

Geo-Civilization

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Abstract

“Geo-civilization” is a new concept proposed by the author. It means a macro-geo-continuum in which two or more civilizations share a common geographical locus and similar religions and cultural values. In contrast, civilization in the traditional sense refers to a large historico-cultural entity sharing a common set of values. Within a geo-civilization, each of the traditional political entities is interlocked with another, not only geo-historically, but culturally, economically, and politically.

A geo-civilization generates a situation in which the cost of association among the peoples or even civilizations concerned is reduced and the effectiveness of association is raised. This implies a relatively high efficiency or productivity. I conclude that in examining the long-term performance of a civilization, the conventional terms of “civilization” and “culture” are inadequate.¹

The benefits of spatial adjacency

This article proposes that a congeries of countries, which may or may not belong to different civilizations but which share a common geographical locus, constitute a natural geo-unit, or a super geo-community, or simply a geo-civilization. (Wallerstein 1994: 184-199)¹

In the historical and present-day interactions of human societies, the spatial proximity between them is much more important than has hitherto been considered. Such proximity brings about immediate relevance to all those concerned in terms of mutual interest, and to a great extent, this relevance is embodied in the relatively low cost and relatively high efficiency of association among the societies concerned, be they nations, clusters of nations or even civilizations in the traditional sense.

Exchanges of personnel, information, technology, products, services, and capital among adjacent peoples, regions, or countries take place faster and more efficiently compared to peoples, regions and countries not adjacent.

¹ The coinage of the term ‘geo-civilization’ was inspired by Immanuel Wallerstein’s use of ‘geo-culture’ in his *Geopolitics and Geoculture* (1994).

Human association with relatively low cost and relatively high efficiency, which is possible only if different human groups or societies share a common geographic locus, means relatively high productivity. In market-economy terms, such shared space would make possible a situation in which the products and services are more competitive than for those without such proximity.

This competition springs precisely from the spatial proximity shared by the peoples concerned, even if originally they might have very different cultures, religions, or even civilizations. Essentially, this proximity causes actual or potential magnification of mutual interests for all those concerned.

Adjacent human communities enjoy a high degree of cultural association with one another. A glimpse at the ancient civilizations in the Mediterranean-West Asian world reveals that the peoples there shared essentially the same cultures and religions --- Paganism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. It is the same with the ancient civilizations in the Indus River Basin or in the Yellow River Basin. This kind of religio-cultural homogeneity is the result of heterogeneous peoples sharing a common geographical locus for long periods of time. Thanks to their spatial adjacency, the cost of association between the peoples is easily reduced and the effectiveness and efficiency of association easily raised.

The neighborliness of neighbors

In Chinese, there is a saying: "A neighbor nearby is better than a relative far away." The reason that a neighbor is more helpful than a far-away relative is exactly because he is a neighbor. Thanks to his proximity, there may evolve a close association between neighbors, and for the same reason there may arise possibilities of mutually beneficial cooperation. A distant relative, even though linked by blood, is not able to serve when needed as a willing neighbor is.

Neighbors being neighborly is a universal phenomenon. In ancient times, when people needed to build an irrigation system, construct a dam, dig ditches or dredge waterways, they needed not only cooperation but complex coordination with others. A single family or clan couldn't possibly have accomplished such tasks. Similarly, for safety's sake and other purposes, neighbors who had no blood ties might even be incorporated into one tribe. To a great extent, the reason that the state comes into being lies in this need for cooperation. Members of a relatively small community, living in proximity to one another, often did not have any choice but to cooperate with another community. (Demangeon 1993: 10)

Such cooperation is extremely important for the emergence of the state and indeed, for the formation of early civilizations. When discussing the essential "traits" of a nation,

spatial factors such as neighbors and natural conditions are more important than the inherent “characteristics” of any particular nation.

