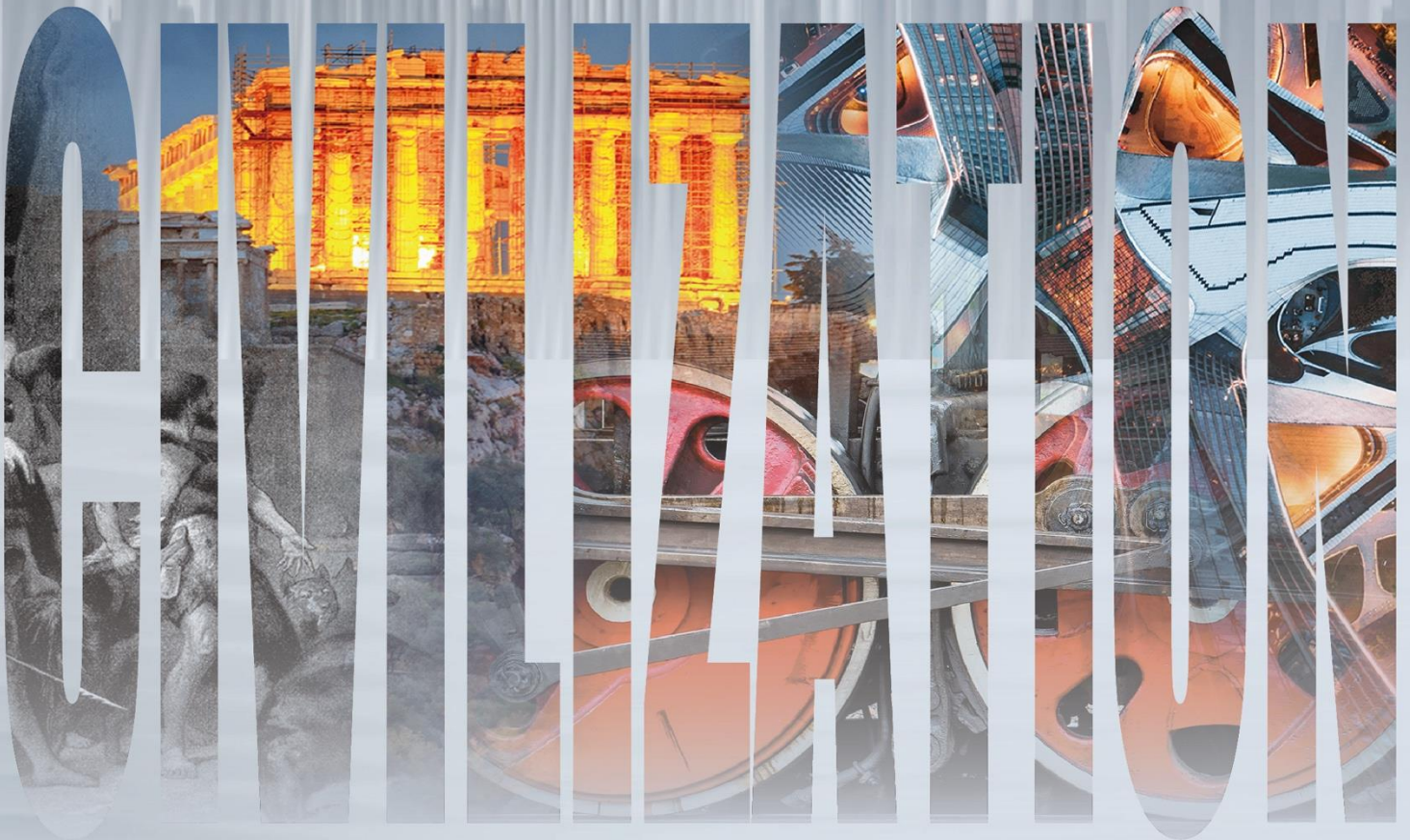


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CHAN KUNG'S  
**FOUR STAGES OF CIVILIZATION MODEL**  
AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

Zhao Zhijiang

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This report was the latest product of ANBOUND's research program regarding the topic of Chan Kung's four stages of civilization model, which was proposed in 2020.

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## Summary

In 2020, Chan Kung, the founder of ANBOUND, developed his model of the four stages of civilization, which ranks all the civilizations in the world into four distinct stages: primitive, early learning, developmental, and stable. Chan's model provides students of international relations and politics with a practical tool to conduct analysis about various social trends, norms, and popular opinions in a country. It can be used to analyze topics such as perceptions regarding money, marriage, life and death, and religious beliefs, which are all important elements of civilizations. Beyond its practicability, this model not only simplifies paradigms from the 18th to 20th century that are overly detailed, but also amends past schematic theories.

