

[Open Peer Review on Qeios](#)

# Civilizational-Historical Approach and the World Order

Ilgar Mamedov

**Funding:** No specific funding was received for this work.

**Potential competing interests:** No potential competing interests to declare.

## Abstract

Many scholars opted to cultural-historical concept to explain historical events. They apply this approach to explain and understand the current global changes taking place in the international arena. Civilizational affiliation influences values, convictions, vision and behavior and significantly affects the world order being shaped nowadays.

**Ilgar Mammadov**

<https://ilgarmammadov.substack.com/>

**Keywords:** civilization, colonialism, religion values, world order.

Since the end of the Cold War, analysts have attempted to conceptualize the changes that have taken place and the new realities that were emerging. The American scholar S. Huntington considered civilization to be the main criterion determining the world order. In his opinion, "... Culture and cultural identity, which in the broadest sense is a civilizational identity, forms patterns of cohesion, disintegration and conflict in the post-cold-war period" ([1], 20). Among the civilizations, he named Chinese, Japanese, Hindu, Islamic, Orthodox, Western, Latin American and African. Huntington comes to such conclusions as multipolarity, the change in the balance of power between civilizations, the grouping of countries around the leading state, the claims of the West leading to conflicts, the need to accept the multi-civilizational nature of the world system.

The methodology of the cultural-historical approach has become particularly relevant in the modern era. But it's not new. Back in the XIX century various theories have emerged to explain the evolution of history. The Russian sociologist N. Danilevsky believed that the content of the world history is the progress of a cultural-historical type, which is characterized by the following: first, peoples close to each other constitute an original cultural-historical type; second, these peoples must have political independence; third, the civilization of one cultural-historical type is not transmitted to other type of peoples; fourthly, a civilization is only fully developed when its ethnographic elements, taking benefit of their independence, constitute a federation or political system of states; fifth, in the case of cultural-historical types, the period of growth is long, and the period of blossoming is short ([2], 113-114).

Danilevsky singled out religious, cultural, political, and socio-economic activities of the cultural-historical types. All previous civilizations developed only one or two aspects of activity ([2], 566–567, 574, 576). The Slavic or Russian cultural-historical type will represent a synthesis of all four aspects of activity ([2], 611). Danilevsky considered the struggle with Europe inevitable ([2], 522). Danilevsky preceded not only Russian, but also European authors who emphasized the cultural-civilizational approach.

The German sociologist M. Weber characterising the Western civilization, claimed that "... it was in the West, and only here, that such a cultural phenomena arose, which developed... in a direction that has acquired *universal* significance." So it is, he argues, with capitalism. Weber acknowledges that "capitalism is absolutely identical with the desire for profit," but at the same time "capitalism *can* be identical with *the curbing* of this irrational drive, or at least with its rational regulation" ([3], 7-9). This is done through a "rational structure of *law* and administration," which "*only the West has provided to the economic sphere in the required legal and formal completeness.*"

Weber traces the origins of this right to Protestantism ([3], 14). For Weber, it was an established fact that Protestants exhibited a specific inclination toward economic rationalism. As an example, he pointed to the Protestant areas of Holland, England and France, as well as the North American colonies, which flourished in those years. In an attempt to find the cause, Weber turns to the Protestant doctrine of "vocation." In this concept the central dogma of all Protestant confessions, which considers exclusively the fulfillment of worldly duties as they are determined for each person by his place in the life as the only way to become pleasing to God finds its expression; in this way, these duties become man's "calling" ([3], 44). As a result, "the moral significance of worldly professional labor and the religious *reward* for it have increased enormously" ([3], 46).

Weber resorts to another Protestant doctrine of *being chosen for salvation*, according to which "some people are predestined to blessedness, while others are cursed forever." To believe that the merits or misdeeds of men have an influence on their destinies would be tantamount to the utterly inconceivable assumption that man can influence God's decisions. Divine mercy cannot be lost by those to whom it is given, to the same extent it is unattainable for those who are deprived of it. Weber argues that this teaching, in its pathetic inhumanity, had one result: a feeling of hitherto unheard-of inner *loneliness of the individual*. In the decisive problem of life for man in the epoch of the Reformation—eternal bliss and the afterlife—he was doomed to wander alone to meet his predetermined destiny ([3], 82).