Of course, counterevidence can be easily found that neighbors are not always neighborly. The ferocious World Wars that European nations fought among themselves and the Israeli-Arab conflicts are two examples. The Sino-Japanese, Sino-Vietnamese and Sino-Indian border conflicts can be cited too. Though European internal wars are already history, there seems to be no immediate hope of settling the fierce Israeli-Arab conflicts because of the great developmental differences between Israel and its Arab neighbors. But the problem may be solved eventually, probably as a result of Europe’s eventual integration of its Mediterranean and Middle East neighbors.

Then how to answer the question of China’s border disputes with its neighbors? To a great extent, the modern vogue of nation-state and nationalism are to blame. Before modern times, China was a peaceful and friendly country, and it still is today. In the 2000 years before the 20th century, Sino-Japanese and Sino-Indian relations were even paragons of neighborliness, in sharp contrast to both the mutual relations of Western European countries and Western Europe’s relations with its Muslim neighbors. Although Sino-Vietnamese relations were a bit troublesome, there were on the whole more eras of peaceful cooperation than periods of conflict and hostilities. So ultimately, China’s border disputes with its neighbors, like those among European countries before 1945, will probably be settled. This may even occur in the not too distant future.

How Japan and Russia benefited from their loci

We are in an era of globalization. The world we are in is rapidly globalizing. In fact, it is already highly globalized in comparison with even half a century ago. The label “Made in China” is not as obvious as it seems. Actually, today nothing is made in just one country.

A car made in China has many parts (even important parts) actually imported from somewhere else, maybe from Japan, South Korea, Malaysia or Thailand. The same experience applies to auto parts made in China or Malaysia because you can export them to Japan, to Korea, to Europe, or to America. Then these parts are assembled into a car about which some people would say it is made in Japan and others would say it is made in Korea. Economic nationalism is almost meaningless today.

However, it can be also said that economic nationalism is still important for mobilizing the people of a nation who may belong to different ethnic groups, who thus have different commitments. Their interests may be synchronized into one single political

unity so as to attain certain higher goals, as is indicated by China's program of "Four Modernizations."²

Sino-Japanese relations can illustrate the point. When people in the Yellow River and the Yangtze River basins already enjoyed a high level of civilization, Japan was still at a lower stage of development. But Japan was very lucky indeed, for it was favorably located in a place which happened to be near China, or near the east end of the Eurasian continent where civilization had emerged two or three thousand years before.

Imagine if Japan had been located where Hawaii now is. Then what would have happened? It is almost certain that their socio-economic development level would have remained very low indeed. Precisely because Japan is adjacent to China, the ancient people on the Japanese islands could make consistent use of their geographic convenience, fruitfully appropriating Chinese culture and successfully transforming itself into a highly civilized nation in a brief period.

On the other hand, after the Sino-Japanese war of 1894, especially from the end of the 1970s onward, China had to embark upon overall reforms. (Incidentally, China has had plenty of reforms in modern times, or indeed quite a few revolutions.) Thus, when China began to reform, it found that a much more advanced Japan was nearby, and that it could conveniently send its personnel there for training, could conveniently export its products there for sale, and could conveniently import Japanese products and appropriate Japanese technology and management skills. Equally important, China could learn from the more advanced Japanese entrepreneurial culture. China has developed very fast in the past 30 years, yet at least at the initial stage of the Reform and Opening-Up movement, it benefited so much from a neighboring Japan that it is now difficult for young people to imagine this indebtedness.

Before the end of the 17th century, although Russia was already civilized through Mongolian rule and had accomplished an initial form of modernization in the 15th and 16th centuries,³ it still remained backward in comparison with Western Europe. There is no doubt that at this point in history West Europe had a considerably higher level of civilization and possessed much more advanced technology than Russia. Russia was lucky in being a neighbor to West Europe.

² In the late 1970s, as part of the Reform and Opening-Up Movement, China launched its famous national program of modernizations of its industry, agriculture, defense and techno-science, namely, the "Four Modernizations".

³ See Donald Ostrowski, *Muscovy and the Mongols: Cross-Cultural Influences on the Steppe Frontier, 1304-1589* (Cambridge University Press, 2002) and Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History* (Princeton University Press, 2010, Chapter 7). Thanks are due to the anonymous reviewer of this essay for drawing my attention to the relevant scholarship.

