TOWARD HUMANO- AND ECO-CENTRISM:
UNITY IN DIVERSITY, NOT CLASH OF CIVILIZATIONS

by

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DIALOGUEs-YES. CIVILIZATIONs- NO.
NOT EVEN SOCIETIES NOR CULTURES.

CIVILIZATIONS NO: There are no and have never been distinct pristine civilizationS, societieS, cultureS nor even peopleS. The very ideas are nothing but ideology, pure and simple although their use occults - that term is created chosen deliberately! - simple and complex reality. In the plural, the invention and use of these terms especially in reference to one's own "civilization" as distinct from others, not to mention "barbarism" of others, knowingly or not represents an often occult and sometimes even express claim -no more and no more less - to an alleged supeiority. It invokes a [God?] chosen Herrenvolk of us, distinct from and even against others. This claim since the nineteenth century and still in the twenty-first, has recently been most and best expressed in and through still widely reigning American ideology. With abundant self-congratulation it claims already to have arrived at The End of History [Fukuyama] even as it still faces "The Clash of Civilizations" of "The West against the Rest,"[Huntington] and Jihad vs. McDonaldization [Barber] to combat "The Coming Anarchy in the World" [Kaplan]. All of these pundits and their misleading civilizational theses of civilizational clash between "us" and "them" are ideologically suspect and socio-politically divisive, often intentionally so. We must counter them with more realistic and at the same time humano- and eco-centric studies with messages that reflect past, present and future reality as well as our continued need for diversity in unity and unity in diversity.

DIALOGUE YES: Contact between people here and there have related and exchanged the means and resulting goods of production, technology, trade, migration, conquest, state formation, war, and the culture and religion that went with them over many millennia. If large-scale civilizations have not ever had any independent existence, their alleged smaller scale component - or non-civilizational "barbarian"! "societies," "cultures," "nations" or "ethnicities" are in the words of Anderson even more so imagined communities. We may here note only four of the many reasons why they do, did and cannot have any real existence.

[1] To begin with, there is no way to identify any boundary between such larger civilizational, and even less among any smaller component or other social units nor therefore to tell where or when one begins and the other ends. [2] All of these alleged civilizations / societies / cultures / nations / ethnicities and also religions experience transformation over time, that is change from one time to another. Like a river flowing under a bridge, it is never the same from one moment to the next. Moreover even more than over rivers, bridges over any such cultural "unit" would have to be built and rebuilt continuously as it changes its width and course. Like the Yellow river, "China" and its millennial "civilization" itself - or rather themselves! – has continuously changed its course and breadth and sometimes radically so during very short periods of time. [3] Like rivers also only much more so, the extent, shape and content of all of these imagined separate or individual "units" has been and still is the - only temporary and even changing! - result of contact and mutual influence among each other. Not only the various past and present streams of confluence, but also the content of all socio-cultural "units" are mixed up not only by seepage but also by interconnecting relations among them at any and all time. As significant as it is neglected is the mutual dependence and contribution of Central Asian "barbarian nomads" and "civilized settlers" across the Inner Asian Frontiers as Owen Lattimore called them in the "Chinese" [and Manchurian, Korean, etc.] East Asia. But the same was equally important in the formation and transformation of civilization/s in South Asia, West Asia,
Siberian and Russian North Asia, not to mention their marginal peninsular appendage in Europe. [4] The very socio-cultural "identity," much more so than that of streams, rivers and lakes or even of civilizational oceans, is more defined FOR us by others, especially by our neighbors, than it is BY us ourselves. In forming - and reforming! - our identities, we in very large part shape and reshape our identities in reaction to those imposed on us by others. Then we re-evaluate the often negative cast of the identity that was thrust upon us by others and re-cast it for ourselves in a more positive light with which we then try shine near and far. That is particularly the case when military or other political oppression generates responses that take nationalist or ethnic forms as a result of especially of increased oppression. That in turn is mostly the result the attempt or success in increasing economic benefits for some at increased cost to others. Even more so is that the case when shrinking economic pie diminishes the absolute amount available to all and generates conflicts over the remaining shares.

