

Mountain of Paradise

Reflections on the Emergence of Greater California as a World Civilization

JOSEF CHYTRY

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AMERICAN UNIVERSITY STUDIES

SERIES X
POLITICAL SCIENCE

VOL. 69



PETER LANG

New York · Washington, D.C./Baltimore · Bern
Frankfurt am Main · Berlin · Brussels · Vienna · Oxford

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Chytry, Josef.

Mountain of paradise: reflections on the emergence of greater
California as a world civilization / Josef Chytry.
pages cm. — (American university studies X.

Political science; Vol. 69)

Includes bibliographical references.

1. California—Civilization. 2. California—Economic conditions.
3. California—Popular culture. 4. Biodiversity—California.
5. Disneyland (Calif.)—History. 6. Globalization—California. I. Title.

F861.C55 979.4—dc23 2013003547

ISBN 978-1-4331-2322-1 (hardcover)

ISBN 978-1-4539-1110-5 (e-book)

ISSN 0740-0470

Bibliographic information published by **Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek**.

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the "Deutsche
Nationalbibliografie"; detailed bibliographic data is available
on the Internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de/>.

Author photo by Sophia Chytry

The paper in this book meets the guidelines for permanence and durability
of the Committee on Production Guidelines for Book Longevity
of the Council of Library Resources.



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Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., New York
29 Broadway, 18th floor, New York, NY 10006
www.peterlang.com

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Printed in Germany

Die Zeiten ändern sich und mit ihnen die Anforderungen. So ändern sich die Jahreszeiten im Lauf des Jahres. So gibt es auch in Weltenjahr Frühling und Herbst der Völker und Nationen, die gesellschaftliche Umgestaltungen erfordern.

“Die Umwälzung (Die Mauserung)”

“The times change and with them the demands. Thus the seasons change in the course of the year. Thus also in the world cycles there are spring and fall of peoples and nations, which demand social transformations.”

“Revolution (Molting),” *I Ching*
(Richard Wilhelm translation)

est locus, Hesperiam Grai cognomine dicunt,
terra antiqua, potens armis atque ubere glabrae; ...
hae nobis propriae sedes,

“There is a place called ‘Hesperia’ by the Greeks,
an ancient land, powerful, warlike rich; ...
Here is our rightful home,”

Virgil, *The Aeneid*, iii, 163–164, 167

“What America is to Europe, what Western America is to Eastern,
that California is to the other Western states. It has more than any other
the character of a great country, capable of standing alone in the world.”

Lord Bryce, *The American Commonwealth*

To my son Gabriel and daughter Sophia,
native-born Californians

Acknowledgments

This inquiry began thanks to the initiation of Michael Bielicky in arranging an invitation for me to lecture on California civilization at the Center for Theoretical Study at Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic, in 2003. Subsequently Peter Murphy generously agreed to publish a developed version of the lecture as “California Civilization” in a special issue of *Thesis Eleven*. Chapter 1 is a further version of the lecture and article.

Once launched on the theme, I was grateful to be invited to present a paper at the annual conference of the Western Humanities Alliance at the University of Arizona in 2005 which was then published in a special issue of the *Western Humanities Review* as “Bordering the Civilization of Greater California: An Inquiry into Genealogy, Treaty-Making and Influence.” Chapter 2 is a fuller account of my paper and article.

Particularly with its inclusion of Franz Werfel, Chapter 3 is a larger version of the article “California Civilization and European Speculative Thought: An Evolving Relationship” published in *California History* in 2008, for which I am particularly grateful for the illustrations provided for the publication version by Shelly Kale.

Chapter 4 is largely based on my article “California Irredenta” published in *History and Theory* in 2011 thanks to Brian Fay.

Finally, Chapter 5 stems from my participation in a Max Planck Institute workshop on “emotional styles – communities and spaces” that was held in Berlin, Germany, in 2010. Thanks to Benno Gammerl, it was published as “Walt Disney and Emotional Environments: Interpreting Walt Disney’s Oeuvre from the Disney Studios to Disneyland, CalArts, and the Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow (EPCOT)” in a special issue of *Rethinking History* in 2012, while thanks to Stuart Kendall a somewhat different and shorter version was published as “Disney’s Design: Imagineering Main Street” in a special issue of *Boom: A Journal of California* in 2012.

As primarily a European intellectual historian I would never have ventured on this project without the inspiring guidance of the oeuvre of Kevin Starr, particularly his monumental *Americans and the California Dream* series.