It is quite obvious that sooner or later every believer must face the same question: am I chosen? Two edifications were offered: in one case, the believer is charged with the direct duty to consider himself God's chosen one. For a lack of confidence in one's own chosenness is evidence of the incompleteness of the faith. The second way is to work tirelessly within the framework of one's profession. Only it gives the assurance of being chosen ([3], 86-87).

Protestant doctrine led to a certain way of life called "secular asceticism." Weber asserted "that the secular asceticism of Protestantism... *freed acquisition* from the psychological yoke of traditionalist ethics, broke the fetters that limited the pursuit of gain, turning it not only into a legitimate but also into a God-pleasing deed." ([3], 121). By edifying the poor classes to gain salvation in the afterlife through the performance of their professional duties, the church subjugated the

underprivileged classes. This contributed to exploitation and increased productivity. The attitude towards work as a vocation has become as characteristic of the modern worker as the similar attitude of the entrepreneur towards a profit ([3], 126).

Perhaps aware of the immorality and depravity of the relentless pursuit of gain, Weber tried to justify it with religious faith and rationalize it with a law and administration. There is ambivalence and possible hypocrisy here. As a result, the messages about the total universalism of Western civilization, the religious justification for profit, the economic reasoning of continuous revenue, the exclusivity of the selected, religious justification and the legalization of the exploitation of the poor/damned by the owners/chosen, which resulted in social inequality, humble acceptance of these realities, and the loneliness of the individual have become the consequences of Protestantism.

The French historian F. Braudel believed that civilizations include spaces ([4], 39). Referring to anthropologists, he observed that cultural space is the space dominated by a set of certain cultural features ([4], 42). Regarding Muslim civilization, Braudel underlined that the geographical location between Asia, Africa and Europe, the Atlantic and Indian Oceans facilitated trade that linked continents and oceans. Islam and Muslims were distinguished by a religious tolerance. The universality of Islam, the broad geographic scope of trade, science, and culture, which bounded the continents together, would seem to suppress a regional specificity. But the opposite happened, local peculiarities, traditions and languages were preserved. Islam combined a tradition and novelty, generality and particularity, faith and tolerance, inclusiveness and self-reliance, regional and local.

The European civilization operated in complete contrast to this. Braudel points out that the discovery of the Americas, Africa, India, and China by Europeans led to their colonization and exploitation, which generated an economic development of Europe. Having thus achieved an abundance of commodities and a surplus of funds, Braudel continues, Europe did not follow the path of social security of the population but preferred an establishment of a global domination. The indispensable elements of capitalism – private property and inequality – required an ideological justification. This is how the ideology of liberalism, which was disguised as a freedom, emerged. In politics, this led to a state protection of freedom of exploitation and wealth inequality. In economics, it meant the freedom to do whatever it takes to make a profit. Philosophical doctrine under the slogan of freedom of thought insisted going beyond religious, social, national, moral, ethical, and other boundaries. In fact, liberalism and its freedoms covered up the domination of the haves over the have-nots, and the preservation of class privileges, Braudel concludes.

On all these issues, the United States were ahead of Europe. The founders of the United States, under the mantra of equality and freedom, created an oligarchy. For they were proprietors and did not consider it necessary for an average people, deprived of property, to elect a president. The system of electors appointed in each state by political parties precludes direct elections. Presidential candidates are nominated by political parties. They also organize elections. This is the real oligarchy. The law protects the privileges of the haves from the encroachments of the have-nots. Respect for an individual emanates from the individualism. The freedom of individual means the right of private enrichment, unrestricted by the state. In America, everything is measured by money. A capitalist production and liberalism are the best suits to these aims. American liberalism does not accept ethnic, religious, sexual, moral, ethical, or other boundaries. In America,

individualism and profit are values, property and money are the means to realize the former and achieve the latter.

The British historian A. Toynbee divided human societies into Western, Orthodox, Islamic, Far Eastern, and Hindu civilizations ([5], 209). By Western Christendom he meant the Roman Catholic and Protestant worlds, i.e., the adherents of the Roman episcopate ([5], 147).

Toynbee speaks at length about the Russian civilization, which does not belong to the Western civilization, but to an entirely different Byzantine civilization. The Russian members of the Byzantine family have always strongly resisted any threat of falling under the influence of the Western world and continue to resist to this day ([5], 159). Although Russians are Christians, they have never belonged to the Western Christianity. Russia was converted to Christianity not by Rome, but by Constantinople. Despite their common Christian roots, Eastern Orthodox and Western Christianity have always been alien, antipathetic, and often hostile, as is still the case today in relations of Russia and the West ([5], 253).

