrew or Syriac(Toynbee,1934-1961,everywhere Christianity in its formative years likewise incorporated a plethora of cultural (and/or religious) elements that for centuries had been evolving in the West Asian and Mediterranean World, which is often seen as a cultural "cauldron" in antiquity and where, before Christianity arose, there were more cultural encounters, engagements, conflicts and integrations between various cultures or civilizations than anywhere else in the ancient world. Thus it can be assumed that if a civilization has survived the vagaries of history and is still alive and active today, it is invariably a hybrid, a product of cultural hybridization, or

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Page 4

indeed an offspring of civilizational hybridization.

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Page 5