Czar Peter the Great, a giant of two meters in height, dressed like a worker and led a huge delegation (the “Grand Embassy”) of “spies” into the West in the late 1690s. They traveled to various European countries such as Austria, France and England and stayed in Holland for probably one year. During this period they were busy gathering information and establishing contacts with influential local people.

After having met quite a few European monarchs and hiring many skilled workers, the delegation returned to Russia with the secrets of advanced technology and culture of West Europe. Back home, Peter started an overall reform movement almost immediately, at the beginning of the 18th century, which enabled them to catch up quickly, at least technologically. In a matter of decades, the national strengths or the overall capacities of Russia increased dramatically.

Previously it had been struggling with Turkey, barely holding its own. It could not possibly have challenged any Western country. Now it was recognized as an emerging power, a major player in European politics, especially in its triangular geopolitical game with Turkey and West Europe. At the time Europe resembled the “Warring States” in China before the common era, fighting that would continue until the middle of the 20th century. By the 1750s, Russia was already a major player in the European political arena.

A question can thus be asked: had the geographic location of Russia been somewhere else, preventing it from appropriating the advanced technologies and cultures of both the West and East, would it have become the powerful country it became from the mid-18th century onward?

European Union: a role model of regional integration

Along with cooperation between neighbors there is also conflict, antagonism, and even hostility. In fact, among different ethnic groups, nations, or civilizations there are always disputes, conflicts, antagonisms, wars, sometimes even large-scale wars. Nevertheless, this does not mean that human beings should deny the importance of neighborly cooperation.

On the contrary, cooperation is so important that it is only too obvious that without cooperation, mankind could not have survived. Compared with other species, primates are a great deal better at cooperation. It has been observed that mountain gorillas can coordinate among themselves extremely well and use highly complex tactics, in feeding and defense. Many other species do not enjoy such cooperation.

In some parts of Africa, hyenas can actually fight lions. Although lions are bigger and more powerful, hyenas can fight them collectively, to their advantage. But so far as coordination and cooperation are concerned, most species are not on par with primates.

Humans are the most developed primates on earth. They can enter into much more sophisticated cooperation than other primates, let alone non-primate species.

Historically, European countries have continually fought each other since the fall of the Roman Empire. In the first half of the 20th century, they fought the bloodiest wars in history. When World War II came to an end, the Europeans finally realized that it was disastrous fighting among themselves. In fact, even before the Second World War, Bertrand Russell, a highly influential European philosopher, had realized that although China is as vast as Europe in territory, the Chinese were much more peaceful than the Europeans. (Russell 1996: 52; Feng 1995: 157)

To him, there had been no chronic and large-scale internal wars in China, like the kind of wars that had been fought among the monarchical or national states of Europe and had lasted for hundreds of years. Historian Arnold Toynbee held essentially the same view. In fact, in much of Chinese history, if there ever was a war, it was relatively brief and far from as ferocious as those in Europe. For example, the first internal “revolutionary” war in 20th-century China lasted for only a few years in the early 1930s, and it consisted mostly of scattered fighting rather than large-scale battle. The second internal revolutionary war in the same century lasted for only three years, from 1946 to 1949.

Although occasionally there was fierce fighting between the Kuomintang and the Communists, many lives were spared because of the massive Kuomintang surrender. It was essentially the same case in the history of dynastic China. Thus compared with the modern wars in Europe, casualties were much less in Chinese wars. Internal conflicts are generally much less violent than wars between sovereign nation states, although there are exceptions to this.

However, after the Second World War, European nations realized that if they could unify into one single political family rather than continue to fight each other, Europe could benefit immeasurably. That is why there is now the European Union. Before the EU came into being, there had been its predecessors, especially the European Coal and Steel Community and the European Economic Community.

All of these, including the EU, are steps toward a unified Europe. Today, the EU is already a sort of trans-national or super-national organization to which every member nation has to yield a bit of its sovereignty. Recently the European Union has elected a foreign minister. This is certainly a first for Europe.

