

Comparing Civilization-State Models

China, Russia, India

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Abstract

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 paved the way for Western-style liberalism to become the prevailing ideological orthodoxy of the post-Cold War international system, particularly on the back of the United States' moment of hegemonic unipolarity and economic ascendance. In the 30 years since then, a new class of indigenous thinkers from a diverse range of states, including China, Russia, and India, among others, pushed back against this perceived imposition of Western norms, turning instead to cultural models of governance and organization in the forging of their own unique "civilizational" thesis. This article compares the roots and perspectives of civilizational thinking in three cases to chart the complex interplay between the rise of domestic "civilizational factions" among a state's intelligentsia and non-Western elites and the subsequent effects of this thinking on each state's behavior and strategic posture in the realm of its external affairs. Through rigorous cross-comparative examination and process-tracing along the defined parameters, this case study seeks to contribute to the nascent scholarly literature on the emerging civilization-state phenomena, offering some conclusions on how the emic repackaging of ancient historical epistemologies under hypermodern frameworks may go on to redefine plurilateral order throughout the dynamic twenty-first century and beyond.

Introduction

As the ravages of the COVID-19 pandemic intersected with the disruptive presidency of Donald Trump to devastating effect, it became evident that the era of uncontested American leadership is coming to a close. The shift from a unipolar to a plurilateral concept of world order has left all major actors scrambling to articulate a new vision of the international structure, as well as new formulations of their place within that structure. In countries such as China, Russia, India, Turkey, Iran, and others, profound and deeply rooted intellectual and cultural currents have combined to stymie the forward march of Western hegemony. Instead, a new class of indigenous thinkers used the period since the fall of the Soviet Union to advance and take solace in the notion of the "civilization-state."

In the conventional understanding of events, the deposition of 1991 removed the last potential resistance to the universalizing impositions of the Western powers, evincing the clear superiority of the liberal-democratic system of politics and economic governance. Yet as gloating intellectuals reveled in the ideological triumphs of the “end of history”¹ and the Pizza Hut-ization of their vanquished foes,² a wave of discontent churned among a rising global middle class alienated by the insistent encroachment of Western norms and values. From this discontent emerged a return to an ancient model repackaged in hype-modern terms and designed to reject the constraints of the nation-state supposition arising from the European continental experience. For these historical agents, there is a more primal identification with an older conception of political organization, one that predates the Pandora’s box of Westphalia that was let loose in 1648.

Thus, the so-called civilizational turn is undertaken, espousing the supremacy of the civilization-state as the major principle of supranational organization. Such a polity is conceived by the memory of a primordial civilization with a continuous identity and a contiguous sense of territorial and cultural geography that is then preserved and defended under the edifices of the modern state. Across the world, the vernacular of civilization has seen renewed urgency and currency in political discourse, undergirded by an incredible proliferation of thought related to the subject. This is doubly so with the etic assessment of the West as “a political civilisation that represents the forward march of history towards a single normative order” but is now crumbling under its own cultural baggage due to a perceived tendency toward “cartel capitalism, bureaucratic overreach, and rampant individualism.”³

A non-Westernized elite has developed these ideas to contest Western thinkers abroad as well as the Westernized class of elites with foreign education that exists as a corrupting influence at home. These civilizational thinkers constitute a civilizational faction that advances their ideas across a number of channels: think tanks, scholarship, foreign ministries, and the popular press. Civilizations serve a narrative and a discursive function, and the language of the civilizational faction pushes for the global recentering of power through the dual lenses of decolonization and revivalism.

Theory and Hypothesis

The model of the civilization-state presents a seismic shift in the way various societies recognize and conceive global power relations organized under the 1945–2016 liberalist paradigm or by the internationalization of the European states system during the preceding two centuries. The contemporary and grassroots functions of the civilization-state ideal must be studied, defined, and factored into

strategic calculations. Through the comparison of high-profile, recognized examples where indigenous agents have proposed trajectories toward civilizational reclamationism, scholars may be able to better deduce a general theory of the civilization-state, observing uniform characteristics that can be extended to other cases in the future. A world lurching toward intercivilizational dialogue will necessitate such inquiry.

Indeed, as each civilization-state seeks to define itself through unique, immutable, and essential characteristics, it is only through stringent comparison that scholars can begin to explain the manners in which civilizational thinking in a polity impacts its foreign conduct or approach to grand strategy. This article will examine the penetration of civilizational thinking among the upper echelons of policy-making and intellectual circles in China, Russia, and India, with a particular view to the 30 years of percolation since the formal dissolution of the Soviet Union. As theories of the civilization-state and civilizationalism strike a chord among the emerging civilizational faction of the domestic foreign policy intelligentsia, it is expected that a process of dissemination will occur to popularize such thought among the public as well as in the highest halls of state power.

The hypothesis is this: the creation of civilizational coalitions within a nation's intelligentsia will in turn exert pressure on the foreign policy apparatus of the state to adopt a unique posture, working to undermine the liberal international world order and to create alternative modes of conceptualizing global power relations. These alternative visions may be framed as *decolonial*, *revanchist*, *revivalist*, or *revisionist* depending on the perspective of the commentator. The ideology of civilization will recast the notion of actions befitting a civilization-state, with a greater emphasis on reorienting the global power space in the wake of the United States' relative positional decline. Emerging civilization-states (in this instance China, Russia, and India) will be expected to act more forcefully and aggressively in their near-abroad as they seek to reconstitute their strategic and mental geographies along civilizational fault lines.

Research Design

Civilizational thinking manifests in idiosyncratic ways, fully dependent on the individual culture and history of the entity in question. Civilization-states cannot be generalized based on similarities in outcome, meaning that the ultimate goal of different civilization-states will not be the same or be carried out via similar methods. Each civilization-state may have a distinct conception of world order or multipolar harmony or the hierarchy of international affairs. Therefore, the study of civilization-states ought to focus on the procedure of thought and percolation that leads to the rise of civilizational coalitions and the emergence of civilizational

outcomes. Civilizationalism is not only an end-state but also a process, because “civilizations [can] be defined as a set of culturally distinct values that are reproduced across time and space.”⁴ While civilizational end-states will necessarily vary as nonuniversal suppositions (a Turkic civilization-state may trend toward neo-Ottomanism, the Iranian may trend toward a Persianate ideation, and so on), tracing the institutionalization of civilizational thought is an eminently more actionable mandate in cross-comparative perspective.

Research Method and Case Selection Strategy

The wider goal of the civilization-state coalition is the reassertion of cultural rights and the undermining of the hegemonic American liberal world order, making space for civilizational ideas and actions to flourish over the course of the next century and beyond. This article will compare the proliferation of civilizationalism in China, Russia, and India since 1991, process-tracing each case to examine the manner in which civilizational ideation emanating from the domestic intelligentsia class (think tanks, prominent writers, members of the foreign affairs apparatus) manifests in the eventual policy conduct and strategic posture of the state.

The cases were determined via cross-case factors and will be studied over time of typical cases, that is, from the end of the Cold War in 1991 to the present day. The three cases (China, Russia, India) were selected due to the depth and strength of the civilizational claims made within each, in addition to the body of existing literature already dedicated to deconstructing the phenomena of their respective emergences as distinctive civilization-states. Indeed, China has been identified as “unavoidably . . . the purest incarnation of the civilisational state,”⁵ and Russia has also been pointed to as an “eminent example of [an entity] . . . pitting themselves culturally in opposition to ‘the West.’”⁶ For these states, “culture has become a currency of power,” driven by the purposeful reassertion and reinstatement of “cultural particularities [that] were once ‘airbrushed’ out of history, as the dominant Western-led liberal order sought to homogenise the world.”⁷ Indian thinkers have presented their arguments as existing beyond the imported left-right dyadic binary, instead finding affirmation of their beliefs in the letter of the secular Constitution, pointing to Article 1, which begins: “India, that is *Bharat*,” to “[presume] within the bounds of reasonableness that the framers of the Constitution saw India as the modern successor state to its civilisational ancient, making India a civilisational state.”⁸

Each of the cases selected display different institutional features, allowing the exercise of process-tracing to interpret the impact of civilizational thought as it pertains to states of diverse domestic characteristics (one-party communist rule in China, illiberal democracy in Russia, and multiparty parliamentary democracy in

India). These states measure within the top ten worldwide by metrics of national population⁹ and have been assessed as top-five global military powers.¹⁰ In any case, these three states are almost unanimously considered to hold great power status and are better suited for comparison than are smaller potential civilization-states such as Israel or Greece.¹¹ These factors, as presented in the respective case studies, will strengthen the analysis and facilitate a generalizable review of the civilization-state phenomenon.