The primitive stage refers to countries with zero tolerance of modern civilizations, which consist of today's poor and war-torn nations. When a country begins to embrace the idea of modernity, it enters the early learning stage, the second level of Chan's model. Most developing countries are at this phase. They are facing issues such as pollution, overpopulation, moral decay, and inequality associated with rapid urbanization and economic development. They need to become more enlightened in order to reach the developmental stage, which will require them to find the balance between their traditional cultures and modern civilizations. The final stage of this model is called the stable stage, which manifests a pronounced and structurally stable modernity. A stable country can withstand changes and challenges throughout history. Stability is inseparable from the development of every country, yet its historical and cultural implications are not easily known.

China's economic growth and technological achievements since the 1970s are phenomenal. Yet it is still at the early learning stage of Chan's model. Recent episodes such as the Feng County Mother Scandal and the Tangshan Incident are harming China's sustainable growth and reputation, as these events should not happen in modern civilization. China must solve the social challenges posed by moral crises and become enlightened through the change. Only then, it will truly become a modern civilization that is inherently stable.

## **Social Issues Challenging China's Modern Civilization**

Earlier this year, a Chinese vlogger posted a video of a woman chained in a shed in Feng County in eastern Jiangsu province on Douyin, which owns TikTok. The woman was a mother of eight children, and allegedly trafficked from another province to Jiangsu in 1998. She was forced to marry a man who sexually abused her for years. As the video circulated on the internet, the anger flooded Chinese social media. The galvanizing of public outrage led to expectations that the local authorities must solve the mystery of this woman. However, the Chinese public has not received any satisfactory answer yet. Less than five months later, a group of men assaulted four female diners at a barbecue restaurant in the northeastern city of Tangshan. The brutal attack left the women with different degrees of injuries. Two of them were admitted to the hospital. This incident sparked another wave of fury in China. Many women expressed fears after watching the security footage of the attack. Two months after the Tangshan Incident, a 48-year-old man killed four children and injured six at a kindergarten in Anfu in Jiangxi province. If 2022 were a movie, the Chinese audience would like to pause it after 20 minutes.

Violent crimes are rare in China, but now one after another vicious attacks against innocent people are touching the nerves of ordinary people. The Chinese public could not believe such tragic events can still occur in modern China. Many wonder why some fellow citizens would conduct barbaric and vengeful actions against people who sometimes are weaker and more disadvantaged than the attackers.

The answer is clear. China has been experiencing ethical problems and moral decay since its drastic transformation in the late 1970s. The country must undergo the process of moral awakening and become enlightened through this change. Only then, in the eyes of Chan Kung, the founder of ANBOUND, China will move toward a higher modern civilization that is inherently stable.

## Chan Kung's Four Stages of Civilization Model

In 2020, Chan proposed and defined his model of the four stages of civilization (see Chan Kung's Model on Four Stages of Civilization as below). He compared the development of each nation in the world by using the level of modernity as a standard and ranked civilizations into four levels with distinct characteristics: primitive, early learning, developmental, and stable.

### Chan Kung's Four Stages of Civilization Model



Zero Tolerance of Modern Civilization



Society Begins to Learn Civilization



Try to Construct Modern Civilization



Possess Systematic Modern Civilization

**Primitive stage**, according to Chan, refers to countries with zero tolerance of modern civilizations. These countries resemble cultures from the pre-literary history. The Hadza tribe from Tanzania is one of the few primitive societies left in today's world. The tribal members are hunters and gatherers whose survival depends on natural resources and their daily diet consists of wild game and berries. The Hadza people do not have written language, nor do they have the concepts of hierarchy or land ownership. The men have no personal possession other than their bows and arrows used for hunting. The primitive Hadza tribe inevitably clashes with the more developed Datooga and Sukuma people in Tanzania. For example, the Hadza are witnessing the disappearance of their ancestral territory, which is encroached by the development of Datooga's pastoralism and Sukuma people's expansion of their agricultural lands. If it had not been for the NGOs that have helped the tribe to fight for land rights in recent years, the Hadza people would likely be squeezed out of existence.



Like the Hadza tribe, many poor and war-torn nations are at the primitive stage. They have no adequate technology or matured political institutions to evolve into modern civilizations. They often need international aids to sustain themselves. The fault lines of gap between primitive countries and higher civilizations are roots of chaos, foreign interferences, and clashes among domestic groups as well as conflicts with external actors in these countries. Primitive nations are not stable. They will not develop unless they begin to embrace the idea of modernity.

