

China and the Writing of World History in the West

Paper prepared for the
XIXth International Congress of Historical Sciences
(Oslo, 6-13 August 2000)

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Recent controversies over multicultural education in the West, particularly some of the heated exchanges about the possibility of introducing more globally oriented alternatives to the standard 'western civilisation' course, at times obscure the fact that world history is a long established genre that has occupied scholars for centuries and has had an enduring appeal for diverse types of readers for just as long. Whatever the current pedagogical concerns regarding it, the scholarly pedigree of world history is difficult to deny. Traditionalists within the historical profession who associate it solely with the grand schemes of Spengler and Toynbee, or who voice dismay because they identify with certain schools of social scientific thought, can be reminded that no less a figure than Leopold von Ranke crowned his career by devoting his last years to the writing of his own seven-volume *Weltgeschichte* (1881-1888). Leaving aside the faults of that work – and its convinced Eurocentrism may now be counted among the gravest – the significance Ranke attached to it and the fact that in undertaking it he put his own legitimising stamp on a genre conventionally recognised as having a lineage extending back in the West to Herodotus and the Bible suggests that world history cannot easily be dismissed as merely a trendy form of inquiry cultivated only on the margins of the discipline.²

A general theoretical justification for a global approach to history was already clearly formulated for mainstream historians at the beginning of the twentieth century, for example, by Henry Smith Williams in his monumental *Historians' History of the World*. Echoing Ranke, Williams declared that 'no historian worthy of the name can narrate the events even of a limited period without at least an inferential reference to the world-historic import of these events.'³ From this proposition, which can be taken to represent an analytical as well as a normative claim, there follows the corollary that there is a scholarly responsibility incumbent on historians to articulate explicitly our views about how the world works and how it has come to be structured as it is, to subject these views to critical examination in the light of existing knowledge and to alter them as appropriate in the light of reason and evidence.

To speak of 'views of the world' is of course to acknowledge a multiplicity of possible perspectives, and one of the premises underlying this paper is that world history can best be viewed as a domain of historical knowledge open to cultivation from diverse theoretical and

1 A partial draft of this essay was presented at the international conference on 'Renegotiating the Scope of Chinese Studies' organised by the East Asia Center of the University of California at Santa Barbara (March 2000). I am grateful to Francesca Bray, Charlotte Furth, Marta Hansen and Victor Mair for their comments on that occasion and to Ralph Croizier for his on a later draft.

2 H.E. Barnes (1963a); Costello (1993), p. 9.

3 H.S. Williams (1907), vol. 1, p. 13.

ideological perspectives. A second premise is that within this framework one can accept the fact of this multiplicity while leaving open a wide range of possible scenarios – from conflict and competition to co-existence and convergence – with regard to how those perspectives might relate to one another. In addition to conceptual breadth, this approach has the significant advantage that it allows for a distinction to be made between world history as a domain of knowledge and the specific uses made of it. In particular, it in no way precludes anyone so inclined from observing that modern writings on world history have often served as so many justifications for Western global hegemony, or, as Jean Chesneaux has provocatively put it, as ideological 'marketing operations' geared to promoting capitalist globalisation. Recognition of that eventuality need not entail the discrediting of world history as such or abandoning it as an arena of debate in which various forms of dominance and exploitation can be challenged.⁴

Just as world history can be characterised as a long-standing domain of scholarship to which new approaches have regularly emerged over time, so can the practice of writing China into world history be understood as a part of a tradition of scholarship that has been cultivated in the West for centuries and that has evolved through several distinct phases over the course of that time. Although historians of China sometimes complain that theories of global development and comparisons with the West have been heavy-handedly imposed on their own field, it has proven virtually impossible to purge it altogether either of comparison or of ideas expressed in such theories. Indeed it is far from clear that any total purging of this sort would be either possible or desirable. Theoretical notions can be formalised tools of great heuristic value, and Western historians reflectively attempt to understand the Chinese past are struck time and again by the force of Mary C. Wright's observation that 'all history is implicitly comparative'.⁵ What is generally recognised as desirable is the goal of overcoming the parochialism so often evident in such theories and comparisons. The pervasiveness of that parochialism makes the long record of interaction between various Western approaches to world history and interpretations of Chinese history a significant component of the background to Chinese studies as a discipline, as E.G. Pulleyblank demonstrated over fifty years ago.⁶ A.G. Frank has more recently castigated leading historians and theorists from Marx and Weber to Braudel and Wallerstein for varying degrees of Eurocentrism and for underestimating the role of China in world history.

Following in Pulleyblank's footsteps, the present study first provides a critical survey of some of the main attempts by Western historians and philosophers of history before 1945 to analyse Chinese history from what those authors took to be a world perspective. The second half of the paper then examines the interplay of developments since the Second World War in the historiography of China on the one hand and of world and comparative history on the other. Considerations of space dictate that analysis is limited to general histories of the world, or at least to studies that aim to treat the world as a whole, even if only for a determinate period. It is not possible here to extend analysis to more specific studies on particular global topics such as environmental or epidemiological trends. While the confines of an essay and the limits of my knowledge dictate that only a restricted selection of authors and issues will be discussed here, my

4 Chesneaux (1976), pp. 91-96.

5 M.C. Wright (1964), p. 515.

6 Pulleyblank (1955a).

hope is that this long-term review of the Western scholarly record may be useful for those concerned with interpretations of Chinese history and of world history alike. It should be understood from the outset that this essay does not attempt to survey the current state of either field; nor will it go to special lengths arguing for one or another current approach for incorporating China into world history. Rather than undertaking to describe the range and significance of recent work, it extends detailed discussion to the late 1970s only. Hopefully this will be sufficient to achieve the basic aims of the exercise, which are to show that the ways in which Western thinkers have interpreted world history have powerfully shaped their understandings of China, and to indicate that the growth in knowledge of Chinese history has over time considerably enriched the comprehension Western authors have had of the dynamics of world history. Appreciation of these points may in turn provide a sense of how Frank and the authors he criticises might fit into a broader historiographical framework.⁷

Early Western Writing on the History of the World

From the late Roman empire until the seventeenth century, the predominant approach to interpreting the destinies of and the changing relations between nations was of course to explain post-Biblical events allegorically in terms of Old Testament genealogies, the distinct Christian and Jewish conceptions of the Providentially directed course of history, and the model of four successive world empires which Orosius and the authors of the *Mishnah* alike took from the Book of Daniel.⁸ At various points during that millennium and a half, however, cross-cultural contacts and the force of events led Western thinkers to revise and expand their vision of the world. Following European expansion into Asia during the Crusades, the stunning military expansion of the Mongols and their incursions into Eastern Europe gave the Latin West its first large-scale direct encounter with peoples from 'further Asia'. Experienced as marking a dramatic rupture with previous history, the Mongol conquests were recorded as world historical developments by two of the leading historical works of the thirteenth-century renaissance, the *Chronica maiora* of Matthew Paris and the *Speculum historiae* of Vincent of Beauvais. The European merchants and missionaries who took advantage of the *pax mongolica* to travel across Asia then provided Western writers and readers with a stream of reports about hitherto little known countries and cultures that offered much food for thought.

Arguably the single greatest impetus to broadening Western views of the world thereafter came from the European military and commercial expansion into the Americas and the Indian Ocean basin during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This resulted in a series of major historical and ethnographical works in Spanish and Portuguese that exercised fundamental

7 Frank (1998).

8 See Yerushalmi (1989), pp. 36-7 on the *Mishnah*. Breisach (1983), pp. 84-7, contrasts the four empires model of Orosius, whose vision of an inherent connection between the power of the Roman empire and the universal mission of Christianity came to predominate in medieval Christian thought, with the outlook of Orosius' mentor Augustine, who conceived of world time in terms of six successive world empires, each correlated to one of the days of creation depicted in Genesis. The sharp line Augustine drew between the City of God and all forms of the City of Man gained new prominence during the Reformation.

influence on how later generations understood the world.⁹ This wave of expansion also produced the first modern work on world history in English, namely, Walter Raleigh's audacious *History of the World* (1612), a fat posthumously published tome composed while the author was imprisoned in the Tower of London (though he only got to 170 B.C.E. before dying). In the seventeenth century Hugo Grotius, the father of modern international law, was one of several prominent scholars who involved themselves in major historiographical and legal debates regarding the origins of the recently encountered American peoples. Although this controversy, which laid the conceptual groundwork for emerging notions of 'natural man', generally remained framed in terms of how the ancestors of the 'newly discovered' peoples might have been related to the Biblical patriarchs, it nevertheless also generated significant doubts about the adequacy of the Genesis account of the descent of the human race from Adam and Noah.¹⁰

China and the Writing of World History in the West Until the Industrial Revolution

The model of patriarchal descent as stipulated in the Bible likewise provided seventeenth-century Jesuit missionaries and other early Western writers on China with the interpretive framework for understanding the origin and meaning of Chinese civilisation. As the West's main informants about the 'Middle Kingdom' at that time, the Jesuits from the early seventeenth century on presented its civilisation as having derived from Noah and as having preserved important elements of an original divine revelation that could serve as a foundation for Christian evangelisation, despite the proliferation of disbelief and superstition that had allegedly grown up in later Chinese culture.¹¹ While the use of the Biblical framework remained commonplace for analysing Chinese and world history long thereafter, some of the early Enlightenment's most serious questions about the universality of the Biblical chronology arose from the publication in 1658 of the first detailed version of ancient Chinese chronology in a Western language by the Jesuit scholar-missionary, Martino Martini. By drawing attention to discrepancies between the Chinese records and the Bible, Martini's work initiated a new era in the writing of world history in the West.¹²

The late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries consequently saw a proliferation of scholarship devoted to the problem of how the chronologies of various peoples should be related to one another, a problem for which the French savant Nicholas Freret in due course developed his source critical approach to comparative chronology.¹³ In the meantime, in addition to Jesuit arguments that Confucian thought incorporated valid religious insights compatible with Christianity there emerged provocative Libertine claims that China embodied a model of tolerant ancient wisdom and/or rationality unencumbered by theological obfuscation. Together these views became the butt of a fierce backlash in less broad-minded circles as the policies of accommodating Confucian belief championed by Matteo Ricci and later Jesuits came under

9 Hooykaas (1979); Pagden (1982) and (1993).

10 Popkin (1987).

11 Mungello (1985).

12 Van Kley (1971).

13 Ellisseeff-Poisle (1978).

sharp attack in the Chinese Rites Controversy from the 1680s onward and eventually incurred papal condemnation in 1715. At the same time the Dispute between the Ancients and Moderns resulted in China's being increasingly thought of as essentially an ancient-style, patriarchal civilisation comparable to Pharaonic Egypt, ancient Israel or classical Greece and Rome. This classification of Chinese culture as somehow inherently ancient was taken to mean that it was likewise fundamentally antithetical to the new, experimental science which was identified in the eyes of the founders of the Royal Society as both gentlemanly and Christian.

The most celebrated contribution to world history in the late seventeenth century was Bossuet's *Discours sur l'histoire universelle* (1681), a treatise written for the education of the Dauphin. Though this work earned its author the title of 'Orosius of the Counter-Reformation', Bossuet actually moved beyond the Orosian / Augustinian historiographical framework in two ways, namely, by integrating Biblical and post-Biblical events into a single narrative and by portraying the world's history as a process of continual spiritual progress directed by God. Unfortunately his exposition came to an end with Charlemagne and excluded from the divine plan all of Asia to the east of Persia along with sub-Saharan Africa and the indigenous societies of the Americas. Voltaire's desire to make good on these omissions resulted later in the Enlightenment's most enduring work of world history, the *Essai sur les mœurs et l'esprit des nations* (1756), a work that intended not only to undermine Bossuet's Eurocentrism and his belief that direct interventions by the Christian deity constituted the motive force in human history, but also to refute Montesquieu's depiction of China as a despotism in *De l'esprit des lois* (1748). After opening his first chapter with the declaration that the Tang empire (618-907) was more extensive than Charlemagne's, Voltaire proceeded to celebrate China's antiquity and its economic prosperity and to praise its meritocratic form of government, the Confucian outlook of its rulers, and its achievements in the arts and sciences, though he did qualify that praise with the opinion that the Chinese had less physical capacity than Europeans to attain scientific excellence. Despite ethnocentric slights of this sort, Voltaire's commitment throughout this seminal work to balancing historical developments in Europe with those in other parts of the world – Japan, India, Africa, the Americas and the Islamic world as well as China – qualifies the *Essai* for recognition as the first genuinely global history of the world.