Independent and Dependent Variables

The independent variables to be examined will measure the proliferation of civilizational thinking and the coalescing of relevant civilizational factions within the intellectual apparatus of the state. These may include the rise and prominence of new think tanks dedicated to espousing the tenets of a civilizational framework in viewing world affairs. These may also include an analysis of top thinkers, academics, public intellectuals, and authors, as well as the impact that their perspectives seem to have made in penetrating the thought of the state's decision-making classes.

There are quantitative and qualitative ways to approach this question—for example, by examining whether the word “civilization” or its derivatives have been used increasingly by the state's leadership or by those in their political periphery. One might also look at media coverage around key incidents, such as the state's courtship of religious authority that is uniquely aligned with its civilizational identity (e.g., the Orthodox Church in Russia, Dharmic faith leaders in India, Buddhist or Confucian institutions in China). A final measurement could be the teaching of a particular civilizational dimension of history in public school curricula. Thus, there are numerous angles and methods by which civilizational thinking can be measured. However, to truly capture its penetration into societal dialogue may require the use of much larger data banks and digital algorithmic systems to quickly parse through that data, which remain beyond the scope of this analysis.

The dependent variable will be the state's posture in global and strategic affairs, as the hypothesis asserts that the state's conduct will become more aggressive and activist in the realm of foreign policy. Again, examining force projection and postures here is a task complicated by the many ways in which power is articulated through state behavior. Potential measurements may include measures of military spending, types of military spending, and the deployment of force abroad. Others include the handling of territorial and diplomatic disputes with neighboring nations and key strategic rivals. A forceful posture may even suggest simply more activist as opposed to lethargic diplomatic structures, meaning the number of

trade deals signed or the aggressive courtship of foreign companies and more consistent economic outreach to other countries.

Another critical component of the civilizational model will be the relationship between the host civilizations and their diaspora populations. The data can be aggregated and spliced in a multitude of ways and will, in large part, vary according to the actual indigenous conceptualization of the civilization in the selected cases. A civilizational thought structure for India might emphasize the idea of *Akband Bharat* (“United India”) that espouses the consolidation of the Indian cultural sphere, as compared to a more tributary Chinese notion of civilization such as *Tianxia* (“All Under Heaven Is Chinese”). This article will attempt to understand how these differing notions of civilization—as cultivated by the distinguishing features of each state—might influence the final analysis of dependent variables in each unique case.

Literature Review

Civilizations are projects centuries in the making, but the civilization-state is a modern thesis. The body of literature that civilizational thinkers can draw on is vast, deriving from fields as varied as geopolitics, history, aesthetics, religion, sociology, canonical works, and more. Emic sources can (and often do) reference spiritual corpuses such as the *Vedas*, the *Mahabharata*, and the *Ramayana*, in the case of defining Indian civilization, or epic texts including *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and *Journey to the West* in the Chinese example. Yet, the scholarly focus on the civilization as a living entity and a basis of political organization has emerged as a thoroughly modern concept. The end of the Cold War rendered the bipolar ideological struggle an outdated historiographical model; in the search for novel definition, no recent thinker has done more to iterate the *primat der zivilisation* than Samuel P. Huntington, whose views have permeated the subsequent scholarship in a seminal and fundamental capacity.

Huntington’s 1993 “Clash of Civilizations” thesis serves as an astute prefatory text for the explication of the civilization-state concept.¹² With the exception of a few modern scholars, there has been little concerted effort to study the civilization-state as an all-encompassing entity or to engage seriously with the historicity of the idea. So far, the majority of attempts appear to be concerned with the application of the civilization-state concept in individual countries, such as the compelling analyses of Andrei Tsygankov¹³ and Fabian Linde¹⁴ with regard to Putinist ideology in Russia, or Guang Xia¹⁵ and Alison Kaufman’s¹⁶ vivisections of China under the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Similar efforts have also glanced at Europe¹⁷ and the Islamic world¹⁸ under a civilizational frame of reference.

In any case, some engagement with Huntington's ideas are necessary. And though he does not utilize the exact terminology of the civilization-state, Huntington does provide scholars with a perfectly workable definition of civilizations in today's planetary state of affairs—"the highest cultural grouping of people and the broadest level of cultural identity people have short of that which distinguishes humans from other species."¹⁹ He argues that the collapse of ideology alongside the USSR signaled the return of cultural or religious identities as a basis for world conflict. Part of this shift comes with the rise of non-Western civilizations as important actors in shaping global norms, as well as the concomitant rise of non-Western methods of self-conceptualization. The interactions among peoples will not mitigate but will in fact exacerbate the development of "civilizational consciousness" as a form of this revisionist trend.²⁰ Finally, Huntington concludes that these shifts will produce a conflict configuration of the "West vs. The Rest," as revisionist civilizations such as the "Sinic" civilization and "Islamic" civilizations bandwagon together to usurp Western hegemony, effectively to "modernize but not to Westernize."²¹ While Huntington's prescriptions can be rudimentary at times, his stark analysis remains potent and highly influential among civilizational thinkers the world over.

Since Huntington's foundational thesis dropped into the milieu of global affairs, some broad strands of theorization have emerged regarding the study of the civilization-state. There are scholars who hold that the civilization-state constitutes a relatively new phenomenon and that it will overtake the nation-state and the American world order as the dominant organizing paradigm of the twenty-first century and beyond. These scholars are often found outside formal academic circles, and their works are better situated in policy reports produced by government departments or think tanks or in discourses published in various national media. Indeed, the civilization-state phenomena writ large must be considered as a reaction against Westernized elites, many of whom are represented by university departments and the traditional liberal internationalist establishment. It is sensible that civilizationalist discourses will be most forcefully articulated outside of those contexts.

Others find that the notion of the civilization-state is simply a reframing of older ideas and continuities in the grander scope of the civilizational narrative. In this view, the civilization-state is merely a rhetorical device, unable to escape from the essential paradigms of realism or liberalism or constructivism; as such, civilizationalism represents a development of thought but not necessarily a development of substance. Finally, and more critically still, are those scholars who are dismissive or harshly skeptical of the abiding power of the civilization-state idea in the twenty-first century, likening it to either a political flavor-of-the-day or

nonpermanent phenomenon. At most, they might consider civilizationalism to be a repackaging of anticolonial discourses used by nationalist movements in the twentieth century.

Professor Amitav Acharya, recognized for his theory of the multiplex world order,²² falls into the last camp. In a 2020 article “The Myth of the ‘Civilization State,’” he provides one of the few existing examples of cross-comparative exegesis of the civilization-state idea.²³ He points to Indian prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru’s appeal to civilization in the early years after independence, as well as the language of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and Sun-Yat Sen, stressing the past anticolonial credentials of civilizationalism. Acharya finds that, “like Huntington’s thesis, the civilization state also oversimplifies the world’s cultural and strategic fault lines and realities”²⁴ and that, in its current form, “the civilization state discourse does more to obfuscate than illuminate.”²⁵ Still, he engages the framework with some nuance, noting that today’s advocates of the civilizational standard, such as Modi, Xi, and Erdoğan, are not necessarily isolationists or cultural chauvinists and that “a civilizational identity does not imply resistance to integration with the rest of the world.”²⁶ Ultimately, he cautions that Western analysts must study the civilization-state carefully: “[W]e should not allow this discourse to create an analytical straitjacket that overemphasizes the negative role of culture and demonizes the rise of non-Western nations.”²⁷

This article will now seek to further develop the nascent cross-comparative tradition in the study of the civilization-state through a more pronounced analysis of the Chinese, Russian, and Indian cases. The methods employed may be similarly applied in the study of other potential civilization-states. The analysis begins with the civilizational concept and the percolation thereof in China, with special attention given to the CCP’s adoption of such rhetoric from the Deng Xiaoping era onward.

