

## THE EVOLUTION OF LOCAL HUMAN CIVILIZATIONS AND THE PROBLEM OF THE PROLIFERATION OF STANDARDS IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS\*

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**Abstract.** The authors consider the ongoing development of local human civilizations in the neighboring regions to Russia (Europe, the Islamic world, and the Pacific Rim). This issue is analyzed through the proliferation of norms within the system of international relations, a key process in guaranteeing international stability. The authors conclude that the speed of norm proliferation in international relations in the twenty-first century will be hampered by a number of factors. First, the dynamics of European and American development indicate a clear decrease in unifying potential as a result of Western influence on other civilizations. Second, the study of the development of Islamic civilization indicates a significant potential for rejection of norm unification. Third, analysis of Pacific Rim civilizations demonstrates that economic development of this region is accompanied by a set of alternative cultural norms to the Eurocentric world.

**Keywords:** human civilizations, international relations, proliferation and unification of norms, Western world, Islamic world, Pacific Rim.

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## ЦИВИЛИЗАЦИОННОЕ ИЗМЕРЕНИЕ ПРОБЛЕМЫ РАСПРОСТРАНЕНИЯ НОРМ В СИСТЕМЕ МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫХ ОТНОШЕНИЙ

**Аннотация.** В работе прогнозируются общие характеристики развития человеческих цивилизаций в регионах мира, сопредельных России (Европа, исламский мир, АТР). Данная проблема анализируется в

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контексте вопроса о распространении норм в рамках системы международных отношений – процесса, играющего ключевую роль с точки зрения обеспечения устойчивости данной системы. В работе делается вывод, что скорость распространения норм в системе международных отношений в XXI-м веке будет умеряться целым рядом факторов. Во-первых, анализ динамики развития Европы и США показывает очевидное снижение унифицирующего потенциала, возникающего за счет влияния западного мира на другие локальные человеческие цивилизации. Во-вторых, изучение развития исламской локальной человеческой цивилизации показывает наличествующий в ее рамках серьезный потенциал неприятия унификации норм в рамках системы международных отношений. В-третьих, анализ группы локальных человеческих цивилизаций, существующих в регионе АТР показывает, что экономический подъем данного региона приводит к формированию представлений о наличии культурно-цивилизационных норм, альтернативных европоцентристскому миру.

**Ключевые слова:** локальная человеческая цивилизация, устойчивость системы международных отношений, распространение и унификация норм, западный мир, исламский мир, АТР.

The proliferation of norms in international relations is a key factor in international stability. Stability, in turn, is a crucial practical issue from the standpoint of state security in the modern world in general, and Russia in particular (Kuznetsov, Sergeev 2008). This research has become a key issue within the Long-term Forecasting of International Relations Program developed by the Center for Military and Political Studies at Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO University) under A. I. Podberezkin.

Civilization diversity, in particular of local human civilizations, is an important “inhibitor” of the norm unification process in international relations. Thus, unification and stability show a complex dialectical nexus: an overly high degree of unification may reduce the system’s resistance to shock, which can hit all its components simultaneously; an overly low degree of unification tends to reduce the rate of economic integration, arouse rapport issues, and escalate conflicts within the system. The analysis of such issues has relevance for current scholarly trends in political science, international relations studies, and complex norm proliferation and innovation studies (Kazantsev 2001; 2003; 2007).

This article examines the ongoing development of three key civilizations that border Russia, namely, the Western civilization, the Islamic world, and the Pacific Rim. This analysis will allow for a preliminary prediction of the degree of international relations system unification on the Russian periphery and of the prospects for norm proliferation in long-term planning.