I am particularly grateful to the many inputs from students attending my course “California civilization” given at the California College of the Arts over

the past decade as well as the consistent financial support provided by Faculty Development Grants of the College.

As ever, I could always count on my daughter Sophia and son Gabriel: “home-grown” Californians.

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Introduction

The following volume on the civilization of California and of Greater California advances a theme developed in a body of published articles over the last half-decade through which I have clarified my reading of California as a world civilization in the making (see Map 1).

The title of the volume is inspired by California historian Carey McWilliams' suggestion that the word *California* was "probably borrowed from the Persian, *Kari-i-farn*, 'the mountain of paradise'."¹ McWilliams' source was a 1922 essay by the French orientalist A. Carnoy which argued the case with considerable eloquence.² Fascinated as I was by this suggestion, I have never been able to find clear confirmation of McWilliams' hypothesis despite informative discussions with experts on the variants of the Persian language – ancient Avestan, Pahlavi, as well as Farsi, the language generally used today by Iranians. In the meantime, other, perhaps more plausible, alternatives for the origin of the word California have been essayed.³

Nonetheless, I could not lightly give up on such a genial connection between the possible origins to "California" and the mountains of the Alburz Range – including the commanding Mount Demavand – circling the north of Tehran, Iran, where I happened to be born. Legends regarding this immense range had permeated ancient Persian myths of a magical Mount Qaf or the Emerald Mountain sustaining innumerable Sufi tales that recounted the canonical pilgrim's quest toward metaphysical and spiritual Truth. So even if McWilliams' conjecture cannot be in all probability philologically sustained, "Mountain of Paradise" still conveniently serves to capture my own sense of the greatness to its signified: the realms alternatively known as *California* and *las Californias*.

Indeed, what land has been more often associated with the evocative term "Paradise" than California – whatever the justification for that claimed conjunction? And what "Paradise" is more indebted to a range of mountains for its life-sustaining powers than California with the towering peaks of its Sierra Nevada, justly celebrated by California's naturalist chronicler John Muir's paeans to its "Range of Light" and its renowned *omphalos*, the Yosemite Valley?⁴

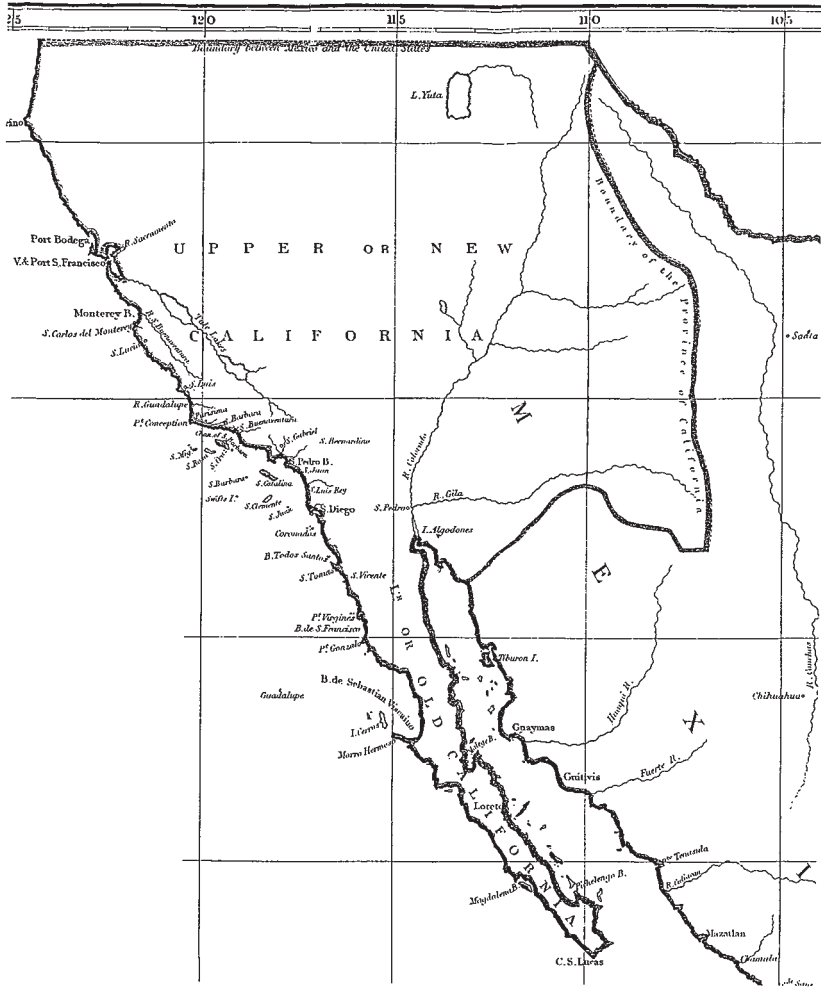
1 McWilliams [1949], 3. Polk [1991] calls this theory "the most interestingly plausible" (131).