China: Tianxia and the Middle Kingdom

China’s geological structure is that of a civilization-state; the nation-state accounts for little more than the top soil.

—Martin Jacques, author and political commentator

Western analysts have struggled to define and understand the Chinese state or contend with the seemingly erratic behavior of its doyens. This is because, as Lucian W. Pye identified in 1990, China is “not just another nation-state in the family of nations” but also a “civilization pretending to be a state.”²⁸ As it stands, China is the product of an arbitrary mission to “squeeze a civilization into the constraining framework of the modern state, an institutional invention that came out of the fragmentation of the West’s own civilization.”²⁹ China has been identi-

fied as the original civilization-state, a claim undergirded by two millennia as a consolidated entity founded on contiguous cultural conceptions of the relationship between the state and society, the role of the family, ancestral worship, Confucian values, legalist philosophy, *Shanrang* ideals, the network of personal relationships known as *Guanxi*, Chinese food, and the Chinese language in spoken and written form.³⁰

Core Concepts of the Chinese Civilization-State

The modern reframing of the civilization-state is rooted intimately in the historical and present-day Chinese encounter with the West, particularly the Qing Dynasty's "Century of Humiliation" in which China was balkanized into semicolonial protectorates for purposes of trade and resource extractivism. In a 2014 speech on "core socialist values," Chinese president Xi Jinping spelled out his definition of success in the realm of international politics: "China has stood up. It will never tolerate being bullied by any nation. . . . Today's China forms a sharp contrast to China in the 19th century when the country was humiliated, its sovereignty was infringed upon, and its people were bullied by foreigners."³¹ Regaining lost confidence in the aftermath of the debilitating experience of Western hegemony forms a recurrent and foundational theme in the study of the civilization-state, both in China and elsewhere. China's material and political success is seen as a return to the natural path of historical prosperity, and the state has been given an exceptional mandate to prevent such an occurrence from ever happening again—even at the risk of provoking ire internally or externally.

The civilization-state project features not only an airing of past grievances but also the wholesale remaking of society along traditional concepts and models. In the CCP's China, this manifests as a neo-Confucian ideal with Marxist-Leninist ideological infusions. In his book *The China Wave: Rise of a Civilizational State*, the progovernment intellectual Zhang Weiwei of Fudan University argues that China has succeeded by rejecting Western political norms, instead pursuing self-sufficiency through Confucian culture and exam-based meritocratic traditions.³² In the Confucian system of familism, the family formed the center and prototype of social dynamics, institutionalizing a set of values and conventions that applied between husband and wife, brother and sister, parents and children; these were then extrapolated to the whole society as an enlarged ideation of the family.³³ In the civilization-state, the state exists at the head of the civilizational family, a position held now by the CCP apparatus and its leader, Xi. The civilization-state is a constant project, and in the context of modernity, "existing civilizations or cultures can only sustain themselves by reinventing themselves."³⁴ Therefore, Chinese

civilization can be faithfully reconciled only in the astute study of its historical transformations and reinventive propositions.

Other traditional Chinese governance philosophies include the spirit of *Shanrang* and the Mandate of Heaven. The former is understood to convey a Chinese ideal of virtuous rulership, represented as an “abdication and succession system under which the current ruler would voluntarily relinquish the throne in due time, and the new ruler was selected by the current one on the basis of the candidate’s merits rather than blood.”³⁵ *Shanrang* has been depicted in various popular legends and, regardless of their veracity, has been conceptually eulogized repeatedly in Chinese history. In terms of the succession of CCP one-party leadership and the state, there exists a possibility of *Shanrang* in guiding future party governance; conversely, the Mandate of Heaven no longer acts as a guarantor of legitimacy. The legitimacy of the state in premodern China was based on the human world and the relationships between ruler and ruled. Heaven in the Chinese sense refers to that which “is transcendent, imminent or intrinsic to humanity,” making sense “only in its unity with humanity, achieved in this world via human beings’ self-cultivation and self-perfection.”³⁶

The last major concept that has seen dedicated traction in Chinese intellectual circles is the explication of the *Tianxia* 天下 system (literally: “All Under Heaven”). *Tianxia* stratifies the external and internal governance of the Chinese civilizational world, and some Chinese academics have proposed it as an alternative to the Westphalian model of global relations. While Westphalianism assumes anarchy as the natural basis of international competition, *Tianxia* is presented “as an ‘all inclusive world’ and a more cooperative order, if not a world government under Chinese rule.”³⁷ Xu Jilin has defined *Tianxia* as “an ideal civilizational order, and a world spatial imaginary with China’s central plains at the core,” embodying the Chinese system at its best and justifying the set of principles formulated under imperial Confucian rule.³⁸

The traditional model of *Tianxia* was organized into three concentric circles, the inner ruled directly by the emperor and their bureaucracy; the middle constituting the border regions indirectly ruled through the system of hereditary titles, vassal states, and tribal headmen; and the third engendering a tributary system that established an international hierarchy bringing other countries to China’s imperial court.³⁹ In the *Tianxia* imaginary, barbarian peoples were to submit to Chinese central authority and recognize the superiority of Chinese civilization.⁴⁰ Jilin has proposed an updated *Tianxia 2.0* as the guiding philosophy of Chinese international policy, where, “in the core regions of China, ‘one system, different models’ should be implemented; in the border regions, ‘one nation, different cultures’ should be realized; in Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan, ‘one civilization,

different systems,' should be experimented with; in East Asian society, 'one region, different interests' should be recognized; in international society, 'one world, different civilizations,' should be constructed."⁴¹

The Civilizational Faction and Percolation to Official Paradigms

The CCP's embrace of traditional Chinese culture today represents a sea change from the Maoist years and the Cultural Revolution and from earlier scholars such as Liang Qichao, who concluded that "ancient Chinese philosophies that valued harmony and quiescence had resulted in a passive [and] ossified culture."⁴² Even during the decaying years of imperial rule, East Asian leaders did not feel the need to take up "wholesale Westernization" but rather to deploy a policy of selective learning from the West. In the post-Mao era, China can be described as both "globalized" and "Sinicized": "globalized, as a result of economic reforms and open-door policy, and Sinicized, because of the conscious and unconscious reconstruction of its traditional culture."⁴³

Some basic features of the premodern Chinese state have been introduced, revived, or reinvented, such as the resumption of meritocratic selection with the National Higher Education Entrance Examination in 1977 and the reinstitutionalization of the National Civil Service Examination in 1989.⁴⁴ Civilization has come to be developed in different ways by the modern state, with the rehabilitation of the civilizational concept finding legislative support from the CCP Central Committee under Jiang Zemin in 1996, when it issued "Resolutions Concerning a Certain Number of Important Questions Regarding the Strengthening of the Building of Socialist Spiritual Civilization." These resolutions reified China's "fine national culture" (*youliang guojia wenhua*) as well as the "revolutionary culture" (*geming wenhua*) in constructing a Chinese "socialist civilization."⁴⁵ The CCP found a new synthesis in its introduction of a Chinese socialist modernity that draws from the vast wells of deeply rooted national cultural instincts.

Another advent of the civilizational concept in post-1949 China has manifested through governmental reform campaigns, creating "ideological and moral imperatives" presented to the Chinese people as mechanisms of modernization. Jiang Zemin introduced several "Socialist Spiritual Civilization campaigns" that emphasized the need for coordinating "'civilizing' activities at all levels of society."⁴⁶ These campaigns have continued under subsequent leadership, such as promotional endeavors to educate the Chinese people on littering and cleanliness in the run-up to the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics. The rhetoric of civilization has percolated through CCP and popular discourses in the post-Deng era of reforms and now finds its most forceful articulation at the highest level of Chinese leadership.