Toynbee studies the history of this feud. In the XVII century, the Polish invaders penetrated into the very heart of Russia, as far as Moscow, and were repulsed only at the cost of colossal efforts on the part of the Russians. The Swedes cut Russia off from the Baltic, annexing the entire eastern coast to the northern limits of Polish possessions. In 1812, Napoleon repeated the Polish success of the XVII century; and at the turn of the XIX and XX centuries, hail from the West rained down on Russia, one after another. The Germans, who invaded its borders in 1915-1918, seized Ukraine and reached the Caucasus. After the collapse of the Germans, it was the turn of the British, French, Americans and Japanese, who in 1918-1920 invaded Russia from four sides. Finally, in 1941, the Germans launched another offensive, more formidable and brutal than ever. The chronicles of centuries of struggle between the two branches of Christianity do indeed reflect that the Russians were the victims of aggression and the Westerners were the aggressors.

Toynbee sees the reason for the hostile attitude of the West towards Russia in the adherence of the Russians to the alien Byzantine civilization of Eastern Orthodox Christianity. At the same time, he admits that the adoption of Orthodoxy by the Russians was a conscious choice ([5], 161). Russians are just different and want to remain as they are. That was enough for the West's hatred and constant aggression against Russia.

Toynbee also touches on Islamic civilization. He acknowledges that the West's many attacks on the Islamic world throughout history are part of a larger and more ambitious plan in which Western civilization aims to incorporate all of humanity, all civilizations – Orthodox-Christian, Hindu, Far Eastern, and the surviving primitive societies of sub-Saharan Africa – into a single society and control over everything on land, in the air and on the water to which modern Western technology can be applied. Thus, Toynbee concludes, the modern clash between Islam and the West is not only deeper and more intense than any of the past, it also represents a very characteristic episode in the West's desire to Westernize the whole world ([5], 177-178).

Toynbee is convinced that the "race question" was imposed on humanity by the English-speaking peoples. The English-speaking nations that had established themselves in the New World simply swept their predecessors off the earth's face ([5], 194). If the adherents of racial intolerance continue to dominate, Toynbee fears, it could lead to a disaster. However, the forces of racial tolerance, which now seem to be losing this extremely important spiritual battle for humanity, can take

over.

This is where, according to Toynbee, Islam can play a role. There is no racial consciousness among Muslims, which, according to Toynbee, is one of the outstanding moral achievements of Islam, and the modern world today more than ever needs to promote this dignity of Islam. He suggests that the spirit of Islam could be a timely reinforcement that could decide the outcome of the battle for tolerance and peace. It was Islam that became the spiritual force that, in the conditions of the spiritual vacuum, seized upon the opportunities opened up in the spiritual sphere by the Western bearers of material civilization ([4], 196). Islam made its way into the world as a program to reform the practice of Christianity in order to get rid of abuses and violations ([5], 262).

The first steps of this counterinfluence were also taken by Orthodox Christianity in Russia. Toynbee considers this step as significant and important, but at the same time troubling and disturbing for the West, not so much because there is a serious material force behind it. The point is that the Russians have already demonstrated the ability to convert Western souls to their own, non-Western "faith" ([5], 208). Toynbee believes that in the clash between Russia and the West, the initiative in the spiritual sphere, as opposed to the technological sphere, passed from the West to Russia. The author urges the West not to put up with this. The clash between the rest of the world and the West is also moving from the technological to the spiritual realm ([4], 261). More powerful civilizations of India and China will respond to the Western challenge and are likely to have a much more profound impact on the Western life.

Toynbee expresses surprise that, despite his deep and broad involvement in the world, the historical vision of a Western man remains limited. He is struck by this contradictory Western view on history, although he admits that it is only one of many contradictions. The recognition of the social rights of a human, nation and race coexists with class struggle, nationalism and racism. These base passions find an exit in cold-blooded, planned cruelties. The author sees these two incompatible states of mind and norms of behavior not just in the same world, but also in the same country, and even in the same soul ([5], 144).

Toynbee invites the westerner to leave "his bump" at least for a few minutes and look at the clash between the rest of the world and the West through the eyes of the vast non-Western majority of humanity. When asked by a Western researcher about their attitude towards the West, everyone – Russians and Muslims, Indians and Chinese, Japanese and everyone else – will answer in the same way. The West, they will say, is the arch-aggressor of the modern age, and everyone would have his own example of Western aggression ([5], 252).