However, the unifying momentum that European nations gained in the past decades appears in trouble. The past three years have not seen any substantial progress. Instead, the EU has suffered quite a few setbacks. The great unification cause was even dealt a

serious blow in the referendums of France and Holland. The draft of a proposed EU Constitution was vetoed by these countries. Despite all this, the EU still serves as an example for other nations in similar situations to follow: to cooperate more closely on a higher level. Peoples in East Asia should do the same. China, Korea, Japan, and the ASEAN countries should cooperate with one another actively, with the eventual objective of integrating into one entity, i.e., an East Asian Community, no matter how loose or insignificant it may appear initially.

There may be some attempts at impeding this unity by America and Japan, both of whom are alarmed by China's rapid rise. In fact Japan has invited America to balance the influence of China, to join in the preparatory talks at the East Asian Summit about closer East Asian cooperation, especially about a prospective East Asian Community. Yet China doesn't have to worry too much about that, because there are plenty of ways of integration in East Asia apart from the East Asian Summit. It is only one form of integration after all.

The idea of nation state is not universal

At present, every country in the world believes that the nation state is the basic form of institution that a cluster of ethnic groups can possibly take. In fact, the sovereignty of a nation state is seen as sacred. Every country on earth believes that its territorial integrity is its bottom line, sacred and under no circumstances to be violated. No foreign country is to interfere in its internal affairs. However, few would admit that a nation state is not an eternal reality but rather a contingent construction. Although it seems to be sacred at the present time, it has not always been the case in the past. In fact the idea of a nation state started with the Treaty of Westphalia or the Peace of Westphalia (1648), which consisted of a series of peace treaties signed by numerous European kingdoms and dukedoms. In the field of international politics, it has been referred to as the "Westphalia model," the traditional approach to regulating a highly decentralized world of sovereign states. It is mainly a European concept of the international order and has no innate claim to universality.

Europe and America have been predominant in world affairs since the end of World War II, and they have promoted the concept of "nation state" around the world. Yet throughout history, the idea of a nation state was almost unheard of, there being always tribes, kingdoms, and empires with their chieftains, kings and emperors.

During the Warring States period in Chinese history, large expanses of territory, occasionally reaching the size of ten to twenty counties, were ceded to another as the result of a military defeat; and some decades later, the ceded land was taken back to the original owner state, again as the result of a military victory. Nobody thought it odd or unfair.

Before the second European war ended in 1945, the European nation states behaved in a similar manner. At the time, Europe was very much like Warring States China. European states then had kept fighting among themselves and couldn't imagine integrating into a United States of Europe. However, since the two great wars, the European way of thinking has changed profoundly. Consequently, European states have been conducting a trans-national integration, which is still going on at present, though it has suffered some setbacks in recent years. This kind of integration could even be seen as trans-civilizational.

A look into the religious composition of the European Union reveals that it is made up of Roman Catholic, Protestant and Eastern Orthodox Church countries (in religious and cultural terms, modern Greece belongs to the Eastern Orthodox Church Society), belonging respectively to Western and Eastern Orthodox Civilizations in Toynbee's classification of civilizations (Toynbee 1935-1961et passim). In this sense, the EU is very much a product of trans-civilizational cooperation.

There are even signs that in the next 30 to 40 years, Europe or the European Union may succeed in incorporating Turkey (my personal prediction). Turkey has been applying for membership in the EU for quite some time, yet due to internal problems, or problems in the eyes of major EU countries, it has not yet satisfied the criteria for joining the EU. Because of this, some Turks would even declare that they no longer mind if they are accepted or not. Nevertheless, the trend represented by the ongoing European integration is clear.

Predictably, Europe has the capacity to incorporate not only Turkey, but also Israel and the Arab countries surrounding the Mediterranean as well. There is a strong reason for Europeans to do so. Historically, these regions or countries were not only adjacent to Europe but culturally similar to it, even though they have different religions and traditionally have even been seen as belonging to different civilizations. Europeans were traditionally Christians, but Turks and Arabs surrounding Europe were Muslims. But it has to be remembered that Islam and Christianity originated in the same place and in the same religio-cultural milieu, in what now Israel/Palestine, Syria and Jordan. They are, therefore, sister religions.