Voltaire's cosmopolitan juxtaposing of diverse histories was offset by two other major tendencies in Enlightenment thought, namely, that of positing essential linkages between certain societies and particular forms of government; and that of identifying distinct stages of historical development. The first trend, which built on the legacies of Aristotle and Machiavelli, received strong important impetus in the eighteenth century from the constitutional thought of Montesquieu, who crafted his own tremendously influential notion of 'despotism' as a form of government that was both inherently illegitimate and endemic to Asia, where it was allegedly fostered by a supposedly uniform topography. Whereas seventeenth-century theorists of despotic rule had conceived of it as a regime natural to the Ottoman empire, Safavid Persia and Moghul India, Montesquieu believed it to be typical of China as well. At the same time, a strong tendency of seeking to identify analytically distinct historical stages by which human societies necessarily developed was effectively disseminated by Turgot and the four-stages theorists of the Scottish Enlightenment, who pictured societies as passing progressively from lower to higher modes of living with hunting and gathering, pastoralism, agriculture, and finally commercial exchange marking the major stages of civilisation.¹⁴ As the eighteenth century drew to a close, European

14 Meek (1976).

judgments about where China stood on the ladder of civilisations fell steadily in accord with these trends. The shift is illustrated by the contrast between Adam Smith's treatment of China in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) as a nation which, though perhaps stationary, nevertheless had an advanced manufacturing industry, and Condorcet's depiction of that country in his *Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humaine* (1795) as an essentially agricultural civilisation stuck at the third of the author's ten stages of historical development.¹⁵

Recent authors who depict the growing Western sense of superiority in this period simply as a consequence of the dissemination of universalistic models of progress unfortunately often overlook the role of the burgeoning Romantic movement in feeding European chauvinism. No doubt one reason why this dimension of the movement has been overlooked is Romanticism's celebration of the historical particularity and cultural diversity of small nations – themes that resonated powerfully among German writers reacting against French political influence and the prominence of French culture in the German states before and even more after the outbreak of the Revolution. No one who has read Herder's chapters related to China in his *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (1784-91) can fail to be struck by the strength of the author's disdain for the Chinese and their culture, a sentiment couched in the idea that the 'genetic character' of the Chinese meant that Chinese society had stood still in its infancy, a condition that had caused it to remain isolated from the world outside and subject to despotism within, since it had been inherently incapable of giving rise to fixed social orders like those found in Europe.¹⁶ Following the defeat of the Revolution, the conservative Romantic Friedrich von Schlegel, sharply dismissed Voltaire's admiration for China as subversive and rather dubiously equated Daoism with the rationalism of the *philosophes*. Analysing Chinese government as a form of political idolatry, he went on to reduce Chinese history to 'one continued series of seditions, usurpations, anarchy, changes of dynasty, and other violent revolutions and catastrophes'. Having thus established the worthlessness of the Chinese history, he argued against any form of universal history that dared place the world's peoples on a footing of 'indiscriminate equality' – obviously another jibe at Voltaire's *Essai*.¹⁷ Spreading through both conservative and liberal circles, the Romantic view of China as a civilisation in decay came to permeate broad segments of educated European society by the 1830s in a process that paralleled the consolidation of British rule in India, the striking expansion of manufacturing industry in northwestern Europe and the decline in China's terms of trade with the West as a result of the fast growing (and of course still illegal) imports of opium from British territories in South Asia.

From the Early Nineteenth Century to the Fall of the Qing

Three of the most important nineteenth-century conduits for further disseminating the view that China epitomised a state of historical stagnation were Hegel, Comte and Ranke, all of whom conceived of China as lying outside of the realm of proper History. Hegel elevated belief in China's historical immutability to the status of metaphysical principle in his lectures on world history. Posthumously published as *The Philosophy of History* (1837), these traced the dialectical

15 Smith (1893), Books 8 & 11, pp. 55-56 & 165; Condorcet (1988).

16 Herder (1966), Bk. 11, especially chapters. 1 & 5.

17 Schlegel (1885), pp. 118, 124 & 134.

unfolding of the global historical process as an evolution that was simultaneously geographical, racial, spiritual and political. As elsewhere in his vast oeuvre, Hegel taught here that the four main stages of world-historical progress were those embodied successively in 'the Oriental world', ancient Greece, the Roman empire and finally 'the Germanic world'. His doctrine, justifiably termed 'monstrous' by Pulleyblank, was that China stood at the beginning of History (better than Africa which was cast completely outside it!) and that China's past, like India's, simply constituted 'unhistorical History', being 'only the repetition of the same majestic ruin'.¹⁸ Despite some evidence that conversations with the French sinologist Abel-Rémusat about Daoism may have led him to reconsider his stated view that Chinese civilisation was bereft of all genuine religion, Hegel's influential published works denied the 'Middle Kingdom had ever given birth to any self-conscious rationality or even to any authentically religious spirituality.

An essentially similar position was advanced within the very different theoretical system of Auguste Comte, whose fixation with discovering the stages through which history had developed was explicitly inspired by Condorcet's vision of history and may have been tacitly influenced by that of Hegel as well. Like both those writers, Comte imagined historical development primarily in terms of the progress of the human spirit. His own fundamental interpretation of that process was stated in his so-called 'law of three stages' which held that not only the human race as a whole, but also each individual person and each field of knowledge, proceeded in its development from fetishism and theologism to metaphysics to science.¹⁹ Throughout most of his career, Comte treated China as an example of a society stuck at the theological stage of development. However, he revisited that judgment just before his death, and during the second Opium War (1856-1858) he declared China the world's most extensive case of fetishism. Curiously, this ostensible demotion on the ladder of civilisation marked an – obviously ambiguous – improvement in his opinion of Chinese civilisation, since it cleared China of the charge of theological obscurantism. Although Comte never made more than the slightest effort at integrating what was then known of Chinese history into his positivist historical system, several of his leading followers did do so with notable sympathy for China civilisation over the following decades.²⁰

Turning to Ranke, whose endorsement of world history was cited at the beginning of this essay, one might wonder what relationship his treatment of China bore to those of the authors just considered. It is well known of course that, although Ranke is often referred to as a positivist, his historiographical particularism and his insistence on primary source analysis distinguished him methodologically and theoretically as much from Comte as from Hegel, whose 'negative' dialectics he found abhorrent. Eloquent testimony of an attitude of parochialism similar

18 Hegel (1956), pp. 105-106; Pulleyblank (1955a), p. 15.

19 This might of course seem to add up to four stages. Comte in his early writings formulated the model as running from theologism to metaphysics to science, and he stood by that the claim that the 'law' of development of historical development had three stages even after he began distinguishing 'primitive' fetishism from theologism, sometimes treating them both as 'fictional' forms of knowledge.

20 In particular Laffitte (1861) and Bridges (1866). On positivist attitudes to China, see Schmutz (1993), ch. 4, and Blue (forthcoming), ch. 9.

to theirs is, however, provided by his principled exclusion of China from his *Weltgeschichte* as well as from the rest of his vast *oeuvre*, on the grounds that it was one of the 'nations of eternal stagnation'.²¹ This exclusion not only carried over into the academic discipline of history whose contours he so extensively shaped, but also gave ideological justification to the nineteenth-century university division of labour that made study of the 'progressive' peoples of the West the domain of 'proper' faculties of History, while reserving anthropology for the 'peoples without history' and 'Oriental studies' for the civilisations of the East which were caught in the trap of 'unhistorical history'.

This being said, it should be stressed that, while the notion that the East lacked historical vitality became a nineteenth-century dogma, university dons were certainly not the only figures to profess it. Marx of course originally borrowed his dialectics from Hegel; and, although he sought to put the study of history on a materialist basis, his mature view that human society had developed progressively through the Asiatic, ancient Graeco-Roman, feudal and modern capitalist modes of productions remained distinctly Hegelian in its formal structure. In journalistic articles published in the *New York Daily Tribune* in the 1850s he discussed current Chinese affairs extensively and expressed hopes that Western imperialists trying to force their way into the Celestial Kingdom might be met with a popular national war of resistance that would benefit socialist forces in the West, but he retained the Romantic portrayal of China as a society 'vegetating in the teeth of time'.²² His more serious historical works at times treated China as an example of an original Asiatic mode of production but at others seemed to acknowledge that Chinese society had developed beyond that stage, so that in the end his writings remained vague and ambiguous about where exactly China stood on the scale of historical evolution. A similar ambiguity is found in the works of Herbert Spencer, the *fons et origo* of nineteenth-century Social Darwinism, whose system of sociology was founded on a bedrock vision of world-historical evolution that displayed distinctly Comtean overtones, particularly in its use of the category of fetishism to characterise the 'primitive' mind. Although he consistently expressed opposition to Western aggression against China, Spencer generally interpreted China as an example of primitive society; and, while like Marx he at times acknowledged that nineteenth-century Chinese society might differ in specific ways from the form of society in effect in Confucius' time, as a rule his treatment of Chinese historical evidence for the imperial era (221B.C.E.-1911 C.E.) remained incidental and sporadic.

A more focused but markedly less sympathetic view was articulated by Arthur de Gobineau, often known as 'the father of modern race theory', whose pessimistic reading of world history as an ultimately degenerative process of racial intermingling identified China as one of the world's ten historical civilisations. In his view civilisation had been introduced there following a white invasion from India, and, having been formed through a process of racial miscegenation, Chinese civilisation epitomised the eventual triumph of what he saw as the inherent mediocrity of the 'yellow race'. Seen as dominated since the Qin dynasty (221-207 B.C.E.) by a conformist bureaucracy, China in Gobineau's reading not only presented a cautionary tale of what democracy held in store for Europe, but also raised the awesome spectre of 'yellow' hordes threatening to swamp the West and to extinguish Aryan civilisation through

21 Ranke (1881), vol. 1, 1, pp. vii-viii.

22 Torr (1951)(ed).

conquest or migration.²³ Though Spencer himself opposed this kind of muscular reading of world history, key aspects of it were adopted in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries not only by prominent political reactionaries like Wilhelm II of Germany, but also by prominent Social-Darwinist 'progressives' like Karl Pearson, for a time the British minister of education in the Australian state of Victoria. Through such channels racial depictions of the Chinese as a world-historical menace provided fuel both for the 'New Imperialism' in Asia, and for the prospects for racially restrictive immigration policies that have continued to haunt international relations for another hundred years or more, as Bertrand Russell insightfully predicted they would.²⁴

A less hostile but hardly less racist depiction of China was advanced at about the same time by the influential German political geographer, Friedrich Ratzel, in his *Völkerkunde*, a work published in English as *The History of Mankind* (1896-97), with an introduction by the dean of British anthropology, E.B. Tylor. Ratzel characterised 'the Chinese' – by which he naturally meant the country's Han majority – as a colonising race of mixed Mongol-Malay extraction that in successive waves of expansion had spread throughout the current boundaries of the empire through a process of 'internal colonisation', had established the original culture of Japan and Korea and had eventually proceeded to send new colonies of settlers into Southeast Asia. Despite his praise for what he recognised as the commercial acumen, general intelligence and good humour of the Chinese, Ratzel judged their civilisation to have been in decline since the thirteenth century. The reason for 'this enigmatic stagnation' was in his view that they 'had never grasped the meaning of science'.²⁵

One conclusion that may be drawn from the above discussion is that by the beginning of the twentieth century 'China' was firmly ensconced in Western discourse on world history. That is to say, by longstanding convention a definite, though distinctly peripheral, place and function were ascribed to China within that discursive framework. From our perspective a century later, and even from Pulleyblank's nearly fifty years ago, the West's great problem with conceiving China in terms of world history had to do not with that country's being totally excluded from the overall story of human development, but rather with the ways and means employed for incorporating it into that story. Evidently, the amount of space allocated to a subject can often be a reasonable indicator of the degree of attention and respect that subject is felt to deserve. The fact that out of the twenty-five volumes of the above cited *Historians' History of the World* (1907) the author Henry Smith Williams and his publishers thought a forty-page chapter in the series' final volume intellectually and commercially sufficient for conveying China's place in world history may well have reflected the general sentiment at the time.²⁶ However, more fundamental problems of method and theory were evident throughout the Western literature in the clumsy, inappropriate conceptual instruments used for fitting 'China' into the mould of then dominant discourses about world history and in the narrowness of evidence with which this

23 Blue (1999).

24 Russell (1922), pp. 181-82.

25 Ratzel (1896-97), vol. 3, pp.438-40 and 460.

26 H.S. Williams (1907), vol. 25, pp. 242-85. Less typical was his reduction of all dynasties prior to the Qing to less than three pages.

'China' was constituted as an object of inquiry, or indeed lack of inquiry, within the framework of comparative historiography as this was construed at the time.

By the fall of the Qing in 1912, Western writers had established a number of standard points of entry at which 'the Celestial Empire', as it was then often ironically referred to, was conventionally expected to appear on the stage of world history. In hindsight one of the most striking things about this set of conventions was that the Chinese historical experience generally continued to be treated as so distinctly marginal and limited at a time when the sinological literature was undergoing rapid expansion.²⁷ The Chinese topics deemed suitable for inclusion in a study of world history rarely strayed far from the following standard fare: the beginnings of Chinese culture and its relation to other civilisations; the emergence of Confucianism and Daoism during the Warring States period; the unification of the empire by Qin Shi Huangdi in 221 B.C.E.; the subordination of the Xiongnu [Hsiung-nu] by the Han dynasty (202 B.C.E.-8 C.E.), a process usually presented as the cause of the trans-Eurasian *Völkerverwanderungen* that in due course led to the downfall of the Western Roman empire; the Silk Road and the introduction of Buddhism; the glories of the Tang and the attendant growth of Chinese influence further afield in Asia; the consolidation of trans-Eurasian trade under the Mongols as reflected in the travels of Marco Polo; the drama of the first Jesuit mission and the challenge it posed to China's perceived isolation; the impact of porcelain and other early modern export items on Western tastes and markets; the Qianlong emperor's refusal of Lord Macartney's request to allow Western traders further access to the Chinese market; the Opium Wars (1839-42 and 1856-60) and the subsequent 'opening' of China; the growing impoverishment of the Chinese masses as the Industrial Revolution forged ahead in the West; and, finally, China's bright prospects once it adopted Western ways.

Thematically, a number of key notions that purported to describe and explain the nature of Chinese society and the trajectory of Chinese history was likewise well established and widely shared within the Western historiography for situating China within the narrative of world history. Many of these notions can be counterposed as conventional binary oppositions: Chinese historical stagnation as opposed to the historical vitality of the West; the despotism of China (and of Asia generally) as opposed to constitutional government in the West; China's isolation as opposed to the openness of the West; the dogged pragmatism of the Chinese as opposed to the deep insight and intellectual curiosity of Westerners. Though one or another of these features of conventional Chinese features might be emphasised in the work of a particular Western author, down until the 1911 Revolution the predominant theme binding Western discourses of China together was that of a determinate historical immutability – or, more precisely, the notion that since at least the Yuan dynasty (1271-1368 C.E.), and possibly since the Qin (221-208 B.C.E.), China had remained in a state of historical stagnation until, for better or worse, it had been awakened from its historical slumber by the Western great powers.

China and World History From the Fall of the Qing to the End of the Second World War

Whether the growth of the republican movement in China can be credited with effecting a major transformation in Western opinion or whether broader forces were at work tending in the same direction during the first decades of the twentieth century is difficult to say, but it is clear that the

27 Works covering this phase of the history of Chinese studies may be found cited in H. Franke (1953), pp. 18-23 *et passim*.