### **Western civilization in the twenty-first century: developmental prospects**

Generally speaking, what is now referred to as the “Western world” implies a well-defined developmental model. Its ideology and system of values combine the following principles: *a) priority of individual rights over social groups (human rights); b) competitive political system with free elections as the only legitimate form of political government (democracy); c) distribution of resources through the free market as the only efficient economical model (market economy); and d) priority of the aforementioned principles over national legislation (limited sovereignty)*. Some have even suggested that the nation-state will disappear under the influence of global communication systems (Negroponte 1995, 243). In practice, the Western world is also marked by American military and political leadership.

Critically, these aforementioned principles, as well as the attempts to enact them worldwide, contain potential internal contradictions. Democracy, understood as the unlimited domination of a majority over a minority, may contradict the idea of human rights. Similarly, the equality implied by democracy and human rights contradicts the inequality implied by a market economy. In reality, international interference is often achieved through double standards, endorsed by the dominant views of elite and popular opinion in the US. Beyond these contradictions is the difficulty in adapting the social and political conditions of many Asian and African countries to these principles. For example, individualism conflicts with loyalty to the clan. A market economy is ill at ease with political systems based on personal patronage.

Another contradiction in the Western variant of a global world order is postmodern culture. Alongside globalization, local cultures have become increasingly valued, with cultural diversity promoted and attempts to impose foreign norms opposed. This contradicts the trend of postmodern culture now popular in the West.

In non-western countries, globalization can trigger conflicting movements for traditionalism (Huntington 2006 [1996]). “The higher the economic interdependence, the more pronounced the differences, especially linguistic ones. Globalization of the economy will be accompanied by the linguistic and cultural renaissance” (Naisbitt 2003 [1982, 1984], 380). Protests against Western globalization have emerged in various forms and on different cultural levels. In the West, it goes as far as antiglobalist attacks on the McDonald’s chain of restaurants. In the Islamic world, traditionalism has spurred jihad against Western cultural expansion (Kazantsev 2003).

Western civilization is first and foremost a coalition of highly effective European states and their former colonies (US, Canada, Australia). This coalition has a unitary civilizational foundation (Western Christianity), common history and culture rooted in Europe, and similar informal institutions (values of democracy, market economy, human rights, individualism, etc.). These countries are integrated through a number of very effective regional organizations, such as NATO, EU, ANZUS, and

others. Many key international organizations (G8, IMF) are closely tied to their interests. Joining the coalition provides various benefits. Therefore, quite a few developed (Japan) and developing countries of different cultural-civilization foundations have forged close connections with it.

At the same time, some rather powerful states (especially Russia, China, and Iran) are not parts of the coalition and only occasionally interact or compete with it. They officially advocate for a “multipolar world,” which may also be seen as a form of protest against political globalization.

The key factor that will determine the evolution of the Western world in the long term is its demographic and economic decline. The former will be increasingly notable in comparison to rapidly growing states in Africa and Asia. The latter will require a relative reduction in the EU and US share of the global economy relative to China, India, and a number of countries in the Pacific Rim.

However, this does not imply an *overall* decline of the Western world. There is no objective evidence to forecast this so far. Living standards will remain high in the Western countries. Even so, the United States and key EU states, being inferior to many Asian and African states in population and also lagging behind new economic giants (China in the first place) in GDP rates, will not be able to solve all the global problems on their own.

Additionally, the West will be increasingly faced with the challenges posed by the incorporation of immigrants into the host society. As the demographic gap between the West and Asian and African countries widens, migration will only increase. The crisis of the multicultural model in the West makes the integration of such migrants particularly difficult. This cultural and civilizational problem already has important political and military dimensions, for example in the form of a large number of Muslim migrants who are ready to go to war with the West in Syria, Iraq, or Afghanistan, as well as the problem of increasing terrorist activity in the Western countries themselves. This cultural and civilizational tension will only grow with time as ways to solve it have not yet been found, and it is difficult to know if they will ever be found.

