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## **What Is Civilization?**

Civilization has a variety of meanings related to human society. The term comes from the Latin *civis*, meaning “**citizen**” or “**townsman**”

1. An advanced state of intellectual, cultural, and material development in human society, marked by progress in the arts and sciences, the extensive use of record-keeping, including writing, and the appearance of complex political and social institutions.
  2. The type of culture and society developed by a particular nation or region or in a particular epoch: the civilization of ancient Rome
  3. The act or process of civilizing or reaching a civilized state
  4. Cultural or intellectual refinement, good taste.
  5. Modern society with its conveniences: e.g., I returned to civilization after camping in the mountains.
- In a technical sense, a civilization is a complex society in which many people live in cities and get their food from agriculture, as distinguished from band and tribal societies in which people live in small settlements or nomadic groups and make their subsistence by hunting, or working small agricultural gardens. When used in this sense, civilization is an exclusive term, applied to some human groups and not others.
  - In a broader sense, civilization often can refer to distinct society, whether complex and city dwelling, or simple and tribal. This definition is often

perceived as less exclusive and ethnocentric than the first. In this sense, civilization is nearly synonymous to culture.

- Civilization can sometimes refer to human society as a whole; it is used in this sense to refer to the potential **global civilization**.
- Civilization can mean a standard of behavior, similar to etiquette. “Civilized behavior” is contrasted with “Barbaric” one. In this sense, civilization implies sophistication and refinement.
- Another use of civilization combines the first and fourth meanings of the word, implying that a complex society is naturally superior to less complex societies. This point of view is associated with racism and imperialism; powerful societies have often believed it was their right to civilize, or culturally dominate weak ones.

### **What Make A Civilization?**

In the technical sense, a civilization is a complex society. It is distinguished from simpler societies but not considered superior to them. Everyone lives in a society and a culture, but not everyone lives in a civilization. In general, civilizations share the following traits:

1. Intensive agriculture techniques, such as the use of animal power, crop rotation, and irrigation. This enables farmers to produce **surplus** of food.
2. A significant portion of the population that does not devote most of its time to produce food. They can go for other occupations

and trade for the food they need. This is called “**specialization of labor**”. It is possible because of the food surplus.

3. The gathering of these non-food producers into permanent settlements called cities.
4. A social hierarchy: a clan rules or state society, in which a government or bureaucracy supports the ruling class. Political power is concentrated in the cities.
5. The establishment of complex and formal social institutions such as organized religion and education which are opposed to the less formal traditions of other societies.
6. Development of complex forms of economic exchange. This includes the expansion of trade and may lead to the creation of money and markets.
7. The accumulation of more material possession than in simpler societies.
8. Development of new technologies by people who are not busy producing food. In many early civilizations, metallurgy was an important advancement.
9. Development in arts for those who are not farmers like writing.

By this definition, some societies, like China, are clearly civilizations, whereas others like The Bushmen clearly are not. However, the distinction is not always clear. In the Pacific Northwest, for example, an abundant supply of fish guaranteed the people had a surplus of food without agriculture. The people established permanent settlements, a social hierarchy, material wealth, and advanced artwork, all without the development of intensive agriculture. Today, many tribal societies live inside states and under their

laws. The political structures of civilization have been superimposed on their way of life, so they occupy a middle ground between tribal and civilized. The first civilization was that of the Sumerians in Mesopotamia in present-day southern Iraq. Archeological evidence dates the beginnings of Sumer to the fifth millennium B.C. By 3000 a flourishing civilization existed, which gradually exerted power over the surrounding area who became an urban society around 3500 B.C.

### **Civilization As A Cultural Identity:**

Civilization” can also describe the culture of a complex society, not just the society itself. Every society, civilization or not, has a specific set of ideas and customs, and a certain set of items and arts, that make it unique. Civilizations have even more intricate cultures, including literature, professional art, architecture, organized religion, and complex customs associated with the elite. This intricate culture associated with civilization has a tendency to spread to and influence other cultures, sometimes assimilating them into the civilization. A classic example is Chinese civilization and its influence on Korea, Japan, Tibet, and so forth. China is the world’s oldest continuous civilization, with a history characterized by repeated divisions and reunifications amid altering periods of peace and war.

So many civilizations are actually large cultural spheres containing many nations and regions. The civilization in which someone lives is that person’s broadest cultural identity.