First World War and the interwar years witnessed a significant shift in Western attitudes to Chinese history as well as to contemporary Chinese society. In the West, a path-breaking comparative work that not only showed a new level of engagement with the available sinological documentation, but also moved decisively beyond simple declarations of China's presumed stagnation to analysing its specific historical trajectory was Max Weber's book-length study of Confucianism and Daoism. First issued as a monograph in 1915 and then posthumously re-published in 1920 in the author's *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie*, this work was far more than a simple exercise in comparative religion or sociology. After all, Weber's chair at Heidelberg was in economic history, and his approach to the study of society was thoroughly and self-consciously historical. The overarching aim of his *Religionssoziologie* was to analyse the various forms of economic ethics comparatively in order to understand what was unique in modern capitalism as a social formation structured on instrumental rationality. Though premised on a firm conviction of the superiority of the West, this work rejected the stereotype of Chinese immutability and accepted that under the Ming and Qing dynasties (1368-1911) China had undergone significant economic changes. This approach was facilitated by his definition of the central problem of the 'universal history of culture' as that of determining not so much the origins of capitalism in general, which he recognised as having been historically present in China and India as well as in Europe, but rather the emergence of what he took to be the specifically Western form of 'sober bourgeois capitalism' featuring a rational organisation of free labour and a grounding in modern science. Posed in this way, Weber's central problem generated the derivative questions of why capitalist forces in China and India had never overcome the dominant 'patrimonial' system and of 'why neither the scientific, nor the artistic, nor the political, nor the economic development there entered upon that path of rationalization that is peculiar to the Occident.' Weber's comparative approach to history made Chinese political economy and Chinese religion legitimate comparative research subjects, rather than objects of peripheral, exotic interest that could be quickly dismissed. At the same time he continued to emphasise what he took to be China's relative lack of rationality, and one of his main conclusion was that China's religions were either too immersed in the world (Confucianism and Daoism) or too other-worldly (Buddhism) to generate the tension between the self and the world that he saw as necessary for the emergence of an instrumentalist world-view. While this assessment and his analysis of the Chinese bureaucracy are both widely contested now, there is no doubt that he gave explicit formulation to key problems that over the last century have occupied not only comparative historians and social scientists, but also many historians of China.²⁸

After the First World War, and partly under the influence of Weber's work, the task of explaining the differential development of Europe and China was addressed with renewed energy from several quarters. Oswald Spengler's much discussed *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (1918-1922), a work pervaded by an historical pessimism reminiscent of Gobineau, depicted civilisations as distinct biological entities, each monadically following its own life-cycle through the inevitable phases from growth, maturity and senility to eventual decay. Though Spengler recognised China as one of the eight great world-historical civilisations and dealt carefully with the Shang and Zhou dynasties, he judged Chinese civilisation to have been dead for the last two thousand years. While Arnold Toynbee's *Study of History* (1934-61) presented a similar organicist mechanism as responsible for the rise and fall of civilisations, its author aimed at

28 See Collins (1986) for a recent critique of Weber's analyses of China.

challenging the then pervasive Eurocentrism of its readers. Perhaps as a result he gave the geographical unit 'China' credit for rather more historical dynamism than Spengler. Of the twenty-one separate civilisations the *Study of History* identified in world history, Toynbee situated two on Chinese soil, namely, an ancient indigenous 'Sinic' civilisation and its imperial-era successor, a 'Far Eastern' civilisation based on the universal religion of Buddhism and with separate branches in China and Japan. Yet, if in principle he denied Spengler's contention that each civilisation must inevitably die, in practice Toynbee voiced this reservation during the interwar period only in relation to the modern West, the rise of which he depicted as coinciding with the final decay of 'Far Eastern' civilisation.

In sharp contrast to the cyclical historiography of Spengler and Toynbee, a progressive evolutionary humanism lay at the heart of the interwar period's most influential English-language contribution to world history, H.G. Wells's *Outline of History* (1920). This was a project intended to provide an intellectual foundation for securing peace among the world's peoples by highlighting the long-term record of peaceful cooperation that Wells felt had been obscured by nationalist historiographies that glorified military confrontation. Working with the help of a team of expert collaborators from Britain and the United States, and despite some caustic criticism of his vision as a world 'religion' from within an isolationist-minded American Historical Association,²⁹ Wells succeeded in exerting a broad influence across the two-cultures divide. His work subsequently played an important part in shaping the outlook of a younger generation of internationalist historians and historians of science, including Julian Huxley, Jawaharlal Nehru, J. Desmond Bernal and Joseph Needham. While clearly following in the footsteps of Comte, Spencer and Ratzel (the *Outline* began with an inspirational quotation from the latter), Wells gave far more credit than they to ancient and 'medieval' China, which he depicted in Voltairean style as having attained a level of development higher than that of the medieval West. Like many other Western writers before and since, he treated the dynasties from the Han to the Tang as the 'Great Age' of Chinese civilisation. Comparing social conditions in ancient China favourably to those under the Roman empire, he observed that the 'Celestial Kingdom' had remained free of the debilitating levels of debt found in Rome and had featured 'no slavery' and no great estates.³⁰ Yet of his study's fifteen hundred pages only about twenty were devoted to China, and a considerable part of his discussion of that country was devoted to elucidating what he termed its 'intellectual fetters'. In commenting on differences among his collaborators over this issue, Wells coined the phrase 'the Chinese problem' to refer to their search for 'the reason for the stationariness' of Chinese civilisation. He himself held that, together with the written language and the imperial examination system, 'the very success and early prosperity and general contentment of China' were responsible for China's having fallen behind the West in the modern era despite its earlier technical and scientific lead. His collaborators favoured other solutions to the 'problem'. The political scientist Ernest Barker and the ancient Greek historian J.L. Myres identified the entrenched 'socio-economic system' based on peasant agriculture as the key obstacle to further progress. The sinologist Lancelot Cranmer Byng by contrast described China as an essentially commercial rather than peasant society, for example,

29 Knowlton (1921) cited in Allardyce (1989), p. 49. Note that a textbook for international use was a significant part of Wells' original plan for this project.

30 Wells (1920), II, pp. 398-99.

stressing the importance of Tang trade with India; Cranmer Byng argued that China's period of achievement had continued until the Ming and had only then been extinguished due to the decay of Daoism and the consequent effacement of the interplay between Confucian and Daoist thought that he thought had given Chinese civilisation its dynamism in previous periods.³¹

Though often ignored in Western works on historiography, the Soviet historical debates of the 1920s and the orthodox form of Soviet Marxism that was officially constructed in the 1930s exerted a strong influence on historical thinking elsewhere in the world, including of course in China itself. Within Soviet historical circles Chinese history was a considerable bone of contention until 1935, partly as a result of the clash of opinions about the aims and methods of the Chinese Communist movement in the 1920s and partly as a result of the conceptual problems involved in trying to square Marx's diverse pronouncements about China (and Asia more generally) with Stalin's formulaic version of historical materialism. Both of these factors led to Marx's notion of an Asiatic mode of production becoming the object of heated debate from 1925 until 1931, when the 'Asiatic mode' as a historical and sociological concept was officially condemned on the grounds that it failed both to give a coherent analysis of Chinese history and to identify the proper target of the revolution. Prominent among the defenders of the notion of an Asiatic mode of production in the years of debate were the Hungarian Komintern intellectual L.I. Mad'iar, who saw the Asiatic mode as defining the nature of early Chinese society, and Karl Wittfogel of the Institut für Sozialforschung in Frankfurt, who treated the Asiatic mode as dominant throughout the imperial era (221 B.C.E.-1911 C.E.). In contrast, Karl Radek, then rector of Sun Yatsen University in Moscow and a well-known member of the Soviet Left Opposition, realised that China had already featured a commodity economy for centuries before the fall of the Qing, and accordingly argued that the target of the revolution ought to be the Chinese bourgeoisie.

All three of these positions were displaced in 1930-31 by advocates of a new historiographical orthodoxy that insisted on identifying the five major modes of production strictly on the basis of distinguishing a specific mechanism of surplus extraction for each (i.e. slavery, land rent, and the wage contract respectively for the three modes seen as based on the exploitation of labour). Proponents of this new view maintained that China had originally moved from primitive society to feudalism during the Shang or Zhou and had retained a feudal structure until the twentieth century, a position that conveniently coincided with the Stalin's view that the landlords and not the 'bourgeoisie' should be the revolution's prime target. Yet, although this position became dominant in Soviet circles in the early 1930s, it sat badly with the Stalinist project of formalising Marxism as a philosophy of history equipped with universally applicable stages. As a result, the mid-1930s saw the systematic propagation of a categorical distinction – derived from Graeco-Roman historiography, but recently extended in Soviet analyses to Egypt and Mesopotamia – between an ancient slave-owning mode of production and a medieval feudal mode. In accord with this, the social structure of ancient China from Zhou to Han was depicted as dominated by slave-owners, while the structure of the imperial era after the Han was designated as feudal on the understanding that landowners were the dominant socio-economic class.³²

31 Wells (1920), II, pp. 400-403. Wells used Ratzel's *The History of Mankind* as a source, but whether that work influenced the Well's focus on 'the China problem' is unclear.

32 Nikiforov (1970), chapters 3-6, and Brook & Blue (eds)(1999), pp. 99-109; Fogel (1988)

Although this solution to the problem of periodisation remained dominant in Soviet historiography down into the 1980s, it left several large difficulties in place. For instance, while extending the definition of feudalism to include any social formation in which rent was the predominant mechanism of surplus extraction might well have justified classifying the imperial era as feudal, the evidence for the extensive use of slaves outside the domestic sphere was shaky at best, a fact that induced most West European and American historians of China to accept Edward Meyer's judgment that chattel slavery had never been as important for production in Asia as it had been in ancient Greece and Rome. Moreover, no clear method existed for showing that rent extraction was more important as a method of surplus extraction after the Han than it had been before. China's high proportion of independent peasants in both eras moreover made that country's social structure appear anomalous in terms of the expected status of labour under both the slavery mode and the feudal mode as defined by the five-stages model. In addition, the new distinction now raised the Weberian question in a more knotted form, for if imperial China was feudal in the same fundamental way as Europe, why did it not give rise to capitalism in the same way as well. To cope with such difficulties, Soviet scholars in the decades after 1935 quietly reverted more and more to citing features like irrigation, centralisation, and the bureaucracy, which Marx had posited as typical of the Asiatic mode, to explain China's relative historical backwardness in the late imperial period.³³ Despite their major differences with Spengler, Wells and Toynbee, the Marxist historians considered above shared with those writers a commitment to deriving from one or another universal theory of historical development the criteria by which diverse civilisations could be rationally integrated into world history.

The interwar period also produced a variety of more factually oriented, idiographic contributions to world history that were important in some cases because of their scholarly significance, in others because of their influence on the public mind. Two monuments of this type of scholarship that had notable impact on both fronts were *The Story of Civilisation* (1935-1967) by the American generalist Will Durant (who continued the project after the war in partnership with his wife Ariel) and the *Histoire générale* (1925-1941), a grand collaborative enterprise under the direction of Gustave Glotz that drew together the cream of French historical scholarship. Both projects began with the neolithic and extended coverage of global developments to the early modern period, with Glotz's continuing down to the fifteenth century and the Durants' to the Industrial Revolution. Both series included serious and substantial treatments of China, India and Japan, although in each series the mode of integrating these histories into the broader projects remained largely a matter of unimaginative juxtapositioning. Like Durant's treatments of other Asian societies, his exposition of Chinese civilisation from its origins down to the establishment of the Japanese puppet-state Manchuko and Chiang Kai-shek's New Life Movement, was consigned to his series' initial volume, titled *Our Oriental Heritage*. Its tone toward China was nevertheless engaging and sympathetic, and its content academically solid, based on a respectable array of Western-language sources from Voltaire to Marcel Granet and Arthur Waley. The *Histoire générale* on the other hand reserved its treatment of 'further Asia' (east of Iran) to the last two of its twenty-four volumes. The first of these, devoted to 'les

and Brook & Blue, chapter 3, related the Soviet debate to contemporary trends among Chinese and Japanese historians.

33 S.L. Dunn (1982).

empires' was the responsibility of a team of scholars headed by the eminent René Grousset, while the second was assigned to the similarly distinguished Henri Maspero and Paul Mus. Like the rest of the Glotz volumes, these two were to incorporate original research based on primary sources. In addition to its primary documentation, Grousset's classic contribution on China and Central Asia, drew on the innovative work of the Soviet Inner Asianists, B.Ya. Vladimirtsov and V.V. Bartold, as well as on that of the incomparable Paul Pelliot; and it introduced into the series as a whole an emphasis on the importance of medieval cross-cultural contacts on a Eurasian scale.³⁴ Unfortunately, the second volume was never completed due to the outbreak of war in Europe and then by Maspero's death at Buchenwald in 1945.³⁵

The Prospect of Ecumenical History: the UNESCO *History of Mankind* and the *Pléiade Histoire universelle*

The Second World War was of course a clash between visions of the world as well as a military conflict. In addition to the rejection of Nazi militarism and racism, its most important intellectual outcomes included criticism of racial interpretations of world history, the discrediting of claims to innate superiority, and a conviction of the value of promoting peaceful international cooperation through the institutions of the United Nations, though the latter already began to be eroded by 1946.³⁶ Western beliefs in the Great Powers' natural right to rule others came under increasing challenge as anti-colonial leaders urged that the wartime ideals of the freedom and self-determination of nations be taken seriously in Asia and Africa as well as in Europe. While the first wave of decolonisation heralded the dawning of a new world order in the late 1940s, calls for increased dialogue and respect among the peoples of the world emerged from various circles around the globe. Newly elected to the Académie française after the war, Grousset for one

34 Grousset, Auboyer & Buhot (1941), pp. 139-345. Note the endorsement of Vladimirtsov's notion of nomadic feudalism, p. 306.