Because of this common origin, they share commonality: monotheism, the notions of Heaven and Hell, the ideas of demons and angels. Before Jesus Christ, even the idea of resurrection was found all over the Mediterranean.

Apart from Europe, there are other human communities in the world that possess the same potentials for such cooperation and integration as Europe. Some have even displayed a strong willingness to cooperate and integrate on a higher level than before, such as the East and Southeast Asian counties. There is good reason to see these

countries, or even civilizations, sharing common loci as a natural geographic unit, a super geo-community, or simply a geo-civilization. They possess the potential to realize a higher level of cooperation and integration than at present.

It can thus be proposed that before a genuine global civilization comes into being, geo-civilizations will serve as a kind of prelude to it. Geo-civilization is higher and larger than civilization in the traditional sense, but lower and smaller than global civilization. Therefore, it is a kind of preparation for, or even a pre-phase of, global civilization. In other words, geo-civilization can be regarded as a quasi-global civilization.

In the foreseeable future, various nations and civilizations in the traditional sense will no longer be categorized by such. The ideas of nations, cultures, and civilizations will no longer be as important as before. What is important is a larger community, a larger entity, which is committed to the universal values of social justice, equality, rule of law, and human rights. In other words, the consummation of geo-civilization is global civilization.

Geo-civilization: a group of entities sharing a common geo-continuum

To better understand the concept of geo-civilization, we will take a look at civilization in the traditional sense. From the perspective of cultural development, civilization can be seen as an aggregate of peoples sharing a common locus and a common value system. In most cases, a civilization has a fixed geographical locus. For instance people of Indian civilization mostly live on the subcontinent of South Asia. People of Western civilization before the 16th century mainly lived in the middle and western part of Europe. After the 16th century, they expanded to the Americas, Australia, and southernmost part of Africa. People who are committed to the Islamic religions have basically inhabited the Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia. Historically, people of Chinese society mainly lived where China is now and in the surrounding areas as well.

The Japanese mainly lived on the Japanese home islands traditionally. Yet in the 20th century, the Japanese displayed a strong urge to colonize. Japan not only turned Korea into a colony and invaded the coastal regions of China, but also expanded to Southeast Asia and occupied the Malay Peninsula and Indonesia for quite some time. They annexed Taiwan from China. These are well-known facts, but attention should be paid to the Japanese settlement in South America, for there are fairly large Japanese communities in these places outside East Asia.

Geo-civilization's difference from civilization in the traditional sense lies in the greater importance attached to the geographical locus and natural environment of a historico-cultural congeries of peoples in a temporal-spatial continuum. Also, greater importance is attached to the long-term structural effects of the natural environment upon a

particular aggregate of peoples sharing a common locus and value system (Braudel 1994: 9-10). Geo-civilization refers to more than one historico-cultural entity in a specific geographical locus, whereas traditional civilization simply refers to just one large historico-cultural community sharing a common set of values and way of life.

Thus it can be proposed that a geo-civilization is a cluster of historico-cultural entities or civilizations sharing a common geo-continuum. To use geo-civilization would mean that although the term traditional civilization can still be used, a shift of focus has occurred. In examining the exchanges, cooperation, and conflicts from interaction among a cluster of civilizations sharing one common geo-unit, especially if the purpose is to work out future trends based on these interactions, the notions of civilization and culture are cognitively inadequate.

Also, geo-civilization can be seen as a kind of geo-historical entity or even a geo-congeries of civilizations; they not only share major historical memories but also have a relatively high degree of political and economic integration.

In a geo-civilization, different but geo-connected communities have long been living in a common "macro locus" and have for long been influencing one another, both in cooperation and in conflict with each other.