*Generally, the above preliminary analysis of local Western civilization development shows obvious decline in its unifying potential due to the influence of other civilizations. Therefore, it already points to one of the factors that provide relatively moderate norm unification in the twenty-first century globalization process.*

### **The Islamic world in the twenty-first century: developmental prospects**

Islam is a multifaceted religion with an enormous variety of dimensions, which has enriched humanity with great spiritual accomplishments. In terms of a specific Islamic civilization, for all its many faces it is possible to single out some general social, political, and psychological consequences that can arise due to a society's position in the

Islamic world and, simultaneously, cause specific foreign policy challenges with non-Muslim partner countries (Kazantsev 2008).

The famous orientalist and comparativist L. S. Vasil'ev noted that "Muslim countries were, as a rule, very powerful. Their unsophisticated internal administrative structure was usually characterized by simplicity and harmony. The effectiveness of the central government, based on the principle of power-ownership, the dominance of the state institutions, and taxation for the purpose of redistribution, was supported, as has often been mentioned, by the sacredness of government and the obedience of subjects" (Vasil'ev 2001, 184). As a result, all modern Islamic states are characterized by statism, paternalism, a bloated public sector, the inseparability of administrative authority and property ownership, and a low degree of economic freedom. These 'anti-market' trends are further strengthened by egalitarianism specific to the Islamic world, the idea of the equality of opportunity for all people and anti-elitism. As a result, mass movements in Islamic countries are, as a rule, anti-liberal.

Equally characteristic of Islamic societies is a "sense of perfection in lifestyle, combined with the universality and comprehensiveness of Islam, which entangle the entire society like a thick web. This has always been the key to the extreme conservatism and conformism of Muslims, who are almost hourly (recall the obligatory five daily prayers) supposed to confirm their religious devotion" (Ibid.). This often leads to a high degree of conservatism, rejection of innovation, and a suspicious attitude toward any independent creative activity. This traditional structure creates a difficult situation in terms of modern innovations (Sergeev, Sarukhanian 2012). An important role in the growth of conservative sentiment is played by "the closing of the gate of *ijtihad*" (i.e. the prohibition of independent, rational interpretation of the principles and norms of Islam) in the tenth century, a prohibition that is maintained to this day.

Combined with the power of a paternalistic state and egalitarianism, the conservatism of the Islamic world leads to serious difficulties not only with the development of both an industrial and post-industrial economy. It is difficult to deny the fact that the economies of all Muslim societies are predominantly agricultural or resource-based. Trade and services are the only well developed modern sectors of the economy. The only exceptions to this rule are Malaysia and, to a certain extent, Turkey. However, Malaysian civilization lies within the Pacific Rim, and the Chinese minority plays a key role in its economic development. Turkey has, since the time of Ataturk, pursued a consistent deislamization in all spheres of life.

It is difficult to refute the fact that the Islamic world resists the adoption of liberal democracy. More or less stable democracies were characteristic for two countries only: Turkey and Lebanon. Moreover, Turkey has experienced recurrent military coups and its army, in accordance with the precepts of Ataturk, considers itself the guardian of secular state development. Democracy in Lebanon was based on the predominant role of the Maronite Christians and has been destabilized by the growing influence of the Muslim population.

An important characteristic of traditional Islam is its belligerence and propensity for conflicts with the outside world. Of course, the mobilization potential of the religion is not often exercised in reality. Contrary to Western “clash of civilizations” misconceptions, the majority of Muslims in the world are neither extremists nor jihadists. Traditional Islamic understandings of the global community of believers (the Ummah) rarely endorse a “global caliphate.” Much more widespread among theologians and Islamic intellectuals is Islamic nationalism. Its supporters advocate the priority of Islam, but within the framework of nation-states. A contemporary interpretation that allows adaptation of Islam to modern requirements has an even greater number of supporters in the Islamic world. Even among supporters of the global caliphate, many advocate for peaceful, educational means of struggle. In this case, it is a matter of integrating internal currents within Islamic society.