35 The drafts seem however to have been revised and seen through to publication as Maspero & Escarra (1952) and Maspero & Balazs (1967)

36 Huxley & Haddon (1935), Huxley (1939) and Dunn & Dobzhansky (1946) were among the more prominent scientific critiques of racism. Critiques of racist interpretations included, e.g., Ernest Barker (1945) and Claude Lévi-Strauss (1952).

applauded the return of China to the international recognition that it had enjoyed until the nineteenth century.³⁷ At the same time, of course, the attitudes of the two postwar superpowers were quickly settling into a pattern of long-term confrontation and hostility that would last throughout the first phase of the Cold War, which took a considerable turn for the worse with the formation of the People's Republic of China in 1949, following Communist victory in the Chinese civil war (1946-1949). Within this complex political and ideological context there emerged several significant works that were devoted to world history or had a direct bearing on it.

The most institutionally prestigious of these was UNESCO's *History of Mankind. Cultural and Scientific* [hereafter *HMCS*]. This multi-volume project, which in due course became one of the main enterprises defining UNESCO's early identity, was first officially proposed in 1946 by the British biologist Julian Huxley, a former H.G. Wells collaborator, then Executive Secretary of the Preparatory Commission for the new special agency charged by the United Nations Organisation with promoting international understanding and cooperation in the spheres of education, science and culture.³⁸ As UNESCO's Director-General from 1946 to 1948, Huxley threw his weight behind this interdisciplinary history project, the original conception of which was worked out in consultations involving himself, the historian Lucien Febvre and the anthropologist Paul Rivet, both French, and the British biochemist and sinologist, Joseph Needham. The common perception that the *HMCS* lacked focus make it worth noting that their plan as spearheaded by Febvre called for a distinctly analytical format and for theoretical coherence based on a vision of the historical construction of a common humanity that emphasised the importance of peaceful exchanges between peoples.³⁹ However, with the Soviet Union remaining outside of UNESCO in the grip of Stalin's campaign against the 'cosmopolitanism', members of the original *HMCS* team were shunted aside under U.S. political pressure in the Cold War crisis years of 1949-1950, and their original vision of the series was replaced with a narrative approach that highlighted the distinctness of societies and civilisations while eschewing overt comparative judgments between them. The overall preparation of the series was at that point entrusted to an international commission which presided over by the Brazilian positivist Paolo de Berrêdo Carneiro and was made up of scholars selected from the then U.N. member states. A team consisting of one primary author-editor and up to three associate authors plus research assistants was commissioned to organise and write each of the six planned volumes.⁴⁰ The defeated American candidate for the commission presidency, Yale

37 Grousset (1946), pp. 259 & 267.

38 One of the most prominent science writers of his generation, Huxley was the grandson of T.H. Huxley and the brother of the novelist Aldous Huxley. He had collaborated with Wells in 1927-1931 on the latter's *The Science of Life* (1931).

39 On the collaborative origins of the *HMCS* and the political visions of those involved, see Petitjean (1999), pp. 172-82.

40 [UNESCO] International Commission of the Scientific and Cultural Development of Mankind (1963-1976). Except for K.M. Pannikar, all of the series' main authors and associate authors were West European or North American; this composition of the team was determined in part by the fact that these responsibilities were assigned in 1951 before

historian Ralph Turner, was appointed general editor of the series and changed with ensuring editorial consistency, while Febvre, the co-founder of *Annales*, was made editor of the new *Journal of World History / Cahiers d'Histoire Mondial*, which was given the task of commissioning materials that could be of use in the preparation of the *HMCS*.⁴¹ Based on an underlying humanistic pluralism that pictured humanity as moving gradually but with increasing speed towards peaceful cooperation based on convergence of outlook and personal autonomy, the *HMCS* despite its limitations remains a valuable scholarly reference work, but also a revealing illustration of the considerable engineering difficulties involved in devising a genuinely global world history.

Analysis of the *HMCS* throws light on one of the most persistent structural problems in composing a comprehensive survey of world history, namely, the need to balance coverage of developments in various regions and/or countries with cross-cultural thematic coverage of subjects from demography and political institutions to religion, science, literature and the arts. As long as one tells a primarily Western story, linkages between these two types of coverage tend to be fairly straightforward because of the density of historic connections between Western societies. However, as soon as one seeks to include other societies and/or culture-areas, and particularly as one seeks to recount their experiences in their own terms, the difficulties of integration increase greatly. Adopting a primarily regional format creates the danger that one will construct a series of discrete studies with minimal relation to one another, while adopting a thematic form of organisation increases the risk that one will give priority to what one knows best and organise materials from other cultures around that central core.

Trying to navigate between Scylla and Charybdis, the authors of the successive *HMCS* volumes resorted to various methods of combining the two approaches, but the way their works

the Soviet block states had joined UNESCO and when independence was still to be achieved in colonial Africa and parts of Asia. See Carneiro's remarks on the project's history and structure in his preface to *HMSC*, vol. I, pp. xvii-xxiii. The Chinese representatives on the international commission, Tung Tso-ping and Chang Chi-yun, were named by the Nationalist government based in Taiwan, as the People's Republic of China was not recognised by the UNO until 1972.

A standing invitation to members of UNESCO's various national commissions to submit comments and criticisms on drafts for the various volumes meant that the author-editors were frequently faced with the problem of being asked to reconcile the unreconcilable. One interesting way of maintaining coherence in the various volumes was the adoption of a series format that allowed for the inclusion of dissenting opinions in annotations added at the end of each chapter. The three main critiques of the *HMSC* were Soviet Marxist, liberal individualist and Roman Catholic. Carneiro (1969) notes that religious antagonistic to the project's humanism and non-denominational character threatened to swamp it in the mid-1950s until the papal nuncio in Paris, Mgr. Angelo Roncalli, later John XXIII, threw his support behind it (pp. 339-40).

41 A leading member of the American national commission for UNESCO, Turner had been the leading advocate in the wartime State Department of developing a vigorous international cultural program as an instrument of U.S. foreign policy; see Ninkovich (1981).

dealt with China and the Third World brings into relief the tendency of a predominantly thematic approach to slant the results of a purportedly global history when the themes themselves are primarily derived from analysis of one particular civilisation or social formation. By far the most disappointing outcomes from this point of view appear in the sixth and seventh volumes, which deal with the nineteenth and twentieth centuries respectively. In each of these the structure of the discussion is heavily thematic, and treatment retains an overwhelmingly Western focus. Though the authors would no doubt have justified their concentration on the Europe and North America on the basis of Western economic predominance or scientific-technical achievement during the last two centuries. The criterion of economic predominance is however open to the objection that the colonial and semi-colonial countries too played essential roles in the world economy and that the social-political subordination does not justify consigning them to a historiographically subordinate role. The criterion of Western scientific-technical leadership, on the other hand, risks ignoring the social context of science as well as the significance of patterns in the distribution of knowledge and technical skills. In any case, to consign the experience of the twenty percent of world's population that was Chinese to perhaps five percent of these two volumes' twenty-six hundred pages while reserving over two-thirds of the total to the Western world ran the risk of appearing to contribute to a process of historical marginalisation, particularly since treatment of the non-Western world was almost entirely separated off into a series of geographically defined chapters in the last quarter of the volume.⁴²

A happier outcome both in terms of the regional coverage and in terms of the integration of Chinese evidence with that related to other parts of the world is to be found in the earlier *HMCS* volumes which integrate regional sub-chapters into broader thematic ones, or vice versa. Not only do these volumes achieve a finer balance between cultural regions, but they may also be said to succeed in incorporating a better array of evidence from China in areas including economics and politics, philosophy and religion, literature and art, and science and technology. The sociological expectation that, other things being equal, the special expertise of a given team of authors will be reflected in the character of their work is borne out by the fact that the best treatments of China in the *HMSC* series are found in the two volumes that included sinologists among their associate authors, namely, Vadime Ellisseeff for the third (500 A.D.-1300) and E.H. Pritchard for the fourth (1300-1770). Perhaps not surprisingly, this fourth early modern volume on which University of Chicago historian Louis Gottschalk was the primary author came under intense criticism from various quarters, allegedly for adopting an indiscriminately egalitarian approach to historical diversity and obscuring the centrality of the West from 1450 to 1770.⁴³ Gottschalk would no doubt have been interested to see that recent contributions to comparative economic history have seriously questioned whether the West indeed played the central role in the world economy before 1770.

A useful counterpoint to the *HMSC* as well as to later broad surveys of world history is the three-volume *Histoire universelle* published in France between 1956 and 1958 in the

42 UNESCO (1963-76), vol. 5, pp. 1237-87.

43 For critiques and correspondence from within the international commission, see Metraux (1969), pp. xviii-xix. A broader range of contemporary criticisms are sympathetically presented in Allardyce (1989), pp. 36-37, which favoured the tailoring of different world histories for different national audiences.

prestigious *Encyclopédie de la Pléiade* series. Organised under the direction of René Grousset but completed after his death, this project brought together a team of scholars with regional specialisations and with ideologically diverse outlooks. (A Christian progressive himself, Grousset recruited Paul Lévy, who was a left socialist and biographer of Trotsky, to write the section on China since the Ming.) The series as a whole refrained from subscribing to any grand theory of historical development other than reaffirming an optimistic outlook on the future of humanity following the defeat of fascism and the horrors of war. Employing a tripartite chronological format – the second volume began with the emergence of Islam and the third with the Reformation – the *Histoire* provided a treatment of distinct civilisations within each major period, but interlarded these from time to time with chapters, such as that on the Silk Road, that highlighted cross-cultural contacts. Overall, the discursive orientation of the series as a whole was thematic, with primary emphasis on political history, but with substantial discussion of religion, cultural exchanges and international trade. It might be remarked that, while Grousset was himself an Asianist and responsible for the section on early China, the *Histoire* devoted less than seven percent of its total pages to China, but in a series of some 5500 pages that was enough for the respective specialist authors to present a detailed and nuanced discussion of the material at hand.

Drawing on a tradition that went back to the nineteenth century, which Durant too had evoked, Lévy treated socialism as embodied in large-scale public works and diverse public welfare measures as a positive and perennial feature of Chinese civilisation. While depicting China as having experienced an economic decline and falling standard of living, he attributed this to a rise in militarism and corruption rather than to the system as a whole and he dated the decline from the late-Qianlong period (1736-1796) only.⁴⁴ Invoking Teilhard de Chardin, he expressed his confidence in the future of China no matter which political colouration it adopted, a view reiterated by Émile Léonard, Grousset's co-editor who carried the *Histoire* to completion.⁴⁵ Their magnanimity was shared by some, but certainly not by all, and it is no wonder that differences in attitude in this regard were powerfully over-determined by competing interpretations of the meaning of Chinese civilisation for world history, past, present and future.

The Capitalism / Bureaucracy Antithesis in Chinese Studies During the Early Cold War

The decades since 1945 have seen the publication of a wealth of innovative works written by historians of China whose views not only incorporated problems and categories rooted in Western traditions of world and comparative history, but also exerted a substantial influence on those fields in turn. Since it is not possible to review the many developments witnessed during that period in the increasingly diversified and complex field of Chinese history, we can focus on several major contributions that manifested contrasting engagements with the themes of capitalism and bureaucracy. Let us therefore consider for present purposes how these contributions employed those themes in diverse ways for the purpose of integrating Chinese history and world history. The contrasting appropriations of these themes during the early Cold War may be taken to illustrate the hermeneutical insight that there is a close connection between

44 Grousset and Léonard (eds), vol. 3, p. 1365.

45 Grousset and Léonard (eds), vol. 3, pp. xix & 1451.

one's outlook on the present and future and one's reading of the past, and vice versa. As an old Chinese adage puts it, history is a mirror that the present holds up to itself.

One of the more original sinological projects to gain notice in the 1950s was Joseph Needham's *Science and Civilisation in China* [hereafter *SCC*] series, the first three volumes of which appeared between 1954 and 1959. Produced by a multicultural team similar in conception to those Needham had assembled at Chongqing during the war and at UNESCO thereafter, *SCC* drew on extensive Chinese primary documentation as well as on secondary sources previously neglected by Western historians of science. The basic thrust of this work was to challenge the long-standing view that the history of scientific discovery had been virtually entirely a Western affair, running from Hippocrates, Aristotle and Euclid to Darwin, Pasteur and Einstein. Like Huxley, Needham was strongly influenced both by the visions of convergent evolution developed by Wells and Teilhard de Chardin. Believing modern science to be both the outcome of achievements by all peoples as well as the most secure foundation for common agreement across cultural boundaries, he took as a central problem of his research the question of why China had not given rise on its own to modern science, despite what he demonstrated to be its many early technical and scientific achievements. His answer, derived largely from Marx and the early Wittfogel, was that China's hydraulic conditions and socio-economic relations as institutionalised in its distinctive system of 'bureaucratic feudalism' (or 'feudal bureaucratism') were unsuitable to the emergence of modern science, which seemed inextricably linked to the development of capitalism.⁴⁶ While Needham's commitment to reading Chinese ideas and practices through a positivistic lense has been criticised for distorting certain aspects of the Chinese record, his comparative approach succeeded in bringing to light a massive amount of impressive evidence and was effective in bringing the importance of Chinese achievements in science and technology to the attention of economic and cultural historians as well as to historians of science.⁴⁷ At the same time, his extensive research into cross-cultural exchanges gave impetus to the emergence of a global approach to the history of science.

Whereas Needham as a left-Christian and international socialist looked sympathetically on the new regime in Beijing and called for the West to engage it in dialogue, Wittfogel by the mid-1950s had become a vociferous critic of Communism in all its forms as well as of those he associated with its ideals.⁴⁸ Having established himself in the United States from the late 1930s, first at Columbia University and then at the University of Washington, in 1957 he published his widely influential *Oriental Despotism*, billing it as a work that simultaneously provided the key to the historical problem of the East's stagnation and the fundamental theoretical rationale for

46 This position was put forward both in cf. also *SCC* – cf. especially vol. 3, pp. 150-168 – and in a series of widely published essays, many of which are included in Needham (1969).

