Chapter VIII
Theory of Critical Total
History of Civilization

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to define information-based tools for the study of the human story in order to “informate” traditional historic findings. By “informate” one may understand a gain of additional information above that found by traditional processing of historical information, by applying modern cybernetic techniques that allow for the modeling and understanding of complexity.

After literature, history is the most universal discipline of knowledge, passionately held (in their own particular versions) by millions of people on Earth. History makes us curious, perhaps because in it resides the puzzle of human existence, its successes and failures. We want to know the past because we want to learn “lessons of history” (Howard, 1991). Hence, history is popular and rich in its public role and its scientific methods are even the subject of philosophical debates.

It is still debated, as Hegel (1956) stated, whether history is not chance but is rather a rational process operating according to laws of evolution and embodying the spirit of freedom. The 19th century’s positivism stipulated two roles for historians: to be disinterested observers and to find, in the records of the past, laws of human behavior. The 20th century’s tremendous progress in research and technology has influenced historians to consider history as a pure science with the emphasis on large-scale forces or structures instead of individuals (Breisach, 1983).

As we move into the 21st century, new trends in the evolution of civilization, informatization and globalization, guide our awareness. These trends emphasize the application of information engineering skills and offer an expanded picture of human undertakings. The emerging world’s history of civilization in the making is no longer “sequential” and “slow” but now “instant” and “fast.” To understand such a dynamic civilization and take a pro-active role in it, one must develop new skills and new approaches to its study. Perhaps one should take examples from other sciences, for example, physics and chemistry, where modeling is applied in order to discover some common observations, rules, and laws. Of course, models do not completely reflect reality, but they are useful tools in grasping its essence and suggesting further investigations and quests for truth.

Of course, a new method of historical investigation, such as is presented here, must take into account concepts that have been formulated in the past. But because some tools were not widely applicable in that era, they were not introduced to historians’ practice. One must mention here
the work of Fernand Braudel (1993) of the French historical school of the *Annales*, in the second part of the 20th century. The founder of this school proposed a structural approach toward the Universal Total History of civilization. In his numerous books, the author sought the driving forces (“wheels”) of civilization; however, his contribution focused at the level of analysis rather than synthesis.

A similar approach has been presented by the English historian Arnold Toynbee (1995), who over the course of 52 years (1920-72) investigated civilization’s processes and described them in several volumes. At the end of his life, he abandoned the civilization approach, since he was convinced that religion rather than civilization had exerted a stronger influence upon human life (Breisach, 1983).

In the past, several historians have undertaken efforts to investigate a total history or so-called World History, but the applied narrative method did not allow for grasping the essence of large-scale historical processes and structures. In this respect, one may mention the German historian Leopold von Ranke, who in the 19th century published fifty-four volumes filled with historical and political writings. The author declared his intention not to pass judgment on the past but simply to report how it actually was (Breisach, 1983).

A similar effort was made by the American historians Will and Ariel Durant (1963), who published 10,000 pages in eleven volumes of *The Story of Civilization*. If those superhuman efforts of registering the past are not to be wasted, this approach should be continued in the next wave of historic investigations, which may lead toward the formulation of a grand synthesis of total history.

Snyder (1999) made an attempt to develop a theory of Macro-History by defining the Historic Cycle (300-400 years) of a culture-system, which has five sub-systems (dimensions): economic, socio-political, intellectual (insight, spiritual aspect, subjective side, ideas, “culture”), geographic, and expressive (art, literature, and music). The Historical Cycle is the basic unit of his analysis, providing a lens to see how a civilization is influenced by these five dimensions of a culture system. He is innovative in defining a role of an individual in a culture system.

This chapter offers an architectural (graphic) modeling of civilization’s evolution in order to develop a big-picture grasp of critical major trends, bifurcations, “turning points,” and consequences of a *total history* of the world, referred to as “CTH.” The architectural-normative method of CTH is defined to study events in terms of historic macro-structures, mini-structures, and micro-structures. This method is a good example of the interdisciplinary approach among historians, political scientists, scientists, and informaticians.

Charles Tilly is a late historian who promoted a similar approach, based on big structures, large processes, and huge comparisons. For example, he writes that differentiation is a progressive master process of social change because it leads to advancement. Examples of such processes can be industrialization, urbanization, coercion, capital formation, proletarianization, immigration of people from alien cultures, state-making, and bureaucratization. He also thinks that the historically grounded treatment of large processes and structures is a sure path to knowledge. Furthermore, Tilly argues that individual instances cannot be replaced by big structures; rather, one should analyze how they interact among themselves. He provides a classification of ways of seeing history and its instances through: individualization, encompassment, variation-finding, and universalization, which are included in a model in Figure 8-1 on the following page.

In this process of searching for critical processes and structures, the author published (co-edited and contributed to) *The Fate of Poland and the World* (2000), an interdisciplinary history book with fourteen co-authors, including some prominent Polish historians. In this book on Poland’s Universal Total History, the authors
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