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The Relationship between the Evolutionary Nature of Civilization and the Degeneration of Its People: A Review and Critique of Marshall Hodgson's View

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Abstract

Among scholars of civilization, there is considerable debate over the existence and nature of civilizations. Some argue that history consists solely of distinct cultures and reject the notion of a broader civilizational framework. Others, however, accept the concept of civilization and can be divided into various groups, some of which believe in the inevitable decline of civilizations and regard them as finite entities that eventually collapse and disappear. Marshall Hodgson, one of the most prominent scholars in this field, offers a different perspective. He views the macro-nature of civilization as a unified whole in which individuals, circumstances, and conditions are constantly exchanged. From his standpoint, decline does not occur at the macro-civilizational level. For Hodgson, the evolutionary foundations of civilization are shared by all its members, and what is often regarded as the decline of a civilization is, in fact, its dissolution into another civilization. The elements of the former civilization continue to exist within the foundational layers of the new one and, under certain conditions, may resurface. Hodgson emphasizes the role of language and other cultural elements in the transmission and exchange of civilizational values in pre-modern contexts. In modern settings, however, he points to changes in patterns of human capital, although these changes have not resulted in fundamental transformations. From this perspective, modern civilization is essentially a continuation of pre-modern civilization and has followed the same historical trajectory. He argues that civilization possesses an enduring essence, while its forms and expressions may change according to surrounding conditions as it moves from one stage to another. However, the decline of particular manifestations of civilization does not imply the decline of civilization as a whole.

Keywords: evolution; degeneration; civilization; Marshall Hodgson.

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