47 T.S. Kuhn (1971).

48 This stance led him to give testimony to House Un-American Affairs Committee against the distinguished historian of China and Inner Asia, Owen Lattimore, FDR's wartime advisor to Chiang Kai-shek, as well as against the young classicist M.I. Finley, then an associate of Frans Boas with a record of anti-racist activism, and later significant voice criticising the Soviet five-stages model of historical development.

fighting the menace of Communism. The book's final defiant words, 'not with the spear only, but with the battleaxe' – the Spartan view on how Greeks should fight Persian imperialism – represented a highbrow version of the slogan 'better dead than red'.⁴⁹ Situating the roots of totalitarianism in ancient and medieval Asia, Wittfogel read Marx's notion of an Asiatic mode of production using a neo-Montesquieuian definition of despotism as a regime based on fear and brutality. Like Marx, but unlike Montesquieu, he argued that hydraulic engineering works provided the technical foundation of bureaucracy, and ostensibly for that reason he identified China as the primary model of Oriental despotism, a phenomenon he depicted as characterised by a necessarily autocratic emperor, a centralised state and – most importantly – a fundamental lack of the genuine forms of private property necessary for securing liberty and capitalist development. Inflecting the older notion of Oriental despotism in this way, Wittfogel deployed his model of an exploitative but historically fettered state, which he referred to as 'the hydraulic sponge',⁵⁰ to explain the fate of a wide range of social formations including ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, Hellenistic Greece and imperial Rome, the Abbassid caliphate, the Moghul empire, Incan Peru, and the Marxist-Leninist regimes. Despite strong critiques by Pulleyblank and other historians of China, the model proved to be of enduring influence in comparative historiography, including the recent widely promoted work of David Landes.⁵¹ Yet, despite its analytical sweep and evident learning, Wittfogel's model made it difficult to understand why government involvement in Chinese social life seemed to have been distinctly limited during the imperial era (221 B.C.E. - 1911 CE.) or how Chinese society could have ever flourished at all. Wittfogel's reading of China as a hydraulic despotism, which was aimed *inter alia* at undermining John Fairbank's Grand Alliance distinction between 'fascist-conservative and communist-progressive forms of totalitarianism', was soon adopted widely in Western comparative social science literature.⁵²

In contrast both to Wittfogel's new analysis of Chinese history as well as to the various Marxist readings of imperialism, Fairbank and his multicultural team at Harvard interpreted the nineteenth-century encounter between China and the West by employing a stimulus-response model of international relations. As the institutional pointman in the dramatic expansion of Chinese studies as a form of area-studies scholarship in the post-war U.S., Fairbank (who during the war had served with the U.S. embassy in Chongqing) elaborated a notion of a 'traditional Chinese world order' defined primarily in cultural terms.⁵³ This notion, which served from the late 1940s to at least the 1970s as the American standard model for interpreting modern interactions between China and the West, was grounded in a perception of Confucian society as agrarian and bureaucratic, and it treated the bureaucracy's 'tributary' outlook on international

49 Wittfogel (1957), p. 449.

50 Wittfogel (1957), pp. 256-57.

51 Pulleyblank (1958); Landes (1998), pp. 17-28.

52 Wittfogel (1957), p. 449.

53 On the collaboration between government and academic institutions in the construction of the interdisciplinary area-studies approach, see Cumings (1998).

relations as the product of the Chinese state's traditions of dealing with inner Asian 'barbarians'.⁵⁴ Dismissing the notion that Western imperialism might have done China any real harm – for example, by weakening Chinese economic performance and political stability during the nineteenth-century – Fairbank depicted the encounter as primarily a cultural clash between the dynamic and essentially forward-looking demands of the modern, industrial West and a conservative, traditional Chinese views of the world that was bound to be displaced as China became incorporated into the modern world.⁵⁵ Though Fairbank expressed distrust of Western social scientific theories, which he rightly saw as parochial, his group's overall outlook and his central distinction between tradition and modernity was nevertheless in tune with contemporary American formulations of modernisation theory derived from the ideas of Talcott Parsons and particularly his interpretations of Durkheim and Max Weber.⁵⁶ As in the work of those thinkers, the Harvard school's emphasis on explaining differences between China and the West in culturalist terms proved fully compatible with its members' completed important studies of Chinese economic history that, together with similar works undertaken by scholars in Europe, served to refute analyses that presented late imperial China as having a 'natural' economy.⁵⁷

In Western Europe probably the most important figure engaged in similar work at this time was Étienne Balazs, a member of the *Annales* circle and Fernand Braudel's colleague in the sixth section of the École Pratique des Hautes Études. Hungarian by origin, Balazs had done pioneering doctoral work in Weimar Berlin analysing the Tang (618-907) economy with concepts drawn from Marx and Weber before moving to France to work with Maspero.⁵⁸ After surfacing from the *maquis* at the end of the Second World War, he quickly re-emerged as one of the pillars of Chinese studies in Europe and began undertaking important new studies on China's social, economic and legal structure in early medieval times.⁵⁹ Before long he was the driving

54 Fairbank (1948); Fairbank (1953); Teng & Fairbank (1954).

55 On the promotion of 'cultural' explanations of development and underdevelopment in government- and foundation-backed studies during the early Cold War, see Gendzier (1998).

56 See Fairbank (1953), p. 20, & (1957), p. 1, for brief but pointed criticism of Western political scientists and economists whom Fairbank charged with having failed to study the politics of the majority of mankind and in particular with having neglected analysis of the Confucian state, leaving its remarkable longevity unexplained in professional terms, 'apparently without loss of self-respect'. For reliance on the ideas of Parsons and Weber, cf. e.g. Yang Lien-sheng's remarks on Chinese ethical particularism and Confucian notion of *bao* [reciprocity] in Fairbank (ed)(1957), 301-303.

57 For At Harvard, cf. Yang (1952) and King (1965); for Europe, i.a., H. Franke (1949) and E.G. Pulleyblank (1955b); D. Twitchett (1959).

58 Balazs (1931).

59 Including Balazs (1953) and (1957). On his importance for Chinese studies in Europe, see the introductory remarks by Twitchett and Demiéville to Balazs (1965) and (1967) respectively.

force behind a new, large-scale collaborative project on the Song period (960-1279) that would reach completion after his death. Like most of his Anglo-Saxon colleagues, Balazs treated the Chinese socio-political order prior to the Qin unification as feudal; and, like the authors treated in the three previous paragraphs, he accepted that imperial China was a bureaucratic society. However, in key essays published 1957-1960, he rejected the standard antithesis of capitalism and bureaucracy, and, drawing instead on the notion of 'state capitalism', he sketched a relationship of long-term symbiosis between the imperial civil service and the Chinese merchant class. In this way he conceptually cleared the way for taking account of extensive documentary evidence of the impressive development of commercial capitalism during the imperial era, while simultaneously maintaining that the unremitting predominance of the 'bougeoisified' bureaucracy in that relationship had forestalled the emergence of industrial capitalism.⁶⁰ This position, which avoided some of the historiographical conundrums of contemporary debates in the P.R.C. and elsewhere about whether late imperial China had generated 'sprouts of capitalism', also led Balazs to argue, like a number of Japanese colleagues, that the growth of bureaucratically-fostered commerce and increasing social differentiation justified considering China to have been a 'modern' society since the Song dynasty, without ever having traversed a period of free enterprise.⁶¹ While this assessment set Balazs's reading of Chinese history off quite distinctly from those of Needham, Wittfogel and Fairbank, it represented an innovative rethinking of themes solidly anchored in world and comparative history, and in this respect it too confirms the point of the above excursus into the early Cold War historiography of China, namely that a significant degree of discursive overlap existed between analyses of Chinese history and those of world and comparative history.

From the early 1960s, a growing number of historians of China began to focus on the importance of market relations throughout the imperial era, but especially from the Song onward.

However, before pursuing the implications of this trend it will be helpful to review several other types of contribution to world and comparative history in the 1950s and early 1960s.

Modernisation and the Questions of Multilinearity and Convergence

Though perhaps most commonly associated with the policy-oriented field of development studies and with the formulation of contemporary economic policy, modernisation theory had at its core a universal model of national historical development which, while based on Euro-American experience, nevertheless claimed global scope. The historical dimensions of this genre were evident, for example, in W.W. Rostow's *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto* (1962) and in Cyril E. Black's *The Dynamics of Modernization: A Study in Comparative History* (1966), both classics of a genre that flourished in the 1950s and 1960s in the framework of what Berkeley East Asianist Chalmers Johnson has recently called the American 'military-industrial-university complex'.⁶² One of the earliest and most prominent

60 Balazs (1964) and (1967).

61 Balazs (1964), chapters 1-3, and especially pp. 52-54. Note that, like Schumpeter, he also thought that private enterprise had already pretty much ceased to exist in the West as well (pp.25 & 54).

62 Johnson (2000), p. xviii. As a former head of the World Bank, Black in a 1982 paper

contributors to this literature was Talcott Parsons' former student, Marion J. Levy, a prominent specialist in East Asian sociology. His early formulations of modernisation theory included expert interpretations of Chinese society, cast in a Durkheimian mould that drew categorical contrasts between that country as a prototypical traditional society in which the peasant household was the basic unit of consumption and production on the one hand and the West as the model of an economically and socially differentiated modernity on the other.⁶³ As in the ideal-typical approaches of Durkheim and Weber, the contrasts that emerged in Levy's early work glossed over important dimensions of imperial Chinese society such as regional commercial networks and complex forms of urban development that might have been taken to approximate the modern model.

Rostow's influential 1962 book, which was likewise peppered with references to Chinese society, though rather less nuanced ones, proposed a five-stage theory of historical development that, though generally quite distinct from the Soviet model, nevertheless did share with that model a vision of each nation moving inevitably through the same series of fixed stages of development. For Rostow, the series ran from a traditional form of society to one in which the necessary conditions for take-off were constructed, then on to the take-off phase itself when growth in per capita income became a normal economic condition, after which there came a phase of maturity in which regular growth is extended to all sectors, followed by a culminating phase of mass consumption characterised by the dissemination of ever-improved consumer durables. In this view, imperial China was a model of 'pre-Newtonian' society, with basic political power diffused in the regions, until the shock of Western influence came during the Opium Wars. Rostow thought that China, like India, had reached the take-off phase only in the 1950s and expected both to reach maturity around the year 2000.⁶⁴ Such an outlook no doubt appealed to political strategists desirous of clear distinctions with which to justify policy choices, but along with other faults it quite indiscriminately assumed that several thousand years of Chinese history could be lumped together in one undifferentiated 'traditional' category, in this sense showing even less historical sense than the Stalinist category of feudalism and ignoring even the recent Western scholarship regarding social and economic differentiation and growth over the last thousand years.

Over time, however, and partly due to recognition of the complexities of the Chinese case, reservations came to be expressed in various circles about the adequacy of schematic explanations of development and underdevelopment associated with those traditions. In the 1960s Levy himself strongly cautioned comparativists against falling into reified contrasts between 'Western' and 'non-Western' models of social structure (à la F.S.C. Northrup) and particularly against thinking that any valid analytical purpose could be achieved by attempting to explain complex Asian societies by invoking only one pole of dichotomous ideal-typical pairs (*Gemeinschaft* / *Gesellschaft*, mechanical/organic and folk/urban). Adopting a revised version of Durkheim's analysis of industrial society as more highly integrated than earlier forms of society, he rejected the clichéd depiction that imperial China represented the epitome of state

recommended using modernization theory as a framework for teaching world history.

63 Levy (1952), pp. 414-24.

64 Rostow (1962), pp. 5, 36 and 127.

centralisation by characterising modern Western totalitarian states as more tightly centralised.⁶⁵ At the same time, Wolfram Eberhard, who criticised Marxist and modernisationist analyses alike, objected to Weberian-style characterisations of the mentality of the imperial Chinese scholar-elite as 'magical' and irrational when their thinking was in his view just as rational as that of Victorian gentlemen.⁶⁶

Meanwhile, among Marxists, the political de-Stalinisation of the Khrushchev era included expressions of historiographical discontent with the simplistic unilinearism of the five-stages model. One of the results of this was a re-awakening of interest in the notion of an Asiatic mode of production which was seen as holding out the possibility of recognising distinct paths of historical development for societies in Asia and Africa.⁶⁷ This re-awakening coincided with the publication in the People's Republic of China of a wealth of results from new archaeological excavations of ancient Chinese sites which were expertly analysed and presented to Western academic audiences first by Cheng Te-k'un, of Cambridge and then Hong Kong, and eventually by K.C. Chang of Yale. Within this framework, the *jingtian* system described by Mencius, which Mad'iar and his associates had attempted to analyse forty years earlier, again became the object of critical theoretical analysis by Soviet sinologists and anthropologists concerned with pre-imperial and early imperial China.⁶⁸ Discussions of this issue as well as of other early Chinese materials challenged certain Marxist thinkers to reconsider and revise their approaches to early forms of world historical development.⁶⁹ At the same time, L.S. Vasilev as the leading Soviet expert on early China, criticising depictions of early Chinese civilisation as a purely indigenous phenomenon, maintained that urban development and the spread of bronze technology in China during the Shang period (18th-12th centuries B.C.E.) most likely resulted in part from contacts with similar cultures in West Asia, a position that proved tempting for comparativists elsewhere as well.⁷⁰ Yet, despite an increase in references to the Marxian theory of the Asiatic mode to explain the nature of late imperial China, the category of feudalism, albeit with Asian, (read: bureaucratic) characteristics remained dominant, apparently due to political sensitivities related to the question of Chinese exceptionalism.