Chinese president Xi Jinping has frequently advocated for the civilizational concept in endogenous and exogenous fora, calling on Asian civilizations to “strengthen cultural confidence” and to “use the foundation of the brilliant achievements obtained by our ancestors” to reach a “new glory of Asian civilisations.”⁴⁷ He has exhorted the country’s elites to “inject new vitality into the Chinese civilisation by energising all cultural elements that transcend time, space, and national borders and that possess both perpetual appeal and current value.”⁴⁸ President Xi’s rise since 2012 has solidified the place of the civilization (*wenming*) in domestic political discourses, and the Chinese concept of civilizational leadership has gained ground in the quest to replace the United States as the foremost global hegemon. He has not hesitated, as demonstrated in his 2014 speech at the College of Europe in Bruges, to place Chinese and Western civilizations on equal terms,⁴⁹ and Chinese leadership as a whole is confident that through the great project of “national rejuvenation” the country might regain the position it lost 170 years ago.

In China, the civilizational faction emerged from within the ranks of the CCP in the years after Mao’s death, finding full resonance by the 1990s with the implementation of Deng-era reforms and the extinguishing of the Soviet model. Under this new framework, the ideological tenets of socialism need not be compromised by the harmonious reintroduction of Chinese civilizational concepts, thereby producing a civilization-state that draws on neo-Confucian as well as Marxist-Leninist schools of thought (perhaps aptly classified as a “socialist civilization-state with Chinese characteristics”). This ideological and cultural merger has begun to profoundly impact China’s approach to foreign policy, as demonstrated by actions in its near-abroad and elsewhere.

Recent Foreign Policy Decisions in Context

The effects of civilizational thinking have changed the way in which China conducts and frames its foreign policy decision-making, with an intensification of such rhetoric accompanying the rise of President Xi in the 2010s. Civilizationalists have laid the building blocks for their values and their vision in the form of multilateral bodies such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), which ties China and Russia to the Central Asian nations of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. The grouping stresses the principle of noninterference in sovereign affairs, and the SCO’s internal security coordination apparatus has adopted China’s definition of the “three evils”—terrorism, extremism, and separatism—used to justify its crackdown on ethnic Uyghurs in Xinjiang Province.⁵⁰

China's signature Belt and Road Initiative has been similarly framed in civilizational terms, hailed as the "New Silk Road" that connects East Asia to Europe via infrastructure projects across the land and seas. The Beijing Consensus (referring generally to China's political and economic policies) is being pushed across Central Asia, evinced by the historical patterns of Han majoritarian persecution against minorities in Xinjiang and Tibet⁵¹; it is now being applied forcefully in Hong Kong with an eye toward Taiwan as well.⁵² Some proponents of the Chinese civilizational concept have in the past stated that Taiwan could be swayed to accept Chinese suzerainty in the near future,⁵³ and Chinese claims in the South China Sea and along the border with India have often relied on imperial-era "documentation" in the bid to provide historical authenticity to the state's military advances.⁵⁴ Modern international law, and the judgments of the International Criminal Court, are seen as recent inventions rising from Western conventions, whereas the claims of the CCP rest on more ancient stipulations of the historical Sinosphere and the eminence of the Chinese state therein.

Another prominent dimension of China's civilizational foreign policy has been a renewed, and perhaps neurotic, aim to develop coercive influence over Chinese diaspora populations abroad.⁵⁵ This is coupled with the strategic implanting of Chinese agents in sensitive national structures abroad, including universities and medical institutes, to target Western nations such as Canada and Australia.⁵⁶ The glory of Chinese civilization is extolled by more than 500 Confucius Institutes, amplified by the Chinese domestic film industry and state media such as the official *China Daily* newspaper and China Central Television's multilingual programs.⁵⁷ It is evident that China is engaging in a global psychological and diplomatic mission to establish the primacy of its civilization-state abroad while simultaneously implementing domestication measures and "campaigns of civilization" at home to reshape the ur-formations of civil society. The manipulation of diaspora populations is a common tactic in the foreign ideation of civilization-states and has been used by the Russian Federation in its own emergence as a distinct civilizational polity.

Russia: A Bicontinental Eurasian Power

Russia should embrace its identity as "a civilisation that has absorbed both east and west" with a "hybrid mentality, intercontinental territory and bipolar history. It is charismatic, talented, beautiful, and lonely. Just as a half-breed should be.

—Vladislav Surkov, advisor to the Russian president

In the aftermath of the Soviet collapse, Russians searched for new meaning and new ways to manifest their national destiny. A class of thinkers—inspired by Huntington's ideas and those prevalent in earlier native literatures—resented the

imposition of Western economics that “shocked” the Russian system and the subsequent prostrate status of the Federation in global affairs. Russia was impotent as NATO expanded closer to its borders and subsumed the Soviet satellite states, and Russian leaders found themselves unable to stop the West’s military campaign against Serbia in the late 1990s despite virulent opposition. With the elevation of Vladimir Putin as the head of state, Russia sought replenishment and differentiation through the conceptualization of the civilization-stat (*gosudarstvennaya tsivilizatsiia*) as a means to restore strength and self-confidence. In the Russian example, the unique medley of spirituality and hard power achieved through conservative governance, the guidance of the Orthodox Church, neo-Tsarist impulses, and a Slavophilic agenda would come together as Russia takes its rightful place at the head of *Russkiy Mir*—the Russian cultural universe.

Core Concepts of the Russian Civilization-State

As in the other cases, resentment against Western incursion fueled the rise of civilizational inquiry in post-Soviet Russia, with the West “[failing] to understand the depth of the resentment in post-Soviet Russia about what had happened with the collapse of the Soviet Union.”⁵⁸ Indeed, Putin himself has deemed the Soviet collapse the great geopolitical catastrophe of the twentieth century. There exists a line of historical discourse in Russia that seeks to explain these disintegrations of state authority in cyclical terms, articulated through the notion of *smuty*, or “times of trouble.” Such cyclical models of viewing the past aim to explain state collapse and periods of breakdown in Russia’s history, and in its “civilizational approach” (*tsivilizatsionnyi podkhod*) Russia is said to possess its own historical logic and ability to recover from chaos.⁵⁹ Today, that ability to recover is engendered by the presence of a strong central authority to restore adequate political and military power to the Russian state.⁶⁰

To this end, a number of clubs and groups have sprung up with the goal of formulating a Russia-centric notion of world order, often through the promotion of imperial ideologies such as *Pax Russica* and *Russkiy Mir*. The latter refers to the historical Russian and Russophone space, encompassing previous imperial boundaries and areas under Soviet influence, including Ukraine, Belarus, and other nations that have “adopted Russian culture, language, and the Great-Russian ideology.”⁶¹ Since 1991, geopolitics in Russia developed beyond the constraints of scientific analysis, becoming somewhat of an exercise in ideology and aesthetics, giving it a Russia-centric literary character and adopting messianic and Promethean aspects.⁶² Moreover, the Russian school of geopolitics has likewise been deemed “geosophy,” concerned with the sacred geography of the homeland, as well as a discursive practice that intends to find an appropriate interpretation of

the Russian historical identity, taking on the essence of geopoetics.⁶³ Lastly, as is fundamental to civilizational theory, there exists a strong emphasis on cultural distinctiveness (*samobytnost*) or self-standing that highlights local values and moral norms as they differ from the vicissitudes of the outside world.⁶⁴

Russia sees itself as the rightful heir to the title of the “Third Rome,” following the original fall of Rome and then Byzantium, leaving the seat of Orthodox power with Moscow. Russian Christendom is perceived as the last bastion of conservative values, with its fealty to ancient times and unchanging tradition, as opposed to a Western Christianity that has “perished under the onslaught of immoral liberal [iconoclasm].”⁶⁵ In 2015, the Russian foreign ministry’s press center hosted a constituent assembly of the Byzantine Club, whose founders claim Russia as the successor of the great Byzantine civilization.⁶⁶ The recentering of power under a strong authoritative figure, personified by Vladimir Putin (who could potentially hold office until 2036),⁶⁷ means that the neo-Tsarist/neoimperial configuration acts as the baseline for the future Russian civilization-state. Indeed, without the centripetal values of empire and geography, it is believed that Russia will lose its unique identity and cease to exist as a civilizational phenomenon altogether.⁶⁸

In the new conservative orthopraxy, the civilization-state exists to protect the country from “dissolving in this diverse world.”⁶⁹ Valery Gergiev, a Russian conductor with links to Putin, performed a concert in 2016 at the recaptured Roman Theatre in Palmyra, Syria, where Putin addressed the audience via video link to celebrate the West’s decline and assert Russia as a force for moral good and order.⁷⁰ Such theatrics mask a deeper inculcation of Enlightenment principles in the construction of Russia’s civilizational discourse, as the themes of Rousseau’s General Will that unifies society and demands absolute obeisance, as well as Hegel’s notion that the state embodies the spirit of the people, have found prominence in the religious philosophies of thinkers such as Ivan Ilyin and Aleksandr Dugin, both of whom have been cited by Putin in the past.⁷¹ In Russia, much intellectual space has been dedicated to the study and proliferation of the civilizational concept, and such discourses have garnered a salvific reputation at even the highest official levels of the Kremlin’s statecraft and strategy.