Historically, human societies sharing one common geo-continuum had conflicts and even wars with each other. Yet to a great extent, exactly because of this shared space and shared memories, there gradually emerged a certain degree of historico-cultural cohesion among these societies. David Wilkinson, an American world-systems thinker, advanced exactly this viewpoint. According to him, even though there are wars and conflicts among the communities in a specific geo-continuum, exactly because of this a kind of historico-cultural cohesion is destined to emerge among them, or at least there is that trend toward greater and greater integration of them (Wilkinson 1995:46-52).

Remember that, historically, China and India had many tribes, nations, and states. But now look at what has happened. Within China and India there are no more such states or nations. Though there are still numerous ethnic groups, they are all solidly unified under one politico-economic entity. It is true, historically, they had conflicts with each other and sometimes they even fought ferocious wars among themselves. Here, Europe is a good example, even though it has not done a perfect job of being politically unified.

On the other hand, although as early as during the Qin Dynasty China had done a superlative job in terms of political unification and cultural integration, it is now faced with the extremely difficult task of integrating the whole of East Asia, including Japan, Korea and the Southeast Asian states. Although the common geographical locus of these

states requires that they be united, it is admittedly a tremendous task to incorporate them all into one super entity or one colossal geo-civilization.

Maybe it will take one century before the peoples of East Asia can finally achieve this goal. A few months ago, we were more optimistic than now, believing that it would probably take another 50 years. But a series of unfortunate events have happened recently in connection with certain islands in the ocean and border disputes on the Korean peninsula. Nevertheless, China should have a more expansive view of the future. It should utilize long-term vision.

China historically was much more powerful than all the other nations surrounding it combined. Of course what happened to China from 1840 to 1949 was a very different story. During this period, China was weak. Now China is coming back rapidly to its original position. Therefore, not only the government but the average Chinese should have a grand view of what will happen in the future. We don't have to appear too militant towards Japan.

In fact, the Japanese and Chinese as neighbors have been interlocked not only geographically, but culturally and economically. Indeed, the two countries at present are economically interlocked. If China could adopt a more generous attitude towards Japan, it would find itself possessing much larger diplomatic space and would find more diplomatic resources available to it in dealing with other powers, especially with America and with the European countries. China would find itself enjoying more freedom and greater comfort in international affairs.

If China obsessively imagines there is a ferocious enemy just next door, how can it feel otherwise than restricted and restrained? As a matter of fact, whether someone is an enemy or friend depends very much on one's own way of looking at him. It is deplorable that even now, in the 21st century, China still finds it difficult to overcome a sense of victimization, which is harmful to its development.

Because nations or civilizations are adjacent to one another, sharing a common geographical locus or geo-continuum, they are not only physically close, but often culturally similar. On the basis of their geographic proximity, they consciously or unconsciously cooperate with one another. In this sense, different human communities sharing a common locus and being adjacent have a kind of "*yuanfen*" (roughly meaning lot or luck by which people are brought together). Exactly because of this *yuanfen*, the nations, countries and even civilizations adjacent to each other share not only common histories, cultures and religions, but also a common destiny.

Geo-political rivalry versus geo-civilization

To talk about a geo-civilization is by and large to talk about a geo-economic community. In the foreseeable future, a geo-civilization will mainly be a geo-economic phenomenon. It is obviously too early to talk about East Asia as a geo-political entity. In East and Southeast Asia, for very complicated historical reasons, and to some extent also because of the deep involvement of external powers, there are not yet any signs of the emergence of a geo-community as a geo-political alliance between the nations or civilizations concerned.

Here again, the European Union serves as a counter example. Observable circumstances clearly indicate that a geo-civilization like Europe is not merely a possibility, but an actual reality. Although they will inevitably encounter plenty of obstacles, the nation-states of Europe are now in the initial stage of evolving into a unified political community. Maybe in another 50 or 60 years, there will be a United States of Europe, or a European Federation!

Precisely for this reason special attention should be paid to the economic cooperation and political interaction between the East and Southeast Asian countries. After all, they share a common macro locus and are in a definite sense a single geo-community. The peoples in East and Southeast Asia should not be short sighted, unwisely fixing their eyes only on the conflicts, disputes, and past wars between them.