China and *The Rise of the West*

It was in the atmosphere of intellectual ferment at the end of the first phase of the Cold War that University of Chicago historian William McNeill captured the American National Book Award for world history with a work that effectively combined accessibility and wide-ranging

65 Levy (1965), pp. 89-92, 315 & 704-708.

66 Eberhard (1965), p. 17.

67 Hobsbawm (1964); Godelier, Chesneaux et al. (1964); Peirka (1967).

68 Vasilev (1961a, 1961b); Felber (1965).

69 Vasilev (1966); Anderson (1974), pp. 462-549.

70 Vasilev (1976) gives the author's developed analysis of early Chinese civilisation along these lines.

scholarship.⁷¹ Unlike most universal histories of the period, *The Rise of the West* (1963) was a single-volume, virtuoso performance rather than a collaborative enterprise. Inspired by Toynbee's *Study of History*, its author adopted a civilisational framework of analysis, but skilfully integrated this into a broader vision of cumulative progress that singled out the communication of diverse technical and organisational skills across national and civilisational boundaries as the driving force of change. In addition, analysis of each civilisation was divided according to the book's overall chronological format, which distinguished three major phases of history (Middle Eastern Dominance until 500 B.C.E., Eurasian Balance from 500 B.C.E. to 1500 C.E., and Western Dominance since 1500) and numerous sub-phases, with the result that treatment of China fell mainly into eight segments of between six and sixteen pages each (together comprising about eight per cent of the book as a whole). Though not as nuanced as the longer expert accounts in multi-authored works, the treatment of non-Western civilisations in *The Rise of the West* was given spark by the book's analytical coherence and drew widely on the specialist literature, including but not limited to recent works by the authors discussed above.⁷² McNeill's interpretations of early Chinese history might be taken to highlight both the advantages and the dangers of a comparative approach that suggests hypothetical explanations based on knowledge of broader Eurasian patterns of social and technical evolution. While readily accepting that Chinese civilisation always exhibited a strong autochthony, McNeill like Vasilev thought it clear that China had received significant early input from external sources. Though this is likely to have occurred at some level, his view that an invasion by chariot-warriors took place around 1700 B.C.E. (at the origin of the Shang state) was tenuous and ran against professional archaeological opinion, whereas the suggestion that the military prowess of Qin Shi Huangdi's armies may have been a function of the Qin rulers' position as march lords who had to adopt new forms of military organisation and technology for defence against steppe nomads was more plausible and accordingly more interesting.⁷³

While judging Wittfogel's theory of Oriental despotism to be reductionist, McNeill treated imperial China as a bureaucratic society and stressed the importance of hydraulic works in its development and evolution. His treatment of the scholar-gentry as the ruling class in Chinese society from the Han based itself on Eberhard's analysis of that stratum, and reflected objections in the Western specialist literature on Chinese history to considering the imperial era feudal. In any case, following Balazs, *The Rise of the West* acknowledged what *prima facie* appeared to be the 'modern' features of significant urban development, regional specialisation and

71 McNeill (1963). Victor Mair has points out that a copy was included in the set of books issued to each Peace Corps volunteer.

72 These included: Cheng Te-k'un for archaeological analysis; Maspero and Marcel Granet on the ancient period; Wittfogel (1957) and Chi Ch'ao-ting (1936) on hydraulic works; Balazs (1931-1933) but also Herbert Franke (1949) and Gernet (1956) on the political economy of the imperial era; Grousset on relations with Central Asia; G.F. Hudson on relations with Europe; Needham (1954-) as well as Yabuuti Kiyoshi on the history of Chinese science and technology; and Fairbank (1953) on the modern encounter with the West.

73 McNeill (1963), pp. 240 & 260.

the growth of a money economy from the late Tang.⁷⁴ Given the book's title, it is hardly surprising that McNeill repeatedly turned to identifying reasons that had kept China from 'rising' like the West. The nub of the difference lay, as he saw it, in the way the ostensibly 'modern' features developed from Tang to Ming remained contained within the relationships of the old agrarian society, and in particular in the way the merchants remained subordinated to the bureaucratic social order. Though accepting that from 1000 to 1450 China seemed about to undergo a 'fundamental change' similar to the rise of the European bourgeoisie, he agreed with his sinological sources that change in that direction was blocked by the predominance of the landed and official class, a predominance he described as secured by that Confucian esteem for learning which always 'insidiously' led merchant families to buy into the status quo of landlordship and government employment.⁷⁵ Drawing on studies by Ho Ping-ti, McNeill reaffirmed the old Malthusian idea that, despite the introduction of new food crops from the Americas from 1500 to 1800, and the simultaneous influx of silver exchanged for exports, the eighteenth century trend to rapid population growth led to a decline in the Chinese average standard of living from 1775 onward.⁷⁶ On the whole, then, *The Rise of the West* represented in respect to China a synthesis that accorded well with positions in the existing scholarly literature pertaining to the imperial era. As it happened, however, the specialist literature itself was undergoing important changes, and McNeill himself would later confess that he had underestimated the importance of China, especially in the period 1000-1500.

One thing that *The Rise of the West* did not underestimate, however, China's importance for the future. The book's final section on that country declared that 'really intimate and decisive confrontation between Chinese and Western civilisations' still lay in the future and promised to be the most important cultural interaction' of the twentieth and possibly the twentieth-first centuries. Indeed, in the growing atmosphere of incipient detente McNeill concluded his work by suggesting that the United States and the Soviet Union might one day be driven to adopt convergent paths of development and form a new Grand Alliance when faced with pressures from 'hungry and aggrieved outsiders' such as most notably the Chinese.⁷⁷ In the long run, however, there would emerge in one way or another a cosmopolitan world order in which the West was bound to predominate, but while recommending the present age as a nearly unprecedented 'theatre for heroism' McNeill warned in a fashion reminiscent of Weber that the new integrated international order was likely to be governed by an overarching world state that would encapsulate a given balance of power and breed a 'more than Chinese bureaucratic immobility'.⁷⁸

It is worth noting before moving on that the emphasis placed on cross-cultural exchanges by William McNeill and other world historians, far from being an exotic *idée fixe*, was instead part of a trend within Western historical scholarship that spanned various fields of study.

74 McNeill (1963), pp. 333-35 & 511.

75 McNeill (1963), pp. 514-15, 578-82 and *passim*.

76 McNeill (1963), p. 697-698. Ho (1955) & (1959).

77 McNeill (1963), pp. 857 & 871-872.

78 McNeill (1963), pp. 877-878.

Religious history was naturally one of the earliest areas to generate interest in trans-Eurasian contacts on account of the long missionary preoccupation that in the case of China dates back to early Jesuit scholarship on the medieval Nestorian presence. During the interwar period, a steady stream of works on early modern missions was accompanied by valuable studies carried out by Paul Pelliot and others on medieval Christian religious and political contacts with East Asia. After the Second World War, with the publication of the seminal works of Jacques Gernet and Eric Zürcher, a tradition of research on the dissemination of Buddhism to China was established that has continued to the present. At the same time, scholarly work on the Christian presence in China during both the medieval and modern periods has grown rapidly, having been spurred in the 'fifties by contributions from authors such as Christopher Dawson, Arnold Rowbotham and C.R. Boxer and continued more recently with new works by Samuel Moffett, Jacques Gernet and Jonathan Spence, to name just a few. On the other hand, the period when McNeill was composing his *magnum opus* also gave rise to several major studies on the impact that Chinese intellectual culture had on the modern West, especially in the period 1500 to 1800, including most notably Etiemble's *L'Europe chinoise*, originally published in 1959-61, and Donald Lach's monumental *Asia in the Making of Europe* (1965ff.), which has been continued with Edwin Van Kley as co-author. In addition, the study of Sino-Western commercial relations, which was first put on a solid footing by H.B. Morse at the beginning of the 20th century, has produced a series of impressive results since the mid-1960s, when it benefited particularly from sophisticated new analyses by the *Annales* school quantitative historians Louis Dermigny and Pierre Chaunu who highlighted China's importance in the early modern world trade system.⁷⁹

Challenges from Chinese Economic History

The expansion of the university sector across the Western world from the late 1950s and the institutional support given to China-related programmes in the United States in particular translated into a proliferation of new research on China during the 1960s and 1970s. One suspects that much of the complex and diverse literature that resulted was quite unexpected from the strategic perspective of the architects of the area-studies approach. Since it is simply not feasible to survey that entire literature here, let us focus for present purposes on some significant developments in the area of Chinese economic history that have continuing reverberations on the writing of world history. The first such development to single out for mention occurred in the field of comparative demographic analysis (a subject pioneered in the West, incidentally, by the 17th-century savant Isaac Vossius, who used figures on China and Europe as the basis for his path-breaking calculations of world population). Ho Ping-ti's 1959 analysis of the period from the Ming to the People's Republic and Michel Cartier and Pierre-Etienne Will's 1971 study of the data from mid-Han to mid-Qing showed the punctuated character of long-term growth during the imperial era and established a methodological benchmark for later work in Chinese population history. Of similar importance was the pioneering work on population distribution published in 1964 by G. William Skinner. Deploying the tools of quantitative spatial analysis and building on the work of Chi Ch'ao-ting (1936), Skinner identified nine economic macro-regions, each structured as a pyramid of settlement types, with several thousand districts at the foundation

79 Dermigny (1964); Chaunu (1960-1966). Recent notable contributions include Von Glahn (19), Frank (1998) and Pomeranz (2000).

of the pyramid, each centred on a market town that was surrounded by several villages.⁸⁰ Supplementing these demographic studies were the quantitative analyses of Dwight Perkins, who systematically documented the growth of Chinese agricultural production in the six centuries down to 1968.⁸¹ The agricultural and demographic figures together demonstrated that any talk of the last thousand years of Chinese history as static stood in need of serious qualification, at the very least.

Just as striking were the results that came in during the 1960s and 1970s on changes in agrarian social structure, industry and urbanisation. In a period when the successive editions of K.C. Chang's *Archaeology of China* followed quickly on one another, each eagerly awaited update brought valuable new information about the prehistoric era and the early dynasties,⁸² and David Keightley brought new precision to the debate on the status of labour under the Shang and opened up a window to discussion with P.R.C. historians by showing that, while chattel slavery was not widespread then, labour coercion was nevertheless standard.⁸³ Perhaps most remarkable was the new picture that emerged of the late Tang and Song (750 - 1279) as a period in which the politically-controlled systems of land allotment were replaced by a system of landlordism involving the buying and sell of land that would predominate until the twentieth century. Related studies documented rapid urbanisation and widespread expansion of commerce as China's economic centre shifted to the rice-producing South in reaction to nomadic pressures in the North. Robert Hartwell in particular drew attention to the astounding growth of the iron and steel and mining industries as the Song state promoted the use of iron agricultural implements and weapons.⁸⁴ Synthesizing much of the recent research in an influential 1973 book that drew on the work of Japanese and Chinese scholars such as Sudo Yoshikuri, Shiba Yoshinobu, and Fu Yiling as well as on recent Western work, British historian Mark Elvin concluded that radical transformations in such diverse domains as farming methods, water transportation, money and credit, market structure and urbanisation, and science and technology amounted to nothing less than a medieval economic revolution.⁸⁵ Then in 1974 the complexity of the Ming economy was documented when Ray Huang published his thorough, primary-source-based analysis of that

80 Skinner (1964).

81 Perkins (1969).

82 Reiterating an established positivist theme, Chang posited a long-term contrast between Chinese and Western civilisations on the grounds that China, like the indigenous cultures of the Americas, had remained fundamentally animistic and never undergone the radical break with neolithic culture typical of West Asia and Europe. Cf. Chang (1986), pp. 414-422.

83 Keightley (1969).

84 Hartwell (1966), (1967) and (1971).

85 Elvin (1973) argued that, far from having a primitive economy, late imperial China was caught in a 'high-level equilibrium trap', in which a comparatively high standard of living was attained within a traditional technological framework, but in which the maintenance of that standard precluded investment in the development of modern technologies.

dynasty's monetary and fiscal institutions and policies. A careful re-appraisal of the Qing had meanwhile already begun to draw attention to the vibrancy of China's economy and institutional order under the first century and a half of Manchu rule.⁸⁶ In addition, the greater size and diversity of China's cities throughout late imperial period as compared with those of Europe before 1800 became increasingly evident from the late 1960s onward.⁸⁷ Developments such as these naturally put into a new light the old comparative question of why China had fallen behind the West.

This issue was dealt with succinctly by Immanuel Wallerstein in the first volume of *The Modern World-System* (1974), a work intended to provide a critical alternative to modernization theory as well as to Stalinist five-stages historiography.⁸⁸ Using an approach that drew on Braudel and Marx as well as on dependency theory, Wallerstein used the notion of 'world-system' to refer to large, relatively autonomous social units comprised of a multiplicity of societies and possessing divisions of labour differentiated on a regional basis.⁸⁹ *The Modern World-System* defined two types of world-systems, namely, world-empires and world economies, the difference between them being that economic mechanisms unified simple world-economies, whereas world-empires were world-economies organised by political and military means. Whereas Braudel wrote of a variety of world-economies co-existing in the early modern period, Wallerstein held that there had only been a single, capitalist world-economy since the fifteenth century. This system centred on Europe had expanded in successive stages from the fifteenth-century to incorporate other parts of the world and/or to transform them into semi-peripheral or peripheral parts of the system (and in the cases of North America and Japan, eventually into parts of the core). As an entity unincorporated into the capitalist world-system, China before the Opium Wars was treated as an 'external regions', a formulation that unfortunately tended to obscure the long-standing pattern of commercial exchange that linked China and Europe in the two and a half centuries from the 1570 to 1820. While granting that Europe had no industrial, technological or demographic lead over China before 1450, *The Modern World-System* classified imperial China as a 'world-empire' with a political and ideological structure that effectively restricted merchant activity and consequently potential for modern economic growth.

Wallerstein found what he took to be a crucial case of such political restriction in the case of the suppression of the Ming grand fleet, which in the early fifteenth century had demonstrated

86 Ho Ping-ti (1967).

87 See Rozman (1973). Also Elvin & Skinner (eds)(1974) and Skinner (ed)(1977), which were the outcome of key international conferences funded by the Carnegie Foundation in 1968-1969.