The Civilizational Faction and Percolation to Official Paradigms

Numerous Russian intellectuals have stepped forward since the Soviet collapse to offer some explanation of the condition of the Russian state and people and to envision a path forward from the murk of post-Soviet confusion. In Russia’s hour of duress, elites have played an integral role in “responding to the situation of ontological insecurity by mobilizing so-called civilizational values.”⁷² One such group of elites, formed in 2012, branded itself as the “Izborsk Club” after the city

of its founding and consolidated traditional, conservative, and ultranationalist voices to act as a civilizational umbrella organization for the Russian center-right and far right. These elites represent a major front of the civilizational faction in Russia, and their works “contribute to creating a renewed public-oriented policy in all spheres of national life.”⁷³

The papers and reports produced by the Izborsk Club are designed to create a reservoir of intellectual thought for the civilizational project that can then later be drawn on to justify state policy. Members of the club include prominent politicians such as Sergei Glazyev, Putin’s presidential advisor on Eurasian integration; the Nobel-laureate scientist Zhores Alferov; writers and thinkers such as Zakhar Prilepin, Aleksandr Prokhanov, and Aleksandr Dugin; historians Natalia Narochinskaya and Nikolai Starikov; and journalists Maxim Shevchenko and Mikhail Leontyev.⁷⁴ The Russian Orthodox Church is represented by Bishop (Archimandrite) Tikhon (Georgiy Shevkunov), supervisor of the Moscow Monastery of the Vladimir Icon of the Mother of God; the attitude of the Church toward the Izborsk Club is overall quite favorable.⁷⁵ The goals of the club are, through their para-scientific theories, to prepare Russian society—materially, intellectually, and psychologically—for the new civilizational dawn, facilitating an atmosphere conducive to revisionism in the realm of foreign affairs.

Izborists believe that Russia’s military power must be reflected in forceful territorial expansion and the regaining of areas lost in 1989, blaming the state of contemporary Russia on “traitors” such as Mikhail Gorbachev, Boris Yeltsin, Alexander Yakovlev, and Eduard Shevardnadze.⁷⁶ Their betrayal and decisions to work with the West represent the “third *smuta*” in Russian history, and only through overcoming this period of turmoil can Russia again derive meaning and energy in its national life. *Smutas* dramatize the historical condition, without which Russian society would be interminably static; the task for Izborist Russia is to once again become “one and indivisible.”⁷⁷ The Izborists have produced maps and recommendations for reshaping the international status quo, proposing boundary changes and the creation of new territories across Europe and Central Asia. Their vision is fundamentally revanchist.

Although the influence of the Izborists on the Kremlin is subject to debate, despite their significant contacts, there are a number of other government-affiliated and -funded think tanks that also constitute the civilizational faction in modern Russia. Since the mid-2000s, United Russia, the ruling party, has established a number of think tanks, including the Foundation for Effective Politics, the Russian Project, the Center for Social Conservative Policy, the Institute for Social Forecasting, and the Institute of National Strategy, dedicated to promoting Russian values across the former Soviet space. All of them possess strong ties to

the current Putin administration, holding potent influence over the Kremlin's vision of Russia's domestic and international priorities.⁷⁸ The civilizational agenda has worked its way up through the halls of Russian power, eventually gaining support in the official governing superstructure itself.

In 2008, Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov frequently advanced thinking in civilizational terms, arguing that “competition is becoming truly global and acquiring a civilizational dimension.”⁷⁹ In his address to the Federal Assembly in 2012, President Vladimir Putin stated that “in the twenty-first century amid a new balance of economic, civilizational, and military forces, Russia must be a sovereign and influential country . . . we must be and remain Russia.”⁸⁰ Putin's notion of the civilization-state stresses this essentially Russian element, and he has in the past recognized ethnic Russians as “the core [*sterzhen*] that binds the fabric” of Russia's state and cultural polity.⁸¹ Campaign articles from 2012 refer to the Russian *ethnos* as the “cultural genome” of the nation and that the abiding civilizational identity of Russia is founded on a common (*edinyi*) cultural code undergirded by quintessentially Russian values.⁸² Still, it is necessary to note that Putin has on a number of occasions rejected outright the notion of a mono-ethnic state as the basis of the Russian civilizational entity; instead, the Russian civilization-state must reflect the country's rich diversity of customs, languages, and traditions.

By 2013, the government's “Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation” established that “global competition takes place on a civilizational level” and that the “cultural and civilizational diversity of the world becomes more and more manifest.”⁸³ It further emphasizes that “global development . . . requires collective leadership by the major states of the world, which, in turn, should be representative in geographical and civilizational terms.”⁸⁴ The 2010s marked a time when the language of civilizationalism percolated from think tanks and academia to become the formal policy of the Russian state, with discernable impacts on its foreign policy and diplomatic rhetoric that continue to the present day.

Recent Foreign Policy Decisions in Context

Russia's conservative elite herald President Putin as a vanquisher of woes and the savior of the erstwhile Tsarist endeavor, elevating him as a natural successor to the Byzantine and Russian emperors of yore. Putin's 2016 visit to Mount Athos in Greece—a site of great holy significance in the Orthodox faith—invoked special symbolic reverence from Russia's religious population.⁸⁵ He was admired for his preservation of Syria and his machinations in Ukraine, representing a willingness to rewrite the unipolar world order in terms more favorable to Russia.⁸⁶ Certainly, he has inspired much awe and adulation amid the nation's civilizational factions, especially among the denizens of the Izborsk Club.

Putin's rejection of the West and his call for confidence in the construction of a bicontinental, pan-Eurasian civilizational-state has found resonance in the Kremlin's policies toward the former Soviet space, Crimea, and Central Asia, as well as among outposts of the Orthodox spiritual universe. In June 2014, for example, more than two dozen members of the Izborsk Club gathered at Livadia Palace (a former summer retreat of the Russian tsars) on the coast of Crimea, kneeling to kiss Crimean soil and tour one of the battleships of Russia's Black Sea Fleet.⁸⁷ Beyond contrivances of symbolic import, members of the Izborsk Club such as Aleksandr Dugin in his 1997 *Foundations of Geopolitics* have articulated a ruthlessly classical binary view of geopolitics, contesting the Atlanticist thalassocratic civilization of the United States and the United Kingdom against the Eurasian tellurocratic land powers, ruled by Russia.⁸⁸

The more maximalist members of the Izborsk Club have called for a return to the European boundaries established in 1945 at Yalta and Potsdam, and even moderate ones aim for the unification of *Russkiy Mir* along famed writer Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's concept consolidating Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan into one monolithic state.⁸⁹ As an "intellectual engine room for Vladimir Putin's Kremlin," the Izborists have also expressed a particular concern for the threat of so-called color revolutions in Russia, referring to the various popular revolts that have toppled governments in some former Soviet states and elsewhere.⁹⁰

The Putinist postulation of the civilization-state—much like its Chinese counterpart—also envisions a prominent role for the Russian diaspora and Russian-language speakers (Russophones) in the conduct of state policy in the civilization's cultural periphery. The Russian diaspora has played an opaque role in the annexation of Crimea, where the Russian military was "considered a tool to protect the dignity of the diaspora,"⁹¹ as well as in Donetsk and Luhansk in eastern Ukraine, where Ukrainian authorities are currently waging a bloody battle against Russian paramilitaries and sustained cyber disinformation campaigns directed at inciting Ukrainian Russophones to take up arms against the state.⁹² In Russia's 2008 invasion of Georgia, 2014 annexation of Crimea, and ongoing disinformation efforts aimed at the Baltic States and the West writ large, there are contours of Russia's civilizational turn toward a polity embodied by archconservative virtues, neo-Tsarist convictions, and a Eurasianist imperial outlook.