The world's judgment of the West has been unequivocally confirmed in the last four and a half centuries, up to 1945. Toynbee warns that westerners will now have to become accustomed to an entirely new experience—to suffer at the hands of the rest of the world, just as the rest of the world has suffered at the hands of the West for the past centuries ([5], 253).

Characterizing various civilizations, Toynbee views Islam to be free of racial consciousness and tolerant. Despite their common Christian roots, Russian Orthodox civilization and Western Catholic-Protestant civilization are different, alien, and hostile. At the same time, Russians are spiritual, in contrast to materialistic westerners.

Toynbee is highly critical of Western civilization. English-speaking peoples have a racist mentality. He accentuates the duality of the Western man – faith and behavior – he admits one thing but do another. In a real life, this duality is very conveniently realized. In domestic policy, the West stands for equal rights for its citizens, in foreign policy it declares adherence to international law, but in reality, wages wars guided by a selfish interest, nationalism and racism. We are even dealing here with the triplicity of Western man – inner convictions, public statements, and practical deeds. Beliefs are leveled by a statement, which in turn is refuted by actions. As a result, actions converge with beliefs. Selfish beliefs guide cruel actions that are attempted to be neutralized by good intentions. Western civilization seeks to westernize the whole world. This is how the West appears before the World.

Thus, there are civilizations that have spatial, political, economic, cultural, ethnic, religious, and ideological dimensions. Scholars agree that Islam, by virtue of its geographical location, is a civilization of transit. For the Great Silk Road passed through its territory, which connected different civilizations, facilitated the exchange of not only goods, but also ideas, cultures and contributed to the cooperation and prosperity of all its participants in Eurasia. In this way, it differed from the colonial system of the Europeans, who, having discovered sea routes to the Americas, Africa and Asia, established their control and began to exploit the resources of the conquered territories and indigenous peoples. Representatives of other religions coexisted peacefully among Muslims. Muslims are a tolerant, non-racial civilization. Orthodoxy is spiritual, aware of its difference from the European materialistic civilization and has been subjected to the Western aggression throughout history.

The Western civilization is based on individualism and greed, which are concealed by a respect for the individual and his freedom. Individualism fits in intolerance and racism. Private property is the most appropriate mean of ensuring individual enrichment, where money is the measure of success. The possession of property and money creates inequality: the class of haves and have-nots, the powerful and the powerless. Accordingly, the former – oligarchs control and exploit the latter. The system of governance they have created – the oligarchy, disguised as a democracy, protects class privileges. This system is based on the ideology of liberalism, which hides behind freedom from everything. The desire to preserve privileges leads to an aggressive aspiration for global domination. The Westernization of the whole world is one of the means to this end.

Each civilization as a cultural-historical type has its own values, way of thinking, world vision, lifestyle, and behavior. Civilizational affiliation to a certain extent determines the political system and economic model, as well as foreign policy. That is why it is so important to be aware of the cultural-historical type, which, among other factors, defines the vision and behaviour of nations. In the modern era, the confrontation between the various poles of the world, which increasingly proceed from their civilizational foundations, is largely moving into the spiritual sphere and shaping the world order.

## References

1. <sup>a</sup> *Huntington S.P. The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order. New York: A Touchstone Book. Published by Simon & Schuster, 1997.*

2. [a](#), [b](#), [c](#), [d](#) Danilevskii N. YA. (2008) *Rossiya i Evropa [Russia and Europe]*. Institut russkoi tsivilizatsii, Moscow, Russia. (in Russian)
3. [a](#), [b](#), [c](#), [d](#), [e](#), [f](#), [g](#), [h](#) Veber M. (2006) *Protestantskaya etika i dukh kapitalizma [Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism]*. 2-e izd., dop. i isp. «Rossiiskaya politicheskaya entsiklopediya» (ROSSPEN). 656 s. Moscow, Russia (in Russian).
4. [a](#), [b](#), [c](#), [d](#) Brodel' F. (2008) *Grammatika tsivilizatsii [Grammar of Civilizations.]*. Ves' mir, Moscow, Russia. (in Russian)
5. [a](#), [b](#), [c](#), [d](#), [e](#), [f](#), [g](#), [h](#), [i](#), [j](#), [k](#), [l](#) Toinbi A. Dzh. (2011) *Tsivilizatsiya pered sudom istorii. Mir i Zapad. [Civilization before the judgment of history. The World and the West] Per. s angl.* AST: Astrel, Vladimir: VKT, Russia. (in Russian)