However, almost all the trends in contemporary Islam include a search for alternative forms of political life and foreign policy to those in the West. This is true even for most Islamic modernists, who are often prone to the ideology of the third way: populism, social conservatism, statism, rejection of liberal democracy, and a free market.

“The Islamic movement, whether moderately liberal or radical, is focused on the search for an ‘Islamic solution’ to contemporary issues, including political ones. However, the definition of an ‘Islamic solution’ differs among representatives of various political and social factions, and among ideologues and leaders, each with their own interpretation of Islamic truth. Still, they share a common desire to use the concept of a Muslim global community in politics, based on the idea that Islam is an integrated socio-political, socio-economic and socio-cultural system that opposes the expansion of the industrial Euro-American world. Today it takes the form of a movement for Islamic solidarity” (Levin 1999, 114).

The “Islamic Alternative” is substantially represented in international political life. It can be seen in the alternative international organizations that exist throughout the Islamic world, with their own guiding principles, in contrast to the so-called Western (i.e. non-organic for the Islamic countries) system of international law and international relations (Ignatenko 2001, 8). Moreover, Islamic organizations have a clear tendency to duplicate Western global international organizations. The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) is an analogue of the United Nations; The Islamic Commission of the International Red Crescent is an analogue of the International Red Cross; the Islamic Development Bank is an analogue of the IBRD; the Islamic Organization for Education, Science, and Culture is a UNESCO analogue; and the Sports Federation of Islamic Solidarity is an analogue of the World Olympic Committee. Key international documents also have alternative Islamic counterparts. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Islamic Declaration of Human Rights are one example. Another is the set of international instruments against terrorism in comparison to the Islamic instruments against international terrorism, the OIC, etc. (Ibid., 8–9).

In general, despite its contradictions, the Islamic world, like the West, is a coalition of states with a shared civilizational foundation. Its integration is due to a shared civilizational foundation, but also the presence of a large number of international governmental and non-governmental organizations, and a widespread feeling of community and Islamic solidarity among the people. A perceptible token of the viability of such a large international coalition is the financial and economic aid that the rich (especially the oil-producing) Islamic countries give to the poorer ones. This aid is closely linked ideologically with various Islamic goals: Islamic education, Islamic solidarity, etc. Finally, *a real indicator of the existence of an 'Islamic Coalition' in the world is that it supports its own version of a global order based on Islam (in spite of the diversity of interpretations of Islam).*

The twenty-first century will see all of the above characteristics of the world of Islam in place. It will continue the search for the "Islamic alternative" to Western-centric globalization. Continued population growth will lead to an enhanced relative role of the Islamic world on a global scale. However, the increase in population without a solid economic growth is also a challenge to the coalition's development and even its stability. Along with population growth, the trend toward economic degradation will remain, since none of the states (with the partial exception of those located in the Pacific Rim, namely Malaysia and, to a lesser extent, Indonesia, and also Turkey, partially located in Europe) failed to fit into the post-industrial world and create an industrial economy. A possible reduction in the role of the hydrocarbon economy in the twenty-first century could lead to a sharp decrease in the significance of key Islamic countries, in particular Saudi Arabia and Iran.

The second important trend for the Islamic world in the twenty-first century is a continued growth of religious extremism. This growth will persist as the economic backwardness of Islamic states and their overpopulation deepen. Religious extremism will define the dynamics of different kinds of serious conflicts, which will involve not only the Islamic countries, but also other regions of the world (Kazantsev 2002).

The third trend is the continued high threat of failed states due to negative socio-economic factors, overpopulation, and the growth of Islamic extremism.

The fourth trend is the internal fragmentation of the Islamic world and severe internal conflicts between different denominations within the Islamic religion, manifested both in the confrontation between states (for example, the current conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia) and in extremist and terrorist activities.

In general, the above preliminary analysis of the local Islamic civilization development shows its serious potential to reject unification of norms in international relations. Moreover, the severity of internal conflicts within the Islamic world clearly demonstrates that the proliferation of norms, even within a group of countries that belong to the same tradition, faces serious problems.