2 Carnoy [1922].

3 See Chapter 2 below for more details on the varied candidates.

4 And apparently still rising. See San Francisco Chronicle [2012].

Map 1



Greater California, 1839

Source: Forbes [1839]

One of the more regrettable aspects of contemporary discursivities regarding this California, this Mountain of Paradise, is the commonplace failure to recognize the deep mythical origins to the phenomenon of California which, once attached to its unprecedented growth and flowering as a global economic power – notwithstanding stern challenges of the moment –, should raise the general question: how is it that of all the global economies on the planet today, California

stands out as the only one lacking sovereign political status? This volume may not directly answer that question – and the gravity of its implications, but it does push it to the forefront. To that extent its intentions differ from even the many highly researched and glowing celebrations of California.

*

Given that the original California named by the Spanish and later by the Mexicans was far more extensive than the present U.S. state of California, I have adopted the following terminology for the distinction: in the text “California” will refer to the U.S. state of California and its boundaries, while – in the spirit of irredentist nomenclatures – “Greater California” will refer to that larger realm, which once included Nevada, Utah, much of Arizona, slivers of Colorado and Wyoming, and Mexican Baja California.⁵

Finally, italicized references to *California* or *Las Californias* should be generally understood as referring to Spanish and Mexican California.

5 This is the sense in which the term “Greater California” is generally used in this volume. In the literature “Greater California” is sometimes applied in a different manner. For Abbott [1993], 160 (map), “Greater California” means the “domination” of economic and social patterns by the “metropolitan complexes” of California over (besides California itself) Oregon, a western sliver of Idaho, and the population centers of western Nevada and of southwestern Arizona. Pomeroy [2008] meanwhile uses it to refer to the common population growth patterns for California, western Nevada, southwestern Arizona, and Oregon (Figure 12.3, 390). See Chapter 6 below.

Chapter 1

Beyond the United States of America? California as a World Civilization¹

Around the turn of the millennium an economic fact occurred that is worth recording. Passing the Republic of France, the U.S. state of California became the fifth economic power in the world. Admittedly, as of the date of this chapter, that same Californian economy has undergone more challenging convolutions that only recently have shown signs of letup, and the most recent estimates place California somewhere between the eighth and ninth ranks (see Table 1). Still, granted that Britain, France and Italy remain within range, and that Germany is not all that significantly ahead, nor that Japan is entirely beyond reach, a few more great surges of the Californian economy, comparable to the last burst of the dotcom 1990s, could conceivably lift California right back into the top five.

Naturally it could be argued that such surges, quite apart from the usual controversy over the validity of the indices used, whether GNP, GDP, GSP, or PPP, are ephemeral. However, excepting the steady advance of another new economic power, China, into the Valhalla of economic preeminence, it is difficult to imagine future expansion by California's immediate rivals on a scale that would match California's own constantly increasing wealth, crucial Pacific location, strategic position in all the distinctly postmodern economic sectors from high tech and media to agribusiness, university research, and green technology, possibly important new sources of oil, not to speak of the growth of a multiethnic population that, were it to advance from the present 37 million to 50 million in the next quarter-century, a not unlikely probability, would fuel further qualitative advances that could easily raise California to permanent status as anywhere between the third and fifth most powerful economy in the world.

At the same time, California has never been granted its deserved autonomy as a force to be reckoned with in world history. This myopia is often supported by such pejorative references to Californian civilization as "Lalaland," "Dream-

1 An early version of this chapter was published as "California Civilization: Beyond the United States of America?," *Thesis Eleven*, 85 (May 2006), 8–36. It was originally presented as an invited lecture at the Center for Theoretical Study, Czech Academy of Sciences and Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic, on 6 August 2003. I am grateful to the Center and its Co-directors Dr. Ivan Havel and Dr. Ivan Chvatik for giving me the rare opportunity to discuss the role of California civilization with a primarily European audience and to Michael Bielicky for arranging the process of collaboration.