Even so "dialogue" or rather a "multilogue" among "civilizations" or "ethnicities" has over the very longest periods of history mostly taken the form of friendly conversation among neighbors that were not even separated by fences between them. And the content of these dialogues has preponderantly been work-a-day topics of practical mutual and especially economic and only less so political interest and only occasionally gossip about third parties and even less so of philosophical, religious, or other cultural, eg. artistic, discourses of deep or far-reaching concern. Throughout Afro-Eurasia and also in the Western Hemisphere members of different ethnicities and cultures have intermingled in cooperative and peaceful, even if also competitive, dialogue far more and much longer and more often than they have in conflict.

So it has been also within and between empires, states, tribes, cities, villages and whatever other social and cultural "units," in which people of varying skin color, language, belief systems, allegiance to "civilizations" etc. have accepted each other, mostly without even taking note of or giving importance to each other's individual or group characteristics. Not only did for instance Confucians, Taoists, Zoroasterists, Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Jews, animists, agnostics, atheists and whatever live peacefully side by side in mutual "dialogue:" they also traded, migrated, and inter-married with each other and participated, even if sometimes with some hierarchical distinctions, in social, political, bureaucratic pyramids. Chinese, Indian, Muslim, Christian and other states and communities were welcomed and integrated "foreigners" or also more assimilated into them. Many, Chinese, Mongol, Indian, Ottoman and other empires deliberately sought out and used individuals and groups for the technical, economic, political, military, administrative, cultural, artistic and other contributions they could offer, which in turn helped transform their new hosts. All competition and conflict of interest notwithstanding, the common practice between and within socio-cultural units has been mutually comprehensible "civilized" dialogue much more than shouting or even silence.

When conflicting interests have led to or been expressed by the threat or use of force, as certainly has often been and still is the case, the alignment of opposing sides has been on any or several of a number of issues other than civilizational, cultural, national or ethnic ones. Indeed, what on the surface may appear as inter-national or ethnic conflict and war creates and uses supposed differences far more than they themselves are the cause or the root of such conflict. Present day examples are legion. Attribution of the recent conflict in the former Yugoslavia to clash of civilizations as by Huntington is no more than a crude attempt to created, impose and confuse and divide us. Else why would Western -Turkey?- NATO powers support Muslim Albanians and even create and arm the Kosovo "Liberation" Army in Kosovo and now also Macedonia? Meanwhile, many previously friendly neighbors and even members of the same family in Bosnia and elsewhere are obliged not only to chose, but even to discover different and opposed ethnic identities of which they had no previous knowledge nor present desire. The claim by western pundit and journalists that Tito kept the lid on 400 year old ethnic strife, which then had to explode cannot stand up to historical evidence that demonstrates exactly the opposite. These mis-attributions are either the fruit of ignorance or of deliberate attempts to deny and obscure the economic and political responsibility of Western political economy in generating the conflict and indeed even its ethnic manifestations in the first place. The same is true for the conflict over land and water between Jewish - but also Arab, Muslim, American, Ethiopian and now Russian - populated Israel and Muslim but also Christian Palestine, whose people had lived in substantial harmony for centuries and indeed millennia. The same again is the case for Hindus, Muslims and others in India, Sinhalese and Tamils in Sri Lanka, Hittus and Tuttsies in western invented Rwanda, and on and on around the globe. In each case, objective examination of the evidence will reveal that both
the root and the immediate cause of the conflict is deterioration in economic conditions and increased economic distress for some or all of the population. And recently, examination will also demonstrate that economic distress was exacerbated by conditionalities imposed by the International Monetary Fund, which was directly co-responsible for the break up of Yugoslavia, inter-tribal and ethnic war in Somalia and Rwanda, not to mention renewed Indonesian pogrom against Chinese in Java and of other ethnicities in the Siriaba, each of which has been sparked by increased economic distress.