**Early learning stage** concerns countries that begin to adapt to modernity. Many developing countries, including China, fall into this category. Most of these countries have ancient civilizations with complex bureaucracy, vibrant literary traditions, as well as technological achievements. Yet in the modern age, these countries are experiencing issues such as pollution, overpopulation, and inequality associated with rapid urbanization and economic development. In addition, moral decay and depravity are problems that cause adverse effects on some developing societies. Even though more and more people are out of poverty and have access to education, somewhere along the way, the public has returned to the time before the time of reasoning. Retrogression hinders some civilizations from further developing.

There is still room for progress in countries at this stage. Their governments need to achieve good governance and people need to become more enlightened.

**Developmental stage** refers to a country that is trying to find the balance between its traditional culture and the country's current level of modernization. Russia is a perfect example. Since the Tsardom, Russia had tried to become a main European power by actively participating in the Continent's political affairs. Peter the Great led a cultural revolution that westernized Russian economic system, political institutions, military, religion, and cultural norms. His purpose was to transform the barbaric Tsarist Russia into a civilized nation such as England and France. This effort brought Russia closer to Europe until the breakout of the Crimean War from 1853 to 1856, which is a watershed event for Russia as it ended alliance with Prussia and Austria, and thereafter Europe started to reject Russia's involvement in European politics.

For the next 166 years, Russia has tried many times to rebuild its relations with the West, but every time the gap becomes even wider. Now Russian leaders firmly believe their country is the center of the Slavic heartland whose culture is essentially different from that of Europe. From the view of Alexander Dugin, who is referred to as “Putin’s brain” by some media, Russia is a conservative empire in perpetual conflict with the liberal West. Today, Putin is spelling out this rivalry by unleashing cruelty against the Ukrainians. His war in Ukraine is driven by the concept of ethno-nationalism and hatred towards the West. In essence, underlying this war is the clash of European and Russian civilizations.

Russia has world famous writers such as Pushkin and Tolstoy, as well as scientists like Mendeleev and Pavlov. Russia is not primitive, nor it needs to go through enlightenment, but Russia is not at the highest level of modern civilization.

The **stable stage** is the final stage of the civilization model, which manifests a pronounced and structurally stable modernity. According to Chan, major European powers such as Germany and France are at this stage. He argues that although European countries and societies have encountered numerous challenges from different historical periods, and their institutions have undergone many changes, in fact, everything remains the same, for the characteristics of these civilizations such as political systems, sovereignty, communities, and interests stay consistent. This reflects the structures of many European countries are inherently stable.

Stability is the crucial prerequisite for effective reforms. Without institutional stability, radical reforms make countries fall into the abyss. Libya and Afghanistan had tried to reform many aspects of their societies, but now they are failed states. Their political structures are not stable enough to bear the pressure and consequences brought by changes. In contrast, since the passing of the Reform Act 1832, Britain has continued to call for further parliamentary reforms. It has never experienced any social unrest resulting in the demise of government. Britain stays as a modern nation, and one of the most developed countries in the world, owing to its inherent structural stability.

Chan's model provides students of international relations and politics with a practical tool to conduct analysis about various social trends, norms, and popular opinions in a country. It can be used to analyze topics such as perceptions regarding money, marriage, life and death, and religious beliefs, which are all important elements of civilizations.

For example, people's perception of money is closely related to the development of their respective societies. Some people don't care about financial gains or losses, while others always fight about money. These antithetical views are results of people's different civilization background. At the primitive stage, people would not think about money because there is no complete form of monetary system in their societies. At the next level, people use money in their daily lives and rely on institutions for financial management. At the same time, however, economic issues such as inequality, poverty, and the fad of money worship surface. Rational thinking about money and appropriate monetary mechanism adopted by the government are important for these countries to acquire. Otherwise, backward notions about money will prevent a society from further developing. In a stable society, money is not just a medium of exchange but also a form of important capital for achieving political stability.

## Comparative Analysis of Chan's Model and Past Studies about

### Civilizations

Beyond its practicability, Chan's model of four stages of civilization not only simplifies paradigms from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century that are overly detailed, but also amends schematic models introduced by previous scholars.

The word "civilization" can be traced back to its Latin roots *civis* and *civitas*, or citizen and city. Its original meaning refers to a society made up of cities. Now it means complex and highly developed human societies. During the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the prevailing theory of evolution proposed by Charles Darwin influenced how intellectuals study civilization. They regarded the development of human societies as a progressive hierarchy of growth from primitivism to civilization. Moreover, in their views, modern civilizations stood against the opposite of "barbarity". Elements of modernization such as language, political institutions, art, philosophy, cultural norms, and technological development are key components of an advanced society, whereas a barbaric civilization does not possess these features.