**The Asian Pacific and “Asianism” evolution in the twenty-first century: developmental prospects for a compound civilization**

Asianism (or Pan-Asianism) is quite a complex set of ideologies prevalent in the Asian part of the Pacific Rim and further west, including China and India (Levin 1999, 196). The unity of these peoples arose due to the formation of giant trade, cultural, and civilizational zones, linking all the countries of the region (influenced by Chinese Confucian culture, Indian Buddhism, Hinduism, and, most recently, Islam via India) before the Europeans arrived (Braudel 1992 [1979], 679). Cultural synthesis also occurred in the area. Moreover, movement toward closer cooperation came from both ends of Asia. Back in the time of Ming dynasty (1368-1644), prior to the European Age of Discovery, Chinese military and merchant fleets circumnavigated the whole of Asia, reaching Africa. On the other end of Asia, the same sea route was explored by Muslim traders from India and Southeast Asia, where the synthesis of Islamic and Hindu-Buddhist cultures had already taken place.

European colonialists who began to dominate the sea routes in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries merely usurped preexisting trade systems and, to a lesser extent, cultural ties. At the same time, China remained the most economically developed part of the world almost until the Opium Wars (nineteenth century), after which this role ultimately went to England. Nevertheless, by the end of the nineteenth century, all the countries within this huge region (except Japan, and also, to a certain extent, China and Thailand) had become European colonies, semi-colonies or dependent states.

The ideology of Asian unity grew as a reaction to Japan's victory over Russia in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05. Prior to this event, due to the influence of European stereotypes, the nations of this vast international region generally bought into Western notions of their own backwardness and even racial inferiority, and the need to completely abandon traditional values. However, the successful military and economic modernization of Japan and her victory over a great military power showed that Asian peoples (associated with the Mongoloid race) could effectively respond to the challenges of the modern world. Moreover, it turned out that many of the traditional institutions and values could well be preserved (as was the case in Japan). They could even be the basis of efficiency in competition with the Europeans.

Within the anti-colonialist struggle, Asianism took on the slogan “Asia for the Asians.” This was in the spirit of many scientific and ideological ideas of the time, including European ones, to assume that Asian racial unity also implied the unity of values and cultures. A certain similarity was also seen between anti-colonial movements in Asia-Pacific and Japanese expansionism aimed at ousting Europeans from East Asia (in fact, a Japanese construct designed to emphasize the leadership of Japan in the region). Thus emerged elements of a cooperative coalition between

various Asian countries, a trend that survived and saw renewed relevance in the postwar period.

Japan had done a lot for the birth of Asianism, but its war crimes during the war with China and World War II alienated it from other Asian countries. Nevertheless, Japan experienced a remarkable economic recovery after World War II that led to a change in the nature of Asianism. Along with various types of anticolonial sentiment, it also incorporated ideas of social and economic modernization, with reliance on traditional values and structures in its trade-investment cooperation with the West.

Following Japan, there appeared new Asian “tigers” (Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea). They were followed by Malaysia and, to a lesser extent, Indonesia. Finally, as a result of the process of rapid economic growth after Deng Xiaoping’s reforms, China regained the status of “the world’s workshop” in the 1990s. There has been a shift in the center of gravity of the global economy from North Atlantic to the Pacific Rim due to simultaneous economic growth in Asia-Pacific (especially China) and the US Pacific Coast. Moreover, there are even arguments that the United States and China are now “one economy with two different political systems.” Indeed, despite all the political controversy between the US and China, the degree of economic interdependence is quite high (China is the main creditor of the United States; the United States is the main investor and source of technology for China, and both countries are each other's key trading partners). All of these trends will mitigate any political-military confrontations between China and the United States in the twenty-first century.