88 Wallerstein had previously contributed on the African history to the *Columbia History of the World* (1972) edited by John Garraty and Peter Gay.

89 This definition follows Sanderson (1995), p. 96. The term 'world-system' apparently derived from Braudel's term 'world-economy', itself an attempt at rendering the German *Weltwirtschaft*. In this sense 'world' denotes not the entire globe, but major regions of it. Though this might be considered a malapropism, the usage accords both with colloquial parlance and with Ranke's style of speaking about the 'Greek world', the 'Roman world', the 'Arab world' and the 'Germanic world'.

a capacity to sail the Indian Ocean, but which thereafter was dismantled on the insistence of the imperial bureaucracy. With this in mind, he narrowed the problem to specifying the reasons for the imperial Chinese state's apparent unwillingness to expand abroad as Europe did in the early modern era, and he found two reasons especially pertinent in this regard. In contrast to liberal historiography, he did not consider the presence of a bureaucratic apparatus to be in itself incompatible with capitalist development, since on his reading capitalism fostered strong states equipped with powerful bureaucracies. Instead, he stressed on the one hand the contrast between the Chinese and European systems of agriculture, arguing that rice allows for increased production through more intensive use of land, whereas the European mixed system of wheat cropping and grazing could most easily raise production by increasing the amount of land in use. On the other hand, Wallerstein focused on the comparatively high degree of political centralisation China had inherited from antiquity as compared to Europe. Endorsing the neo-Weberian analysis advanced by the intellectual historian Joseph Levenson (a view similar in fact to Needham's), Wallerstein argued that, even though China's centralised, prebendal system may have been responsible for fostering impressive forms of traditional economic and technical development for centuries, it had ultimately exerted more effective social control (e.g. over both trade and the dissemination of weapons) and had allowed for fewer independent initiatives (e.g. in respect to both trade and exploration) than did Europe's system of parcellised sovereignty.⁹⁰ On balance, one can say that the position Wallerstein put forward in *The Modern World-System* had the advantage that it recognised distinct paths of development without invoking a dubious notion of rationalisation à la Weber and without falling into theoretical impasses about transitions between modes of production. Yet it had the distinct disadvantage that it failed to examine consider how China might have kept apace with the West after the establishment of the modern world-system in the sixteenth century.

A more serious engagement with China's late imperial economy was demonstrated a few years later in the three volumes of *Civilisation matérielle, économie et capitalisme: XVe-XVIIIe siècle* [CMEC] published in 1979 by Fernand Braudel, Wallerstein's mentor and one of the more brilliant disciples of Lucien Febvre.⁹¹ Like McNeill's *Rise of the West*, Braudel's project was a virtuoso enterprise that drew heavily on the available Western sources on China and Chinese history; and its analytic rather than chronological or geographical organisation perhaps gives some hint of what the *HMSC* might have looked like under Febvre's editorship. Although Braudel's treatment of world history was restricted to the period from the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries, and more specifically to the economic history of that period, he adopted an explicitly comparative and global perspective to civilisational development, and the combination of breadth, erudition and theoretical boldness with which he addressed major world historical themes made his project one of the late twentieth century's most influential examples of historical scholarship. Taking the central problem of modern history to be that of explaining the remarkable, still growing gap that had existed between the West and the rest of the world, he dealt with that problem primarily by addressing the question of how the Western 'world-economy' had come to displace and subsume the others.

90 Wallerstein (1974 -), vol. 1, pp. 53-63; Levenson (1967).

91 Citations here are from the 1981 English translation. A first version of volume one was published in French in 1967 (and in English translation in 1973), but was heavily revised and expanded thereafter.

Braudel's immersion in the recent specialist literature on other civilisations led him, in contrast to most previous nineteenth- and twentieth-century comparativists, to view the gap between the West and other major civilisations not as a long-standing phenomenon, but as a fairly recent development. Extending Esther Boserup's analysis, he read population density as a key indicator of economic development; and, after correlating evidence of other sorts with the available demographic data from various parts of the world, he concluded that all of the world's major centres of dense population probably enjoyed roughly the same standard of living at the start of the sixteenth century.⁹² In considering Wallerstein's distinction between world-economy and world-empire, Braudel (rather dubiously) equated the former with Marx's category of an Asiatic mode of production and with John Hicks's notion of a command economy. Applying such concepts to late imperial China, Moghul India and the Ottoman empire, he granted Wittfogel's point that under those regimes the state had been stronger than society, but he denied that the state was stronger than the economy even in such systems.⁹³ His resulting treatment of imperial China, Moghul India and the Islamic world as distinct world-economies made it possible to readily accommodate the evidence of economic growth in medieval and late imperial China supplied by Balazs and other more historians of the Chinese economy.⁹⁴

One of Braudel's most important innovations was the categorical distinction he drew between the competitive 'market economy' (what other authors have called Smithian economics) and 'capitalism' which he defined as 'big business' or the type of society dominated by it. Inspired by the theoretical ideas of Joseph Schumpeter and J.K. Galbraith, this was a distinction formulated with an eye to the monopolistic and oligopolistic structures of twentieth century society, as opposed to ideal of perfect competition on which classical economic theory had been based. As crucial historical support for it Braudel marshalled the case of imperial China, which like Balazs and Skinner he depicted as having had vibrant markets for the last millennium, even though he recognised that China's 'capitalists' had always remained subordinated within the general order of the bureaucratic society.⁹⁵ Using figures provided by French sinologist Michel Cartier, Braudel documented a record of long-term demographic parity between Europe and China since antiquity and then drew on the calculations by Paul Bairoch to argue that these two civilisations probably had generally similar per capita standards of living even until the early nineteenth century.⁹⁶ After documenting the strength of Chinese participation in the inter-Asian trade throughout the medieval period, the third volume of *CMEC* highlighted the early fifteenth-century Ming role in promoting Malacca as a key point of encounter between the world-economies of China, India, the Islamic world. Describing the subsequent conjoining of these as a 'super-world-economy' into which Europe was later able to insinuate itself, Braudel in this manner portrayed China as a pillar of the Asian super-economy and as a major participant in world trade until the early nineteenth century. Here was a clear break with the old view that

92 Braudel (1981), vol. 2, p. 134 & 600.

93 Braudel (1981), vol. 3, pp. 54-55.

94 Braudel (1981), vol. 3, p. 25.

95 Braudel (1981), vol. 2, pp. 115-120 & 600 and vol. 3, pp. 629.

96 Braudel (1981), vol. 3, p. 534.

traditional, particularist values had isolated had made China an isolated, economically stagnating backwater in an early modern era when Europe was singlehandedly joining the world's diverse regions together in a new system of its ownmaking.⁹⁷ Yet, after comparative examination of various cases in which economic crisis and political collapse had been linked, Braudel nevertheless thought it safe to infer from China's worsening trade balance in the 1820s and 1830s that its economy must have fallen behind Europe's by the time of the first Opium War (1839-1842).⁹⁸

While taking that war as the key point at which the balance in the standards of living of the two civilisations shifted, Braudel accepted that the causes behind China's lag lay elsewhere than in a simple military defeat or even in the dictates of the world-economic conjuncture. Apparently the most decisive single event was in his eyes the 1421 Ming decision to shift the empire's capital northward from Nanjing to Beijing, for he read this as the key choice to turn away from sea-power which effectively lost China its hitherto favoured position in a 'race for world domination' that it had embarked upon 'without fully realising it' when Zheng He had launched his voyages a few years before.⁹⁹ At a more fundamental level, Braudel revealed Balazs's continued influence when he interpreted the choice of the northern capital as a decision that was deeply consistent with the Chinese bureaucracy's perennial policy of deliberately thwarting all capitalist initiatives that were not backed and supervised by the bureaucratic state.¹⁰⁰ In a similar vein, he recognised the comparatively great size and demographic density of Chinese and Indian cities, but judged them to be 'prematurely fixed' in developmental terms, on the grounds that they possessed political and social structures that hampered the freedom of town life – a view that amounted to a restatement of Weber's claim that Asian cities lacked the autonomy which made European cities havens of capitalist activity.¹⁰¹ More original was the suggestion that the economies of Japan, Tibet, Indochina and South-east Asia were too primitive and weak as semi-peripheries to stimulate an energetic commercial or monetary policy within the Chinese core of the East Asian world-system.¹⁰² This analysis may well have seriously underestimating the degree of development of China's neighbours, particularly Japan and Korea. Much more sensible was his rejection of Norman Jacobs' argument that the differences in Chinese and Japanese development in the twentieth century could be traced back to differences in their medieval conditions.¹⁰³ But should the same reservation then perhaps have been raised in regard to the Sino-Western contrast as well? Lastly Braudel saw a crucial difference of attitude between China and the West in regard to technical innovation, with Europe's poverty and backwardness in his view having fostered a more acquisitive spirit and instilled a greater motivation to accumulate

97 Braudel (1981), vol. 3, p. 79.

98 Braudel (1981), vol. 2, pp. 218 & 223.

99 Braudel, (1981), vol. 3, p. 32.

100 Braudel, (1981), vol. 3, pp. 520, & vol. 2, pp. 588-589.

101 Braudel (1981), vol. 1, pp. 513-14 & 524-525.

102 Braudel (1981), vol. 1, p. 452, and vol. 3, p. 266.

103 Braudel (1981), vol. 2, p. 586.

new inventions and techniques both in manufacturing and in weaponry, including the ultimately crucial instrument of expansion that was the Western warship.¹⁰⁴

While allowing for distinctive forms of development in diverse parts of the world, Braudel's analyses of differential development appeared to answer the question of how the West had pulled ahead of China. But then again, did they really answer correctly? One of the more charming aspects of his analysis of the modern world was the frankly exploratory tone of Braudel's inquiries. This feature expressed itself with regard to non-Western civilisations in his refreshing recognition that a form of 'historiographical inequality' existed between the West and other civilisations due to the fact that Europe's history had already been studied extensively and could therefore be readily mustered in support of appealing claims about the origins of West's superiority, whereas 'the history of non-Europe is still being written'. Here was a proposition both generous and realistic that recognised that further study might yet yield important surprises.¹⁰⁵

Paths to the Present

Since Braudel in the late 1970s issued his reminder of the provisional nature of historical analysis, a succession of new efforts at rethinking the place of China in world history have accompanied a steady stream of publications on aspects of Chinese history relevant to global development. As noted at the outset of this essay, it is beyond the purview of this study to offer a state-of-the-field discussion on the recent Western literature. However, a brief sketch of a few of the major trends and publications that have appeared since Braudel's *tour de force* may be of use to readers interested in pursuing the subject further.

The normalisation of relations between the People's Republic of China and most Western states that occurred after the diplomatic warming between the United States and the P.R.C. in 1971-1972 resulted in a marked increase in academic communication and exchange between China and the West. For Western historians of China, the new atmosphere brought increased opportunities for discussion with specialists in the P.R.C. at a time when the intellectual terrain there was becoming increasingly diversified. It also brought access to a wealth of new archival and archaeological materials that provided new evidence for testing analyses of various facets of Chinese history. Among the most results of the new access to archival materials was a growing appreciation of the role of market relations in the late imperial economy and an emphasis on the economic growth that characterised that period. As we have seen, this was a trend that was already gaining steam during the 1970s. One notable event in consolidating it was the publication in 1978 of an issue of the journal *Modern China* devoted to assessing the relevance to China of the notion of the 'development of underdevelopment' that dependency theorists and world-systems historians had previously used to explain differential development in Latin America and North America. Somewhat surprisingly, all contributors to the *Modern China* discussion agreed on the inapplicability of the notion to late imperial China. In particular, the economic historian Albert Feuerwerker and the world-systems advocate A.G. Frank both stressed China's record of economic growth through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with Feuerwerker cogently arguing for recognition of the difference between traditional and modern types of economic

104 Braudel (1981), vol. 1, pp. 412-415; vol. 2, pp. 303-304; vol. 3, pp. 491-96.

105 Braudel (1979), vol. 2, p. 134.

growth.¹⁰⁶ The same points were argued and documented more thoroughly in the milestone collaborative volume, *The Modernization of China* (1981), edited by Gilbert Rozman, which brought together many of the leading proponents of modernisation theory with expertise in East Asia, including Marion Levy and Cyril Black, who were jointly responsible for the introduction and conclusion.¹⁰⁷

Not surprisingly, there was a certain lag in transferring these new appreciations of Ming and Qing economic performance into general works on world and comparative history, but it is worth noting that several distinct schools of thought have continued to occupy themselves with doing so done to the present. In the modernisation camp, for example, E.L. Jones made an ambitious attempt in *The European Miracle* (1981) to integrate environmental and political-economic history within a broadly comparative framework. Contrasting Europe and the great empires of Asia in a manner somewhat reminiscent of Wittfogel, he characterised Moghul India, Qing China and the Ottoman empire as 'revenue pumps' that sapped all potential for rising per capita growth, but the categorical nature of the distinction caused him to underestimate the vibrancy of Qing economic performance in the eighteenth century, a point he willingly conceded by the end of the decade.¹⁰⁸ A more appreciative assessment of China in general, if not of the Qing in particular, appeared the following year in William McNeill's *The Pursuit of Power* (1982), a sequel to *The Rise of the West* that focused especially on differences in the development of military technologies. Drawing on Hartwell (1966, 1966, 1971), Shiba (1970) and Elvin (1973), McNeill's revised reading of world history not only treated the five centuries prior to 1500 as 'the era of Chinese predominance' in Eurasia, also portrayed the Song-dynasty blossoming of market activity and overseas trade as responsible for sparking a long-term upsurge of market relations across Eurasia that eventually culminated in the rise of capitalism in Europe.¹⁰⁹ Preserving a picture of European dominance from the Renaissance, McNeill accounted for what he perceived as the decline in China's economic vitality with the explanation that a command economy had been reimposed under the Yuan and early Ming, a position that contained some truth but that also overlooked the new proliferation of market relations that took place from the mid-Ming onward. Several years later, S.A.M. Adshead published his excellent *China in World History* (1988), still by far the best general treatment of the subject, which culminates with a limited and critically revised endorsement of the optimistic Teilhardian vision of convergence, a vision that of course contrasted rather sharply with Samuel Huntington's prognosis of a 'clash of civilisations' in which China and the West would be pitted antagonistically against one another.