India: Rendering Bharatvarsha

The fact remains that the Indic civilization's religious traditions venerate the land itself. Further, it is this sub-continent, this landmass, that has been associated by indigenous history and tradition with the civilization of the Aryans, which gave it the name Bharat.

—J. Sai Deepak, advocate before the Supreme Court of India

The civilization-state concept has roared to the front of modern Indian political discourse, reviving a rhetorical thread line inherited from the original nationalists who agitated against British Raj in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, while further attending the deconstruction of the Nehruvian framework of state-society relations that dominated the first five decades after independence in 1947. India's liberalization reforms of 1991 coincided with the failure of Soviet-style socialism, making ground for new contact with the global economy and the simultaneous re-rendering of the role of the indigene in constructing the postcolonial nation.

The notion of Indian civilization is entwined and enmeshed with the spiritual fabric of the land and its people; the sacrality of Indic texts and the patrimony of faith as realized in the major *Dharmic* traditions of the subcontinent, being Hinduism or *Sanatan Dharma* (the Eternal Way), Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism. In the language of decoloniality, Indic thinkers have traced the sacred geography of the land as mentioned in the river-hymns of the ancient *Rig Veda*, namely “Ganga, Yamuna, Saraswati, Sutudri (Sutlej), Parusni (Ravi), Asikni (Chenab), Vitasta (Jhelum), Arjikiya (Vipasha/Beas), and Susoma (Indus).”⁹³ The expansion of *Bharatvarsha* (the Land of the Descendants of King Bharata) to the Narmada, Godavari, and Cauvery Rivers, as noted in later *Puranic* (a genre of mythopoeic epics) adaptations of the Vedic hymns, constitutes “indigenous sources of Indic identity as well as the repository of indigenous epistemology which cannot and must not be ignored or dismissed.”⁹⁴ The underlying fundamental unity of India, the “symbiotic relationship” between geography and civilization,⁹⁵ has also been noted by Western historians through observation of ancient pilgrimage routes (*Ārthas*) and the proliferation of traditions that pay homage to the land of India itself.⁹⁶ Again and again, the basic consecration of the Indian civilization-state is explicitly defined by its mission of spiritual enlightenment and its search for heavenly emancipation.

Core Concepts of the Indian Civilization-State

Prototypical nineteenth-century figures such as Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo used civilizational registers to articulate a national identity for the subjugated Indian population, describing “Bharatavarsha i.e. India [as] a nation in the distinctly Indic sense as well as a civilization from long before the concepts of nation-state and Westphalian sovereignty came into existence.”⁹⁷ Today, history serves as a fertile battleground for making and remaking the civilizational imaginary, that is to say, in the ability of historiography to “make or break a people's relationship with their past, which, in turn, affects their sense of self.”⁹⁸ Avid de-

colonialists must therefore concern themselves with the id or the ego of their people, demanding “the political utility of history” as well as crafting an imperative to “pay attention to the ebb and flow of politics and power structures surrounding a work of history.”⁹⁹

In the case of post-1991 discourses on Indian civilization, an interesting process of diffusion has taken place in the manner that intellectual crosscurrents, such as those that emanated from Huntington and the Chinese civilizationalists, have propagated and repropagated the civilizational philosophy elsewhere. While some authors such as Christopher Coker believe India to be “too diverse” and too encumbered by “legacies from its colonial past, including social and judicial liberalism,” to ever truly be a civilization-state, this kind of analysis fails to recognize how each civilization-state intends to construct its own categorization of itself.¹⁰⁰ A recent novel by Rajeev Mantri and Harsh Madhusudan titled *A New Idea of India: Individual Rights in a Civilisational State* garnered the attention of Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself¹⁰¹ for its articulation of a “civilisational republic” as the surest guarantor of “individual freedom.”¹⁰²

Indian thinkers demonstrate the variety inherent to the civilizational project and the inability to simply equivocate across cases; indeed, “a civilisation can give rise to several types of political units over millennia, from kingdoms to empires to republics,” and “several political formations can also co-exist within civilisational boundaries with different territorial boundaries at the same time, as has been evident in India where belonging to different kingdoms didn’t preclude belonging to Bharatvarsha.”¹⁰³ This can be likened to the current function of the European Union, with some arguing the existence of a greater European civilization beyond the confines of individual territorial or political delineations. The current structure of the Indian Republic is perceived merely to be built atop the eternal foundation of a pluralistic Indian civilization.

From the experience of British colonialism emerged the notion of *Swaraj* (self-rule) as essential to the formulation of an Indic political modernity, and in today’s civilizational concept the state must act as defender of Indian sovereignty and guardian of the subcontinent’s sacred soil. Indigenous ideas of international relations stretch back into antiquity with the Kautilya *Arthashastra*, and updated works include a 1919 article by Benoy Kumar Sarkar in the *American Political Science Review* on the “Hindu Theory of International Relations” that weaves the teachings of ancient scholars including Kautilya and Kamandakiya Nitisara “into a rearticulation of the doctrine of *rajamandala* [the circular balance of power between kings].”¹⁰⁴ The reinterpretation of Vedic texts and concepts comes through in the article’s description of *sarvabhauma* (the whole world), a “Hindu variant on Kantian notions of ‘permanent peace,’ and contemporary ideas of imperial federa-

tions and the League of Nations.”¹⁰⁵ Civilizationalism will increasingly engender such alternative perspectives on international theory, drawing from works such as Chanakya’s *Arthashastra* or Sun Tzu’s *Art of War* as sources for emic strategic doctrines.

The civilizational faction in India—a young republic but an ancient civilization—has envisioned a distinct cultural mandate for the Indic civilization-state. The purpose of the civilization—its calling—must be realized through its continuing existence, as the “civilization lives as long as that mandate is undelivered, and it dies after that mandate has been accomplished.”¹⁰⁶ In the case of India, this mandate must “organically integrate all these Indian provinces into a vibrant nation” in its pursuit of the “deepest core of Truth” that can be reached only by “exploring the inner universe of Man.”¹⁰⁷ The memory of Partition continues to sting the Indian civilizationalist, and though “wounded due to loss of vital territory,” the Indian civilization is said to remain alive and persist because its mandate “is yet to be delivered.”¹⁰⁸

The other calling of the civilization-state is to achieve numinous, economic, and social self-sufficiency or, as Prime Minister Modi has dictated, self-reliance (*ātmanirbhartā*). This concept can be recognized as a direct rebuke of the overreach of the socialist Nehruvian state in matters of economic and political governance against the wider backdrop of the 1947–1991 system’s roots in Western liberal dogmas. This would be *ātmanirbhartā* in the “true sense of the term, when the *samāja* (society) would not have to look up to the state for each and every essential service it would need.”¹⁰⁹ A contemporary Dharmic polity has been theorized along several models, and Indic civilizationalists admit that its precepts require further intellectual development before deployment. Some of these developments might expound a societal structure aligned with the cosmic *Ṛta* (natural order), or an economic dimension based on the realization of the four *puruṣārthas* (objects of human pursuit) in a globalized world. Those are: *Dharma* (righteousness, moral values), *Artha* (prosperity), *Kama* (pleasure, love, psychological fulfillment), and *Mokṣha* (liberatory and spiritual values).¹¹⁰

In any case, it is recognized that the creation of an Indic civilizational-state will necessitate “an original vocabulary and the flowering of an Indic episteme,”¹¹¹ and currently there are a number of official and para-official organizations dedicated to the advancement of such a civilizational ideal in eminently achievable terms. There is an appetite for centralizing policies and the aim of achieving “self-confidence [that] begets self-reliance” through a “nationalism in the true spirit [that] should withhold us from continuously seeking to feed our inner beasts.”¹¹² These nationalizing and civilizing impulses are finding greater and greater reso-

nance at the highest levels of the Indian political imaginary, sustained simultaneously by civilizational discourses articulated in the growing civil society sector.