In the domain of political culture, the peoples of Asia-Pacific share pronounced pragmatism and the desire to maximize the potential of their traditional values for social and economic modernization. In terms of political systems, these countries are a rather mixed picture. Authoritarian, semi-authoritarian or post-communist regimes generally predominate. The region has very few democracies. While some of them are very young (South Korea, Taiwan), others are marked by specifically Asian features (such as the dominance of one party in Japan). This has led to the extreme popularity of a development model that combines successful development of a market economy with preservation of the existing, often authoritarian or semi-authoritarian, social and political institutions. In this respect, the model developed in the Asian Pacific Rim, based on a combination of Westernization, democratization and economic liberalization, offers a viable alternative to the Western model of development in the twenty-first century.

International cooperation in the region has become more and more grounded on the principle of “Asian affairs should be administered by Asians.” Thus, the countries of the region took responsibility for shaping their own structures of regional order, spurred on by attempts by Western countries to intervene in the process. This trend will continue in the twenty-first century, although during Obama’s presidency, it faced a new challenge: the American desire to establish a system of military-political

alliances around the periphery of China. However, this policy has met with resistance from China and pushback from many representatives of Asian political elites.

This is evident, for example, in the various integration structures in the APR. The basis for integration in the region is Asian values as opposed to political pressure from the West. Often, it is officially proclaimed public policy. Thus, during the early 1980s, Malaysia officially declared a “focus on Asia” policy. Likewise, Singapore, while supporting immigration of highly qualified professionals from other countries, especially encouraged Asians, not Europeans to take advantage of this policy. In this particular case, Singapore authorities have consistently emphasized the role of Asian values in the functioning of the state political system.

At the informal level, Asian countries also interact mainly and most comfortably with each other. Overall, despite some differences (such as territorial disputes and claims against Japan for the atrocities of the occupation), they have developed a very effective international coalition, the ranks of which are closed for the carriers of foreign values. For example, ASEAN rejected a proposal to establish a free trade area with neighboring Australia and New Zealand. “The question of a merger was withdrawn from the agenda since three leading members of ASEAN (Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines) refused to launch talks in October 2000, in large part because of dissatisfaction with repeated attempts by the Australian government to impose their worldview on these countries” (Tsyganov 2006).

As the economic influence of Asia-Pacific countries, especially China, grows, their perception of the optimal structure of regional order based on Asian culture will begin to have a global impact. The most active countries in this respect are Malaysia and China. *It is likely that this trend will continue for at least the first half of the twenty-first century. In this connection, an analysis of local civilizations in the Asia-Pacific Rim (civilizations of Sino-Confucian, Indian, Islamic and other traditions) shows that this region’s rise will lead to the formation of alternative cultural and civilizational standards to the Eurocentric world. In the long term, this development will also reduce the degree of unification of the norms within international relations and will also hamper the trend toward unification within the region.*

### **Conclusion**

In general, the above preliminary analysis of a number of local civilizations located on the periphery of Russia's borders shows that the rate of norm proliferation in international relations in the twenty-first century will be tempered by a number of factors. Among them are the following:

- 1) an analysis of the dynamics of European and American development shows a clear decline in unifying potential based on the influence of the Western world on other local civilizations;

2) an analysis of local civilizations in the Asia-Pacific Rim (Sino-Confucian, Indian, Islamic and other traditional civilizations) shows that this region's rise will lead to the formation of alternative civilizational standards to the Eurocentric world.

In the long run, these factors will reduce the degree of unification of norms in international relations. However, the question of whether it will lead to increased conflict and reduce the stability of international relations in accordance with the theory first put forward by Samuel Huntington (2006 [1996]), or alternatively, whether the system will provide the necessary stability for diversity, must be the subject of a separate analysis, as suggested in the framework of the Long-term Forecasting of International Relations Program implemented by the Center for Military and Political Studies at Moscow State Institute of International Relations of the Russian Foreign Ministry.

*Translated from Russian by Alexander M. Amatov*

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