This same pattern and process has been both continuous and repetitive over centuries and millennia. Even at the dawn of "civilization" in the 4th and 3rd millennia, there were no distinct pristine "civilizations." By the 3rd millennium in AND BEYOND the Golden Crescent, their mutual social reaction to common ecological and other events and their migratory, economic, military, political, social, and cultural relations, directly and chain-like fashion indirectly, linked an area that already encompassed the Arabian Peninsula, Nubia and Egypt in the southeast; the Levant, Anatolia, and the Eastern Mediterranean to the west; the Persian Gulf, Persia/Elam, and Mesopotamia in the middle; and Harappa, Afghanistan and other parts of Central Asia to the northeast. Soon or perhaps already then, "Europe" and the Indian sub-continent were linked in as well. A criterion of systemic participation in a single system is that no part of this system would be as it is or was if other parts were not as they are or were. The inter-action from one part of the system to another may be only indirectly chain-linked. A weaker systemic link would be that the various parts may also have reacted to, and on, the same global ecological constraints. That system criterion was proposed in Frank (1990) and in Gills and Frank (1990/91) and Frank & Gills (1993). Moreover it can be demonstrated that all of these areas and their inhabitants by and large danced to the same economic and ecological tune with near simultaneous economic, political and cultural growth for periods of around three centuries, followed by also simultaneous centuries long renewed decline, and sometimes extinction. This simultaneity can be used as a preliminary measure of the extent of what can aptly be called "Central Civilization" [combining the World System term of Frank & Gills with the Central Civilization of our fellow panel member Wilkinson], but which also included nomads in Africa, the Arabian Peninsula and Central Asia with whom surrounding "civilized" settled people lived in mutually necessary symbiosis.

This the world system was first constructed and cemented by economic trade connections in view of which Frank and Gills date the birth of Central Civilization from before 3,000 BCE which precede political connections within and recurrent conflict among "societies," which are emphasized by David Wilkinson (1987), who therefore dates the birth of the system from only 1500 BCE. The recognition of such conflict as a mark of participation in the same world system is all the more important insofar as much of the conflict has been over economic resources and control of trade routes. And vice versa: Trade in metals and/or weapons could increase military capacity and that in turn can enhance control over sources of economic resources, including trade itself.

Our thesis of the existence of this incipient "World System" and the dating of its cyclical phases of rise and decline [with occasional extinction of parts but never of the system as a whole] covers not only this large region. It also included that regions of Eurasia to the north of the mountain ranges that cross it from East to West. The analysis of E.N. Chernykh's (1993) Ancient Metallurgy in the USSR: The Early Metal Age, leads to the inclusion in this world system also North of the mountains of "a whole chain from the Atlantic to the Pacific: the European, Eurasian, Caucasian and Central Asian provinces, along with others outside the USSR." (Chernykh 1993:302). He also suggests in his foreword that "from at least the fifth millennium BC until the third millennium BC, the peoples of the EMA cultural zone seem to have shared the same developmental cycle: the formation and decline of cultures at various levels generally coincided" (xxi). In his closing chapter, he returns to "the contemporaneity of the decline and formation of various systems over the vast expanse of Eurasia and the Old World as a whole" (302). "The world system itself has turned out to be far more extensive than appeared earlier," Chernykh (1993:304) writes (cited and discussed in Frank 1993), and so do its near simultaneous rhythm of expansion and contraction. Throughout this vast area of Afro-Eurasia, therefore, extensive and recurrent trade, migration and invasion, as well as cultural/technological diffusion and dialogue has been the norm over the millennia. Any claim that there were separate, let alone pristine, civilizations therefore disregards the more important reality of millennial relations and commonality across all of Afro-Eurasia. This Afro-Eurasion commonality becomes even more evident once we realize that most parts of this vast area danced to the same cyclical tune since at least the end of the 4th millennium BC. For it possible to identify a cyclical pattern of long ascending [A] and descending
[B] phases in the same world system back through the Bronze Age 3rd millennium BCE and probably still for some time before that as well. We have already noted that a most revealing operational criterion of the extent of the world system is the participation or not in the same about 500 year long economic cycle and the inter-regional near-synchronization of its about 250 year long A and B phases. The suggested datings of the up [A] and down [B] phases during the Bronze Age are A:3100-2800, B:2800-2600, A:2600-2300, B:2300-2000, A:2000-1750, B:1750-1500, A:1500-1200, B:1200-1000, which was the Bronze "Dark Age" Crisis (Frank 1993). Tentative Iron Age dates are: A: 1000-800, B:800-550, A:550-400. Then the dating becomes more uncertain until 250/200 BCE - 200 AD that witnessed expansion across all of Eurasia and 200 - 500 CE during which the major empires all experienced renewed decline. Another phase between 500-750 CE included the rise of Tang China, the westward expansion of the eastern and western Turks, and the eastward expansion of Islam. Another B phase lasted from 750 CE to near the end of the first millennium, when another major expansion began Song China and continued until 1250 to 1300. That was followed by the pan-Eurasian fourteenth century crisis, and that in turn by another long period of expansion again originating in China in 1400.