Shortly after the publication of Adshead book, Janet Abu-Lughod sparked a new wave of world-systems analysis relevant to China with her *Before European Hegemony* (1989), a study

106 Feurewerker (1978); Frank (1978).

107 Rozman (1981). Other contributors included the economic historian Ramon Myers and the intellectual historian Frederick Mote. The latter, based at Princeton, had written the substantial section on Song to Qing for the influential ten-volume *Prolyläen Weltgeschichte* edited by Golo Mann and Alfred Heuss (1967).

108 Jones (1988).

109 McNeill (1982), chapter 2.

that extended Wallerstein's concept of world-system beyond the modern era to the medieval period. In a manner reminiscent of Grousset but taking an economic focus, she stressed the network of interactions between the major Eurasian civilisations during the *pax mongolica* (13th-14th centuries) and depicted China as playing a crucial role in an integrated system of commercial exchanges before the breakdown of the system at the time of the Black Death. In 1992 Wallerstein in turn published an important new essay originally intended for the final volume of Needham's *SCC* series. In this he built on Abu-Lughod's analysis of the medieval trade *ecumene* and suggested that after the breakdown of the medieval trading system the parcellisation of sovereignty and the consequent broad scope for independent merchant initiative in Europe, but not in China, made possible the emergence of capitalism in the early modern West.¹¹⁰ A.G. Frank for his part responded in a series of stimulating but still controversial studies – culminating in his *ReOrient*, winner of the World History Association 1999 Book Prize – by rejecting both the idea of European predominance in the global economy before 1750 and by asserting that it was Asia, and most especially China with its rapid economic expansion and its acute demand for silver, that served as the motor for global economic expansion between 1450 and 1750.¹¹¹

As in previous decades, the studies too briefly described in the previous paragraph all drew to a greater or lesser degree on specialist work carried out by historians of China. The opening of major portions of the Ming and Qing dynasty archives during the 1980s has allowed valuable new light to be shed on aspects of Chinese history – for example, in the areas of late imperial political economy and foreign relations with the Western powers – that have a direct bearing on global and comparative issues.¹¹² Of the more recent works, there are several which in the opinion of the present author are likely to have an important impact on the broader world history literature. These include: Joanna Waley-Cohen's *The Sextants of Beijing* (1999), which offers a wide-ranging critique of the old notion that imperial China stood isolated from trends elsewhere in Eurasia; Lavelly and Wong's (1998) critique of the long-standing view that China suffered a Malthusian-style population crisis in the early nineteenth-century; Hill Gates 1996 neo-Marxist case for the predominance of a petty-capitalist mode of production in China from the Song to the twentieth century; Francesca Bray's pioneering work on gender and technology (1997), which focuses on the late imperial period; R.B. Wong admirably balanced analysis of historical change in Europe and China during the early modern era (1997), which makes a strong case for methodological parity in comparative studies; S.A.M. Adhead's 1997 wide-ranging comparative analysis of the emergence of consumerism in China and Europe from 1400 to 1800; and Kenneth Pomeranz's skilfully crafted response to Braudel's core question of how the nineteenth-century gap between China and Europe came to emerge, given their distinct modes of material culture but similar standards of living prior to 1770. These are invaluable works, in which world and comparative historians can be expected to find much food for thought and discussion in the years to come.

110 Wallerstein (1992).

111 Frank (1995); Frank (1998).

112 Note, for example, the committedly comparative discussions of Will & Wong (1991) on grain provisioning and Dunstan (1996) on Qing macro-economic thinking; as well as the the new analyses of Sino-Western relations provided by Hevia (1995) on the Macartney embassy and by J.Y. Wong (1998) on the significance of the 19th-century opium trade.

Concluding Thoughts

In one of the less defensible passages of his seminal book *Orientalism*, Edward Said made the claim that 'Islam excepted, the Orient for Europe was until the nineteenth century a domain with a continuous history of unchallenged Western dominance.' Even a moment's reflection should have made readers with a reasonable knowledge of South and East Asian history realise that both the general claim and the specific assertion that it was 'patently true' of Portuguese experience in China and British experience in India were wrong, as indeed was the assertion that by and large 'only the Arab and Islamic Orient presented Europe with an unresolved challenge on the political, intellectual, and for a time, economic levels' before 1800.¹¹³ China and India have continuously faced Westerners with serious challenges as well as with considerable opportunities on all three fronts from the sixteenth century to the present. With regard to India, it is enough to recall the repeated seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century attempts by Europeans to negotiate with the Moghul court or the same period's complex jockeying for power between the imperial court and a host of native rulers and provincial governors, not to mention four European powers, to attest to the lack of British predominance before 1757. Similarly, for China, continuous demand for Chinese goods by early modern Western consumers together with the Ming and Qing regulation of foreign trade and the long-standing incapacity of the European powers to balance their China trade with anything other than bullion were causes of political and economic concern to European statesmen and thinkers well before the Napoleonic era. Though the present study has concentrated on only a limited selection of historical authors and makes no claim to being exhaustive, hopefully it has shown that prior to 1760 a new awareness of Chinese history posed significant challenges to Western thinkers concerned with constructing formal interpretations of world history and that this awareness contributed to the emergence of various attempts to formulate a broader vision of humanity's historical experience.

Yet, if Said's assumption that Europe dominated 'farther Asia' throughout the early modern era must be considered factually unfounded, the Western tradition of situating China discursively in the framework of interpretations of world history appears to confirm, but also to qualify, another of his ideas, namely, the insight that negative stereotypes played an instrumental role in legitimating imperialistic expansion and Western hegemony in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The dissemination from 1770 to 1839 of established depictions of Chinese civilisation as historically fixed, genetically inferior, and perennially in the sway of despotism and superstition prepared the social-psychological ground for the military, commercial and ideological aggressions of the nineteenth century. On the other hand, however, there is little doubt that the worsening of China's economic, military and diplomatic positions vis-à-vis the colonial powers between 1790 and 1912 also shaped the overall decline in Western opinion about where China stood on the 'scale of civilisation' and played a large role in the marginalisation of Chinese history within the Western historiography of world history. Although the per capita standards of living in Europe and China seem to have been roughly equivalent as late as the 1760s, by the beginning of the twentieth century talk of the partition of China seems to have intoxicated historians of all stripes to believe that the March of Civilisation was an exclusively Western story from which distant China had remained isolated, fixed for centuries if not millennia at the same level of development.

113 Said (1978), pp. 73-74.

In the wake of the overthrow of the Chinese dynastic system and the trauma of the First World War in the West, the twentieth century not only witnessed a series of dramatic shifts both in China's international position and in its internal politics, but also saw a distinct diversification of Western attitudes concerning China. This marked a clear contrast with the near consensus of the previous century. One of the most notable aspects of this change of attitudes by the 1980s was the rejection by scholars of the old notion that China had remained essentially unchanged from the fifteenth to the early nineteenth centuries. This insight was accompanied by a corresponding realisation that during those centuries Chinese society was engaged in a complex, multi-faceted process of long-term change that may have been quite distinct from the paths adopted by the Western powers and Japan, but was nevertheless of great historical interest and importance. Table 1 gives a formalised summary of opinions held by successive Western world historians regarding China and its place in world history; the contrasts presented there may help illustrate trends in opinion since the Enlightenment.

This essay has considered some of the major conceptual artefacts developed over the historical long-term for integrating China into Western interpretations of world history. It has also recalled some of the ways in which concepts and problems derived from interpretations of world and/or comparative history have shaped Western understandings of China, either as heuristic tools for carrying out research or as principles for systematically organising research results. Several cases considered here, including the 17th-century Western 'discovery' of Chinese historiography, the 18th-century appreciation of Confucian government and the late 20th-century recognition of the importance of China's international commerce within the global trade system from the eleventh to the eighteenth century, indicate that knowledge about Chinese history and society has from time to time served effectively in the past to challenge and at times broaden existing Western notions about the global historical process. Though researchers in the field of Chinese studies may sometimes express resentment toward grand theories, few of them seriously deny that ideas derived from world and comparative historiography are pervasive enough to require historians of China to pay critical attention to developments in these fields from time to time. One hopes that world historians and comparativists whose training is in other fields may in turn realise that new developments in the area of Chinese historiography are important enough to merit careful consideration. The examples of Weber, McNeill and Braudel are on record to testify that valuable insights and substantial challenges are likely to await anyone willing to mine the rich vein of ongoing research on Chinese history and China's historical relations with the rest of the world. And one of the main lessons to be learnt both from that new research and from the classics is that old syntheses are never enough, and new ones are needed.

TABLE 1

Name	I. Relation of Different Patterns of Development	II. View of China's Basic Relation to Rest of World	III. Pattern of Development of West	IV. Pattern of Development of Imperial China
Voltaire	Distinct	Mainly closed before modern era, but with some contacts	Fixed constitution open to abuse and reform	Constitution fixed and politics stable

Name	I. Relation of Different Patterns of Development	II. View of China's Basic Relation to Rest of World	III. Pattern of Development of West	IV. Pattern of Development of Imperial China
Montesquieu	Different	Closed before modern era	Fixed constitution open to abuse and reform	Constitution fixed and politics unstable
Herder	Different	Closed	Change	Fixed
Condorcet	Universal model: unilinear + common stages	Closed	Change for better	Stagnant
Hegel	Universal model: unilinear + diff stages	Closed	Change for better	Fixed
Schlegel	Different	Closed	From order through chaos to order again	Constitution fixed and and politics unstable
Gobineau	Different, with eventual bad convergence	Threat	Change, ultimately for worse	Fixed qualitatively, with quantitative growth
Marx	Sometimes unilinear, but sometimes multilinear	Closed before modern era, oppressed in 19th	Change, ultimately for better	Stagnant (but with quantitative growth?)
Ranke	Different	Closed	Change	Fixed
Comte	Universal model: unilinear + common stages	Closed before modern era, oppressed in 19th	Change, ultimately for better	Stagnant (but with quantitative growth?)
Spencer	Universal model: unilinear + common stages	Closed before modern era, oppressed in 19th	Change for better	Stagnant (but with quantitative growth?)
Ratzel	Different	Closed before modern era	Change	Stagnant (but with quantitative growth?)
Weber	Distinct	Mainly closed before modern era, despite contacts	Change, towards rationalisation	Change (but rationalisation stunted)
Spengler	Different	Closed	Change towards decline	Life-cycle completed in antiquity
Toynbee	Different	Closed	Change; modern West continuing	Two life-cycles: first completed in antiquity;

Name	I. Relation of Different Patterns of Development	II. View of China's Basic Relation to Rest of World	III. Pattern of Development of West	IV. Pattern of Development of Imperial China
			forward	second in early modern era
Wells	Multilinear convergence model	From closed to gradually integrated	Change for better	Stagnant
Stalin Line (1)	Universal model: unilinear + common stages	Closed to integrated in modern era	Change, ultimately for better	Stagnant
Mad'iar	Multilinear convergence model	Closed to integrated in modern era	Change, ultimately for better	Stagnant
Wittfogel (1)	Multilinear convergence model	Closed to integrated in modern era	Change, ultimately for better	Stagnant
Radek	Universal model: unilinear + common stages	Closed to integrated in modern era	Change, ultimately for better	Change
Stalin Line (2)	Universal model: unilinear + common stages	Closed but with some contacts, to integrated in modern era	Change, ultimately for better	Stagnant
Durant	Different	Closed but with some contacts	Change, ultimately for better	Continuous, but lagging behind West since medieval times
UNESCO / HMSC	Multilinear convergence model	From limited contacts towards gradual integration and partial convergence	Change for better	Change
Needham	Multilinear convergence model	From limited contacts towards integration and ecumenical development	Change, ultimately for better	Bureaucratism evolving, and lagging behind West from 16th-20th
Wittfogel (2)	Different	Threat	Change, with outcome in jeopardy	Bureaucratism fixed, but change possible now
Fairbank	Differential development converging	From closed to coerced integration in 19th	Change for better	Bureaucratism evolving, but lagging behind West since 16th, and change possible in future
Balazs	Differential development non-	From limited contacts to independent development	Change	Bureaucratism evolving, and lagging behind West

Name	I. Relation of Different Patterns of Development	II. View of China's Basic Relation to Rest of World	III. Pattern of Development of West	IV. Pattern of Development of Imperial China
	converging			since 16th
Modernisation Theory	Universal model: unilinear + common stages	From closed to convergent development	Change for better	Stagnant, with change since 19th
Vasilev	Multilinear convergence model	Increasing closedness till end of imperial era, with inter-active development since	Change, ultimately for better	Continuous, but lagging behind West by early modern era
McNeill (1963)	Differential development	From contacts between distinct civilisations to cosmopolitan integration under Western dominance	Change, with threat of bureaucratic stagnation	Stagnant from Song or Ming, with change since 19th
Wallerstein (1974)	Differential Development	Limited but increasing contacts since 15th century	Change	Change, with politically induced restrictions before 20th century
Braudel	Differential Development	From limited contacts to increased integration since 15th century	Change	Change

NOTE: Range of Options for columns 1 & 4.

Column 1: Unilinear or Multilinear, the latter of which may be convergent or non-convergent. 'Different' indicates strong differentiation between societies/ civilisations, where 'distinct' allows mixing of similarities and differences.

Column 3: 'Ultimately for better' denotes aggravation of hardship preceding improvement.

Column 4: 'Fixed' = essentially unchanging; 'stagnant' - liable to change at some point, but stalled; 'continuous' and 'evolving' denote ongoing change with persistent of distinctive characteristics. The category of 'change' allows for a variety of types of change.

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