Even so, the geo-political reality of rivalry, conflicts or wars is not that easy to dismiss. Take, for instance, the Cold War. During the Cold War, the Soviet Union and its alliance in East Europe had their Warsaw Treaty Organization. The West in Western Europe, America, and Canada formed the opposite group, NATO, which still exists. Although the Cold War is over, one party is still there flexing its muscles at a shadow opponent.

The Cold War came to an end a long time ago, but a colossal military organization remained, with belligerent sentiments but without an opponent, or desperately trying to find a new opponent. During the Cold War, the two military alliances --- the Warsaw Pact and the NATO states --- were the most prominent players in international affairs. They were two gigantic geo-political actors hostile to and competing with one another. The so-called Cold War waged by them was both rhetorically and literally a war, presumably a war between capitalism and socialism. But could it be that these ideological differences are just an excuse?

Mere ideology can never be so powerful as to divide millions of people so profoundly, on such an immense scale. Only major structural differences or clashes of interest could have done just that. There couldn't possibly have been such large-scale mobilization if there had only been ideological antagonism between the two parties.

Today, Russia has abandoned its communist ideology of 20 years ago, but it is still treated as a major rival by the West. China has abandoned socialism, too, but somehow it is now regarded as the No. 1 geo-political opponent of the West. (Although China is still a nominally socialist country, it is the *de facto* No. 1 capitalist country in the world, even bigger than America). Clearly, even in this highly globalized era, when capitalism finally reigns, clashes of interest are still there. Therefore, it is quite clear that ideological differences during the Cold War were only an excuse for mobilization. Geo-political factors were much more important and much longer lasting than mere ideology.

Ideology is always superficial. Behind ideological differences there are always deep-rooted differences of interest. This would mean that NATO and the Warsaw Pact states developed as ideological alliances only superficially; they were rival geo-political parties in essence. It was a highly dangerous situation in which they were military alliances, each with a unified military command, each with powerful mobilizing capacities and with huge nuclear arsenals. It was very dangerous indeed, as their mutual antagonism could have dragged the world into the calamity of a third World War.

A geo-civilization should make best use of its geographical yuanfen

A geo-civilization should be seen as a pre-determined spatial arrangement, visible and palpable, not as an abstract construct. It is not to be dismissed. Under such circumstances, a geo-civilization means not only very close economic and political interaction between different areas, states and civilizations in a common geographic locus, but actual or potential political integration of them. Fundamentally, a geo-civilization depends on an unchangeable and inescapable spatial connectedness or adjacency.

Because of this adjacency, a geo-civilization can also be seen as a kind of spatial reality that the nations and civilizations concerned have to face. Thus, what they should do is not to cling obstinately to negative memories of past conflicts and wars, but to look forward into the future, making the best of their geographical yuanfen and bringing out maximally such potentials as are inherent in this adjacency.

Apart from this, the term of geo-civilization also means that one has to take into consideration not only the incidents or events that have taken place or are taking place at present, but also future possibilities. Although in most parts of the world, geo-civilization has not become a reality, still, by using the concept, one can have a better view of what will happen to the present-day countries or civilizations in the future. This understanding of what is to happen in the future is undoubtedly based on the possibilities inherent in the actual circumstances of the past and present.

If we set out to describe and classify civilizations, we will surely find that sometimes two, three or more giant human communities sharing a common macro locus may be regarded as different civilizations; that sometimes they may also be treated as separate societies with very different religions and cultures. But if we can see through the surface differences, we will find that these nations, civilizations or religions have essentially the same cultural “genes,” or are genetically closely related.

Take, for example, the similarities between Judaism, Islam and Christianity and between the East Orthodox Church and Western Catholic Church. Actually these religions represent the phenomena usually referred to as civilizations. But obviously, they share the same cultural genes. It is very much the same with the relations among Japan, Korea and China. Although Japan is often seen as a separate civilization in civilizational studies, it in fact has a great deal in common with China, not only geographically and economically, but also culturally and religiously.

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ⁱ This article was based on a lecture of the same title delivered at Shenzhen University on October 10th, 2010, to postgraduates of English.