The Civilizational Faction and Percolation to Official Paradigms

An emerging Indic intellectual class has arisen to challenge the traditional societal dominance of the Western-educated Nehruvian elites, producing a tension that is realized in the contestation and advancement of the civilizational paradigm. Oftentimes, this Indic class stems not from Tier 1 cities like Delhi or Mumbai but instead from Tier 2 and Tier 3 parts of the rapidly developing Indian hinterland or from the newly prosperous middle class that grew out of the seismic 1991 economic reforms. They are still globalized, studying abroad and working in the Londons and New Yorks of the world, but much like civilizational factions elsewhere they envision their globalization as plausible without adherence to Westernization. Harsh Madhusudan and Rajeiv Mantri represent one aspect of this Indic intellectualism that has arisen outside the context of the formal university sector, particularly in their idea of the “civilisational republic as a democratic polity based on the rule of law that in turn is rooted in India’s millennia-old pluralistic ethos,”¹¹³ as well as their arguments advancing a *Bhāratīya* culture as the bedrock of the civilization-state.

Jayant Sinha, a minister in the Modi government, is a former McKinsey consultant with an MBA degree from Harvard, and he also decries the choice of the early Nehruvians in embracing Western ideas such as scientific socialism under the mistaken assumption of their universal applicability. Instead, Sinha believes that the nation ought to have developed a system of postcolonial governance rooted in its cultural particularism, stating that “in our view, heritage precedes the state [and] people feel their heritage is under siege,” and that Indians possess a “faith-based” view of the world.¹¹⁴ The globalization of the 1990s failed to homogenize the next generation of indigenous civilizationalists but instead instilled in them a fierce desire to preserve and protect their native values in the face of Western decommmodification and deculturation. Elements of India’s growing think-tank scene have tapped into this resentment, now producing a body of civilizational ideation that can be drawn on in any future remaking of the state.

While India’s think-tank sector was traditionally underdeveloped, consisting mostly of organizations devoted to studying economic development along socialist or liberal models, in recent years a new crop of right-wing think tanks have been commissioned with ties to the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party and its ideological parent organization, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. In June 2014, Prime Minister Modi indicated that “the input of intellectual think tanks” should be substantially enhanced for the creation of better policy frameworks, and new

opportunities for government funding have since been made available on an ad hoc basis to various organizations.¹¹⁵ Prominent among these are the Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF), which claims that “universities and institutions of higher learning have not been able to fulfill these objectives that fall under a broad head called nation-building.”¹¹⁶ National Security Advisor Ajit Doval, principal secretary to the PM Nripendra Mishra, additional principal secretary to the PM P. K. Mishra, and NITI Aayog members Bibek Debroy and V. K. Saraswat have been handpicked for choice government positions due to their involvement in the creation and management of the VIF.¹¹⁷

Other think tanks enjoying influence on the current government include the India Foundation, which “strives to bring out the Indian nationalistic perspective” as a “premier think tank that can help understand the Indian civilisational influence on our contemporary society”; as well as the Center for Policy Studies, which aims to “[comprehend] and [cherish] the essential civilisational genius of India, and to help formulate a polity that would allow the Indian genius to flourish and assert itself in the present day world.”¹¹⁸ These organizations provide the cerebral barracks for the civilizational vanguard to supply their mission of reshaping government and society, and several Union ministers serve on the boards of these foundations. Civilizationalism has found a rapt audience in this new generation of Indian politicians and strategic thinkers, and those political entities that fail to adopt the civilizational vernacular will be rendered outdated in the consciousness of both the public and the intelligentsia.

In popular media and the legal field as well, civilizational rhetoric has found new utility vis-à-vis its legitimation in the Indian constitution and in framing India’s foreign affairs. J. Sai Deepak is a practicing attorney before the Supreme Court of India and the Delhi High Court, and in his newspaper column “Indic Views” he often stresses a civilizational line with regard to religious, diplomatic, legal, and political philosophy. He has denigrated both the left and the right who “have a turbulent and complicated relationship with India’s past—the former views the past through the prism of the present, and the latter struggles to reconcile the present with the past.”¹¹⁹ Congruent with the Russian example of *smuty*, Deepak likens the “sweep and nature of a civilisational journey” to a procedure of “cyclical evolution.”¹²⁰ His columns reify the sanctity of India’s borders and critique the Western notion of patriotism as “jingoism or toxic nationalism,” which “marginalises it as a trait of the unwashed, unevolved, savage, and hence sub-human ‘native.’”¹²¹ In this worldview, an unmitigated proliferation of free-market outcomes end up “[loosening] civilizational moorings,” thereby preserving the hegemony of the Westernized business elite.¹²² Deepak’s “civilization first” approach has found rhetorical invocation and camaraderie among major Indian

political figures such as Minister of External Affairs Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, who has expressed similar inclinations in the past.

At a forum in autumn 2019, months after his government's decision to revoke the special status of Kashmir under Article 370 of the Indian Constitution, Minister Jaishankar lampooned those Western critics who denigrated the nationalist credentials of the Modi government, saying "in Asia, nationalism is a positive word. . . . [N]ationalists have stood up against colonization, against the domination of the West."¹²³ He further noted that "there is much to be done with the restoration of identity, of cultural trust," and that, unlike in the Western connotation, a "good [Indian] nationalist is an internationalist, it is not contradictory."¹²⁴ He explicitly conceives India as a civilization-state with a "natural linguistic, ethnic, and religious diversity . . . [where] uniformity [has never been considered] as a necessity or an aspiration."¹²⁵

Jaishankar attributes this sentiment to increasing education and the progress of democracy, elevating the voices of those who had previously been left out of high politics: "[T]oday, politics in India is less westernized, less elitist. We are moving more towards what India really is, towards a style more rooted in Indian culture. That's a good thing."¹²⁶ Finally, he stresses that "you [the West] see us through your prism, you attribute to us a behaviour that you practice yourself . . . but we are not you!"¹²⁷ This exchange highlights a practitioner's own thesis of the civilization-state model and demonstrates the differentiated nature of dialogue and self-constitution between such entities. Each civilization-state must be approached on its own terms, and its actions need to be contextualized using an appropriate construction of its autochthonous habitus and its historical strategic culture.

Recent Foreign Policy Decisions in Context

The Union government's revocation of Article 370 was a major geopolitical event, affecting the strategic calculus in the Himalayan trijunction between three nuclear-armed powers, each with a long and tendentious history operating in the volatile region. Arguments surrounding the decision have been framed in civilizational terms either to justify the government's maneuver or to condemn it. A retired Pakistani ambassador framed the decision in a stark civilizational manner, opining that the "rise of Hindu extremism in India will make the search for a peaceful settlement of the Kashmir dispute even more difficult than in the past" and that there exists a "potential of turning Kashmir into a civilizational dispute at the fault-line of Islamic and Hindu civilizations as predicted by Professor Huntington in his widely acclaimed book."¹²⁸ The ripples of Huntington's language

have reverberated across spatial and temporal conflict dimensions, finding an audience here in subcontinental civilizationalists.

Likewise, Indian commentators have brought up the long history of Hinduism in Kashmir and the persecution of the Hindu minority there that has resulted in ethnic cleansing and an exodus of the population. A Kashmiri writer points to the Hindu Pandits, “reported to be the original inhabitants of the Kashmir Valley,” whose presence there can be “traced to that time when civilization began in the valley.”¹²⁹ He references the continuous 5,000 years of inhabitation by Hindus in the valley, as substantiated by historical texts including the *Nilamat Purana*.¹³⁰ In this sense, Kashmir is a part of the sacred geography of India and constitutes an integral part of its civilizational core; “all manners of cultural markers display unequivocally a Kashmir that was intensively integrated with the rest of India.”¹³¹ Article 370 was thus an “anomaly,” and its revocation is justified as a consolidatory policy designed to better infuse and integrate Kashmir within the Indian body politic.