Since the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, Western and Japanese scholars have long conceived their respective models of civilizations based on the studies of human societies' development. In his 1869 published booklet *the Pocket Almanac of the World*, Japanese scholar Fukuzawa Yukichi classified all the countries in the world into four types: chaotic lands, primitive countries, semi-developed and civilized countries. In Fukuzawa's view, the United States and most European nations are civilized countries because of their technological achievements and progressive political systems. China and Turkey, in contrast, are considered as semi-developed countries due to their economic and technological backwardness. Building upon this notion about the world, Fukuzawa later wrote in *An Outline of a Theory of Civilization (1875)*, that on one end, the human societies are primitive and barbaric -and on the other end, we have civilizations. In between lies the semi-developed stage. Similarly, in *Ancient History (1877)*, American anthropologist Lewis H. Morgan also recognized the three stages in the cultural evolution of human beings: savagery,

barbarism, and civilization. He explained that “inventions and discoveries stand in serial relations along the lines of human progress and register its successive stages.” Morgan’s analysis of civilization inspired German philosophers Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels’ works on human societies. In 1884, Engels published a treatise called *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. Mirroring Morgan’s ideas, Engels divided history into three stages: savagery, barbarism, and civilization. In the 1930s, British historian Arnold Toynbee studied the Roman civilization in his series *A Study of History* and argued that civilizations of the world follow a cyclic order: genesis, growth, breakdown, and disintegration. Furthermore, Toynbee stated that universal religions and the invasion of outsiders play important parts in the stability and breakdown of a civilization, respectively. Until today, there are still new theories about the states of civilization, as scholars realized that social issues can be attributed to the level and differentiation of civilizations.

Both Fukuzawa and Morgan refer to “civilization” as the highest stage of human development. But to reach the highest level of modern civilizations, Chan’s model suggests that a country needs to advance to the stages of development and stability. Stability is inseparable with the development of every country, yet its historical and cultural implications are not easily known. Additionally, Chan’s model simplifies Toynbee’s theory, which is deeply rooted in a Eurocentric interpretation of the Roman Empire, by eliminating factors such as religions and migrants. This allows individuals studying civilizations to have more rooms for their interpretations of the development of different human societies. Primitivism, enlightenment, development, and stability, according to Chan, are the basic elements pertaining to civilizations.

## China's Step to Achieve Stability

There is no denying that China has made significant economic and technological achievements since the Reform and Opening. China has been the world's second largest economy since 2010, with its GDP accounting for about 17% of the global economy. In recent years, the country's technological achievements in fields such as aerospace science and artificial intelligence have boosted China's international influence and national image. Simultaneously, social issues such as violence, moral decay and the fad of money worshiping occur in many parts of China. Episodes such as the Feng County Mother Scandal and the Tangshan Incident are harming China's sustainable growth and reputation. These events have no place in a modern society. A calling for moral awakening and enlightenment is crucial for China's future.

*Xiaonong Yishi*, or peasant consciousness is one the most pressing challenges facing China's progress for years. It is an "I only sweep the snow from my own doorstep, and I don't care about the frost on others' roofs" attitude that does not motivate altruism. It makes people worship money blatantly and think only about themselves. This selfish thought leads to China's moral crisis today. The peasant consciousness encourages bystander effect, abets abnormal behaviors such as *Peng Ci*, or the "broken porcelain" practice which scammers use to extort innocent people, cyber bullying as well as internet vigilantism, and leads people to commit criminal acts such as random killing of innocent people.

China needs to eradicate *Xiaonong Yishi* and become enlightened through the process of revival of culture, moral awakening, and the repairment of the cracks in the society. In this regard, Chinese government's various departments should play dominant part in establishing moral standards. The Annual *Lianghui*, or the Two Sessions, provides a good window for officials to pitch suggestions on amendments or the introduction of new laws targeted at various social issues. For example, amid the Feng County scandal, Zhu Zhengfu, a member of the national committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, told a Chinese press that he prepared to submit a proposal on anti-human trafficking in 2022's *Lianghui*.

Additionally, Chinese education system has the responsibilities to promote the ideas of mutual respect, modernity, and civilized approaches to social problems that students may encounter in the future.

People can make personal contributions, too. When the protection of women's dignity and disadvantaged groups' rights becomes a given, and when the public truly accept the philanthropic "people-centered philosophy" into its hearts, the Chinese society will reach stability, the final stage of Chan Kung's civilization model, and become a permanent modern state.

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