This world system thesis and the proposed datings of its long cyclical ups and downs coincides substantially with findings also by archaeologists such as Sherratt and Kritiansen for the earlier times and the latter and Randsborg for the first millennium CE. Moreover these datings have been supported by three empirical studies so far made specifically to test them by reference to cyclically increasing and and decreasing city sizes, clumping and distribution from the data base constructed by Tertius Chandler(1987). These studies also demonstrate that by the middle of the 1st millennium BC, the regions of China already danced to the same temporal tune of political economic expansion and contraction and urban size as did the rest Eurasia. "China," it should be remembered, has been invaded and governed by non-Han people during more than half its so-called five millennial history. Also, some political events in Han Dynasty China had immediate political economic consequences also in the Roman Empire as Frederick Teggart demonstrated long ago.

As already noted in the long cyclical datings above, the economic and political rise in the two centuries before and after the "Common Era" and so also the renewed declines of Han China and Imperial Rome in its western part were contemporaneous. Both were also accompanied by the declines of Kushan India and then of Parthian Persia and Axum East Africa. As a result also, the intermediate cities in Central Asia literally bit the dust when the reasons for and sources of their very existence disappeared at both ends of the Silk Road had that connected them. The marginalization of Western Europe plunged it into a "Dark Age" analogous to those that - as also per the above datings - decimated civilization and even writing in West Asia and beyond during their Dark Ages between about 1750 and 1500 BC and then again from 1200 to 1000 BC, which has come to be known as the end of the Bronze Age. These also like lesser changes in growth rates and absolute levels of population, settlement, production and income have in turn always been reflected also in political and cultural changes. These events and experiences may well have been caused partially by also centuries long large-scale climactic and environmental as well as epidemiological changes. Nonetheless, there can be no doubt that all such experiences were also at the very least mediated, but significantly also caused, by changing social relations, notably including human impact on the environment, albeit differentially during periods of expansion and of contraction, and the consequent ecological deterioration. Again, these long cycles of near simultaneous puexpansion and contraction that overarch almost all parts of the Afro-Eurasian ecumene belie assl claims to the alleged existence of separate civilizations.

Periods of expansion of economic and settlement frontiers were accompanied by imperial expansion and consolidation but also by increased demands on the environment. They were followed by periods of economic decline in response to economic, political, social problems generated by the previous expansion and the ecological damages it engendered, which also increased exposure to and/or reduced immunity against adverse climactic changes [Chew 2001]. All these political economic, social and ecological strains accordingly generated political conflict and fragmentation and exacerbated "civilizational," "ethnic" and "national" differences, which in turn reduced the extent and civility of a "dialogue." However, such apparent differences have always been - and still today in the former Yugoslavia and Soviet Unions are - far more the real consequences than than the alleged "causes" of such differentiation. Subsequent economic recovery then again was, and in the future can again also be accompanied by increased dialogue.