The dyadic relationship between India and China has been conceptualized using civilizational frames, particularly with regard to the history of border disputes and strategic competition therein. The Indian construction of its civilization-state has been shaped in response to Chinese rhetoric since the 1990s, with Indian civilizationalists asserting that “*Bharat* has a better claim to being a civilization state than China given its longevity and diversity.”¹³² Civilizational consciousness begets consciousness transnationally, and though Indic commentators maintain the parity of the two civilizations, they lament that “China is much more aware of its history and status as a civilization state and is certainly more committed to preserving and furthering that character than *Bharat*.”¹³³ The border disputes represent a clash of civilizations, one that can be resolved only through a complete overhaul of India’s mental fabric regarding its civilizational character. According to the civilizationalists, this may be accomplished by adopting policy (no China on Indian borders or, preferably, no anti-Indic state on Indian borders) through the creation of a “sphere of *Bharatiya* influence without undermining the sovereignty of other States.”¹³⁴ Even earlier in the historical relationship, there has been a comprehension of the civilizational other, both in India and China, which has influenced their mutual bilateral conduct.

Before their emergence as modern states, India and China had experienced contact between their two civilizations for millennia and had already developed certain impressions of the other. For its part, Indian commentary on China in the early twentieth century was benevolent, juxtaposing China and India as “sister civilizations” that faced joint hurdles of imperialism and that shared aspirations of reviving their ancient civilization-states.¹³⁵ Concurrent Chinese discourses dif-

ferred significantly, harboring extremely negative perceptions of India as a colonized nation or “lost country (*wangguo*),” which can also be interpreted as a “failed” or “enslaved” state lacking in national spirit.¹³⁶ Civilizational animosities and appraisals colored the first major diplomatic crisis between communist China and independent India during the former’s annexation of Tibet in the 1950s, when India provided sanctuary to the fleeing Dalai Lama and his government. The Chinese suspected India of contesting Tibet’s sovereignty or its status under the CCP, misconstruing the nonpolitical “depth of reverence” for the Dalai Lama in India, given that the spiritual-religious foundation[] of Indian civilization “considers Tibetan Buddhism as a part of [its] own heritage.”¹³⁷ In a world of civilization-states, such patterns of interaction and miscalculation may become a regular feature should the Huntingtonian prediction of global order prove true in coming decades or centuries.

Conclusion

In light of the differences and peculiarities among China, Russia, and India, several commonalities emerge from the comparative study of civilizationalism. The great Indo-Trinidadian writer and Nobel Laureate V. S. Naipaul once deemed India a “wounded civilization”; it is apparent that, to some degree, all nations preoccupied by the project of remaking themselves along civilizational lines have been, in some immeasurable way, wounded.¹³⁸ These wounds have, in each instance, arisen from the encounter with the West and with the general condition of modernity and globalization, refocusing the lens on the particularities innate to each culture and locale.

Everywhere, a civilizational intelligentsia composed of domestic elites felt the need to coalesce and provide a cogent defense of their culture in the face of Western unipolarity. In China, this coalition arose from within the CCP after the reforms of Deng Xiaoping; in Russia, from the admixture of writers, thinkers, intellectuals, journalists, and moralists searching for meaning in the aftermath of the Soviet collapse; and in India, from an emerging think-tank sector bolstered by a growing non-Nehruvian middle class. Together, they assert the moral superiority of their native cultural epistemologies, achieving globalization through indigenization (not Westernization), even as they each seek to recover and reinvent ancient traditions in a plurilateral derivation of global power relations.

In the creation of these autochthonous modernities, the civilizational faction concerns itself with both modernization *and* preservation. Traditions are updated in a manner consistent with the historical understanding of the civilization, as is the case with the reintroduction of meritocratic examinations in China and the increasing usage of Vedic concepts in the articulation of Indian strategic policy. By

and large, these inchoate civilization-states lay few claims to universality, unconcerned with the ability of their models to be exported (or not) to other nations. While the three nations' ideas of global order differ in the medium and long terms, for now each seeks to undo aspects of the liberal international order while maintaining supremacy in its own geo-civilizational sphere.

Thus, civilizations truly are a phenomenon of historical production and reproduction. How a modern society relates to its own history and constructs its sense of identity will intimately inform the nature of the relationship between the civilization and the state and to the population that it comprises. China has represented a truly astounding continuity of Confucian and Legalist thought structures over the course of millennia, whereas the histories of the Indian and Russian civilization-states profess a kind of cyclical thinking in their ideation, reflected in *Dharmic* religious philosophies and the Russian concept of turbulent times, or *smuty*, therefore providing narrative substance to the cause of popular struggle. This article has concentrated mainly on articulations of civilizationalism in the realm of the state's foreign policies and the makeup of its external posture; civilization-states, however, are projects of endogenous and exogenous reconceptualization. Profound changes are under way domestically in each of the countries examined. These changes will irrevocably alter the makeup of the world in the next several decades and centuries of Western decline and global multipolarity.

President Xi Jinping, President Vladimir Putin, and Prime Minister Narendra Modi will certainly go down as epochal figures in their national canons as the first of the official civilizationalists—but there is no doubt that others will succeed them. Each leader makes the deliberate choice to speak in their native tongues and to elevate indigenous intellectual and cultural traditions in their interactions with the exogeny, to much popular acclaim. The ideas and theories espoused by civilizationalist doctrines may be chimerical or salvific, depending on the view of the commentator, but such philosophies currently are set to only gain in power and prestige moving forward. It is necessary that we do not retreat from these ideations or dismiss them as the preserve of two-bit dictators and dogmatic imperialists. This is doubly so as such language has found reverberation in Western circles, as espoused by French president Emmanuel Macron or former American president Donald Trump, who in a 2017 speech queried the Polish people: “Do we have the desire and the courage to preserve our civilization in the face of those who would subvert and destroy it?”¹³⁹

In the cases examined throughout this article, the domestic civilizational faction draws its intellectual strength from principles elaborated in earlier philosophical texts and religious traditions, reframing them in ways consistent with the modern paradigmatic experience. Through a process of percolation and dissemi-

nation, these civilizational concepts are diffused into the general population while simultaneously becoming situated in official policy speech and documentation. These findings are consistent with the initial hypothesis, although they must be examined with special attention given to the unique civilizational conditions of each case. The methods used here can be employed in the study of other civilization-states, particularly in cross-comparative perspective, to elucidate the manner in which such thinking ingratiates itself within an indigenous elite as well as the impacts it then has on the state's conduct of foreign affairs.

These findings may be generalizable across great powers, and future studies may wish to interpret the civilizational condition in polities such as Japan, Turkey, Iran, and the European Union. While some New World societies including the United States, Mexico, and Brazil have been proposed as potential civilization-state candidates, the history and characteristics of societies produced from European contact with the North/South American continents may not have the same claim to an ancient and contiguous cultural civilization that stretches back into classical antiquity—a foundation that constitutes one of the basic features of any civilization-state's reproduced memory. There may be grounds for legitimate comparison among smaller civilization-states, and future scholars might be interested in examining the applicability of these foundational features to polities such as Israel, Greece, Tibet, and Ethiopia, among other plausible cases.

The results and findings of these academic endeavors may very well aid practitioners and policy makers in better comprehending the changing nature of the oncoming world order. A return to civilizational thinking will be fraught with critical questions of savagery, anarchy, violence, harmony, hegemony, particularism, and noncomprehension among peoples. The global community may have to contend with the resurgence of the Hobbesian condition in an essentially Huntingtonian landscape. Or, perhaps, the astute study of civilizational order can result in a new, more delicate balance of power with its own mechanisms of engagement and negotiation for managing disagreements among states of different philosophical and political orientations. The clash of civilization-states is not an inevitable proposition; to avoid it will require objective study of the civilizational phenomenon and the fostering of a genuine desire for dialogue and community among civilizations in the twenty-first century and beyond. ✪

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