Table 1
World Economic Powers 2000–2010
GDP & GSP (Millions of US \$)

	2000	2001	2008	2009	2010
1. United States	9,837	10,171	14,204	14,119	14,582
2. China	1,080	1,159	4,306	4,985	5,879
3. Japan	4,313	4,842	4,909	5,068	5,498
4. Germany	1,873	1,874	3,652	3,330	3,310
5. France	1,294	1,303	2,853	2,649	2,560
6. United Kingdom	1,415	1,406	2,645	2,174	2,246
7. Italy	1,074	1,091	2,293	2,112	2,051
8. Brazil	644	554	1,650	1,622	2,088
9. CALIFORNIA	1,344 (5)	1,359 (5)	1,846 (8)	1,891 (8)	1,936 (9)

GREATER CALIFORNIA (2010)

California	1,936
Arizona	261
Nevada	127
Utah	117
Baja California	28
Baja California Sur	4
Total	2,473 (6)

Ranking of California for given year in parentheses

Sources: World Bank; Bureau of Economic Analysis, U.S. Department of Commerce

land,” “the Land of Oz,” even where these same references often enough carry the underlying concern that perhaps the power of California is really here to stay – with, no doubt, deleterious effects on the rest of innocent humankind. Moreover, even in cases of more favorable classifications, the best that such boosterism is able to articulate is the status of California as a “regional civilization” rather than a civilization in itself.²

It is incumbent on contemporary students of global or world history to question such provincial readings. This chapter – which is primarily directed to such students – claims, first, the fact of a distinctly Californian civilization sufficiently different from (and, in time, possibly superior to) the United States of Amer-

2 In the California History Sequiscentennial Series edited by Richard J. Orsi, the general preface launching the series by Michael McCone and Richard J. Orsi does state that “it is incumbent on Californians to take stock of their civilization.” Gutiérrez and Orsi [1998], ix. In his mammoth and crafted study of California up to 1963 (as well as 1990–2003 as of the date of this chapter), a work that I largely follow, Kevin Starr generally speaks of California as a “regional civilization” or “regional society.” See also DeWitt [1989] who is more direct in his references to a “California civilization” (vii).

ica; and, second, the contours of a history and character that students of twenty-first-century economics, politics and culture need increasingly to take into account if their reflections and predictions are to match national and international reality. Those contours, far from being summed up solely by synonyms of material wealth which seem to be one conventional stance towards Californian uniqueness, require far more comprehensive terms of art. This chapter argues that, properly applied, such terms of art may help reveal that California is possibly the only major characteristically twenty-first century civilization worth recording today.³

What single set of signifiers helps mark off the unique characteristics of California? Once California had settled into American rule around the late nineteenth century, the first serious efforts to capture those characteristics by a host of Californian writers, thinkers, explorers and academics settled on the majesty and towering presence of California Nature – along with concern that human and social life would always sense its own inadequacy before such natural greatness.⁴ Perhaps the most imposing such statement, certainly the most prestigious at the time, is the lecture given by Harvard philosopher George Santayana to the Berkeley Philosophical Union in 1911 in which Santayana asked his California audience to pay more attention to the mountains and redwoods of their environment as stimuli to break what he called “the genteel tradition” in American philosophy and inaugurate a California philosophy reflective of its natural grandeur. In the presence of such “a virgin and prodigious world,” Californians must sense “a non-human beauty and peace” which should “stir the sub-human depths and the superhuman possibilities of your own spirit,” since “everywhere is beauty and nowhere permanence, everywhere an incipient harmony, nowhere an intention, nor a responsibility, nor a plan.” In short, Californians must learn “to salute the wild, indifferent, non-censorious infinity of nature,” as a consequence of which they would be simultaneously inspired to “speculation.”⁵

-
- 3 A sensitive statistic to follow in the future relations between California and the United States may well be the balance of payments between California and the U.S. federal treasury in terms of fiscal outflow to the federal government. Whereas until 1987 there was a net fiscal inflow from Washington, D.C., since that period there has been a net outflow. In 2002 the imbalance set a record for any U.S. state in its relation to the federal government (succeeding the 2001 record imbalance, also involving California). In short: “As has been the case for more than a decade, California subsidizes the rest of the nation at unrivaled levels.” California Institute for Federal Policy Research [2003], 8. For figures to 2005 see Table 2.
 - 4 See the account in Starr [1973], 417–33, specifically drawing on George Santayana, Joseph Le Conte, and Luther Burbank. Also the study of Californian landscape and imagination by Wyatt [1986].
 - 5 “The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy (1911),” in Santayana [1967], 62, 63, 64.

Table 2
California's Balance of Payments with
The Federal Treasury, 1990 – 2005

1990	135,497*	117,636**	4,551+	3,951++	0.89#
1991	137,071	128,639	4,517	4,240	0.89
1992	137,581	141,913	4,460	4,600	0.93
1993	143,298	149,383	4,593	4,788	0.95
1994	152,768	153,952	4,860	4,898	0.98
1995	163,140	153,831	5,156	4,861	0.94
1996	177,479	156,075	5,557	4,887	0.93
1997	195,099	160,884	6,027	4,970	0.92
1998	213,694	161,909	6,503	4,927	0.90
1999	235,772	168,676	7,065	5,055	0.87
2000	276,393	175,967	8,158	5,194	0.81
2001	265,608	188,758	7,718	5,485	0.82
2002	241,625	206,417	6,922	5,914	0.82
2003	233,626	219,706	6,608	6,214	0.79
2004	250,373	232,387	7,004	6,501	0.78
2005	289,627	242,023	8,028	6,709	0.78

* = Federal Taxes Paid to Federal Government

** = Federal Spending Received

+ = Federal Taxes Paid to Federal Government per capita

++ = Federal Spending Received per capita

= Federal Spending Received Per Dollar of Tax Paid

Source: Tax Foundation Special Report No. 158, "Federal Tax Burdens and Spending by State";
U.S. Census Bureau

Consolidated Federal Funds Report 2005

According to California's historian Kevin Starr, Santayana's suggestion may be read to claim that "the true key to the success of California as a civilization" would be "its interior life in relationship to its environment."⁶ Taking Santayana's cue as our starting-point, let us flesh out the breadth of this reference. Certainly, if California is something other than an economic statistic, it must reside in features discernible in its flora and fauna, its environment and ecosystem.

First, that ecosystem is unique. Even its geological basis stands out for originating tectonically from the subduction of the Pacific tectonic plate under the North American plate, thus producing what would eventually become an "island" of biodiversity.⁷ As a result, "California has environmental diversity and richness

6 Starr [1973], 423.

7 "No other concept in geology is as important to understanding how California came to be so diverse than that of plate tectonics, plates sliding about on the surface of the earth." Schoen-

unparalleled anywhere in the world.” Moreover, “this astounding array of Californian vegetation exists in close juxtaposition.”⁸ Indeed, “there is more climatic and topographic variation in California than in any region of comparable size in the United States.”⁹ Belonging mainly to the Mediterranean climate group, California displays far greater variety in species and landscape than other similarly classified regions of the world. It has eleven of the world’s major soil groups and ten percent of all soil types in the United States, some of which are astonishingly old. Each vegetation group has its own habitat, soil and local climate, resulting in fifty types of vegetation, in a landscape that encompasses the highest as well as lowest points in the contiguous United States.¹⁰

Second, with regard to the human component to this ecosystem, California has been occupied for probably fifteen thousand years by native Californians who cared for it in a manner that shaped its appearance for the Spanish conquistadores who began its conquest from outside after 1535. This native Californian population formed the most populous native American region north of Mexico – possibly 310,000 at the time of European intrusion – and lived in small groupings of two to five hundred individuals “in small well-defined territories under the tradition and authority of a leader who almost always was a male.” What is of even greater significance is that, as a result, native California was “one of the most linguistically diverse areas in the world” with “perhaps as many as one hundred mutually unintelligible languages.”¹¹

The argument of this chapter regarding Californian uniqueness thus begins with the juxtaposition of these natural and human indices. What gives “California” its unity and constancy is the fact that historically its environmental diversity was matched by its human diversity down to the presence of a uniquely rich variety of languages. That native Californians related to their natural environment in small groupings and developed languages that replicated the diversity they experienced over vast periods of time is an important key to understanding Californian history and destiny. Once the longevity of this uniqueness is granted, it becomes no accident that contemporary California is presently interpreted as posing the challenge to world history of a “new society of the new millennium”

herr [1992], 58, 58–62; also Francis & Reiman [1999], 5–9, and McPhee [1993]. My thanks to Colin Day for these references.

8 M. Kat Anderson, Michael G. Barbour, and Valerie Whitworth, “A World of Balance and Plenty: Land, Plants, Animals, and Humans in a Pre-European California,” in Gutiérrez & Orsi [1998], 12.

9 Schoenherr [1992], ix.

10 Anderson, Barbour & Whitworth, “A World of Balance and Plenty: Land, Plants, Animals, and Humans in a Pre-European California,” in Gutiérrez & Orsi [1998], 12–47; Bakker [1971]; Schonherr [1992].

11 William S. Simmons, “Indian Peoples of California,” in Gutiérrez & Orsi [1998], 56, 48.