

RADCLIFFE-BROWN LECTURE IN SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY

COSMOLOGIES OF CAPITALISM:
THE TRANS-PACIFIC SECTOR OF
'THE WORLD SYSTEM'

By MARSHALL SAHLINS

University of Chicago

Read 17 March 1988

It is a special privilege for a social anthropologist from the University of Chicago to be invited to present the Radcliffe-Brown Lecture. Indeed it is not so much in a personal capacity but as a member of a scholarly corporate lineage that I welcome the honour: as a representative, that is, of a Department of Anthropology that still owes such distinction as it enjoys in the United States to its British ancestry. As you know, Radcliffe-Brown taught at Chicago for several years in the 1930s. And in training the likes of Fred Eggan, Sol Tax and Robert Redfield, students who were destined to become leading anthropologists of the next generation, the English master managed to create an island of structure—of theoretical coherence—in what seemed to be a sea of historicist confusion. So it occurred to me that in making this modest reciprocation on behalf of my colleagues, I could do no better than to imitate his achievement, by talking about how the peoples of the Pacific region have given some cultural structure to the world-historical havoc wrought by the European expansion.

Develop-Man Economics

On 20 November 1839, the Revd John Williams of the London Missionary Society was killed shortly after landing at Dillon's Bay, Eromanga, one of the New Hebrides islands (now Vanuatu). Already famous as 'the Apostle of Polynesia', Williams was abruptly translated to martyrdom by certain Melanesians, purportedly in blind revenge for outrages earlier inflicted on them by White sandalwood traders. Or so runs the pious description of the event which, like calling it 'murder' or them

'savages', characteristically inscribes the actions of islanders in the notions of Westerners. The historiographic tradition of such incidents has since improved, but not to the extent of ridding itself of the Christian virtue of understanding the Melanesians on the grounds that it was not them who cast the first stone. As if they could have no reasons or violence of their own devising. Never mind that the indigenous meaning of Williams' death—in its ceremonial details strangely reminiscent of the fall of Captain Cook at Hawaii—never mind that the local meaning seems to have been nothing less than deicide.¹ In almost all the European accounts of these events the islanders have nothing to do but to react to the determining presence of the foreigner. The explanatory principle, as Dorothy Shineberg says, is that 'there must be a White man behind every brown' (1967: 214).²

Of course I invoke the missionary's fate in a metaphoric way: in order to join the anthropological chorus of protest against the idea that the global expansion of Western capitalism, or the World System so-called, has made the colonized and 'peripheral' peoples the passive objects of their own history and not its

¹ On Williams's death and various explanations thereof, see Turner (1861: 490), Robertson (1902: 56–9), Prout (1843: 388f), Murray (1862: 179, 195–6, 206–8) and Shineberg (1967: 205–7). Among the apparent parallels to Cook's death at Hawaii—apart from the manner in which Williams was collectively mobbed after he was drowned in shallow water—was the missionary's reported intrusion in the great annual feast (*nisekar*). From all reports, this was a solstitial event analogous to the Hawaiian Makahiki, also marked by sham battles and an interdiction of war (cf. Humphreys, 1926: 180–1). As other Europeans, moreover, Williams was locally categorized as *Nobu*, the name of the lost creator-god at Eromanga, again analogous to the Hawaiian Lono, of whom Cook was an avatar (cf. Capell, 1938: 72–3). It is said that Williams's body was traded to some nearby people in exchange for pigs for the annual feast, although his companion, a certain Harris, was eaten directly. On the ritual dimensions of Cook's death, see Sahlins (1985).

² Langridge voices the common wisdom of the 'martyrdom', to the effect that 'the tragic occurrence was due almost entirely to the evil deeds of white men preceding his [Williams's] visit' (1934: 15). Shineberg doubts it, noting that the last major violence at Eromanga consisted of attacks by Hawaiians on local people across the island from Dillon's Bay some nine years before Williams's death (cf. Bennet, 1832). Shineberg's comments on Eurocentric explanations such as Langridge's are worth repeating in full:

The retaliation-only theory fits perfectly into the concept of the passive role of the Melanesian in culture contact, for it implies that there must be a white man behind every brown. Only in response to European action is the islander seen to act. He may not take the initiative: he may not have his own independent good reasons for killing Europeans—motives emanating from his own desires and customs—but must wait for the European to offend him (Shineberg, 1967: 214).

authors, and through tributary economic relations has turned their cultures likewise into adulterated goods. In *Europe and the People without History*, Eric Wolf is compelled to argue that attention must be paid to these people, that they are in fact historical beings, somebody more than the 'victims and silent witnesses' of their own subjugation (1982: x). Wolf was moved to say so because in the headier days of World System theory it had seemed that there was nothing left for anthropology to do but the global ethnography of capitalism. Anthropology would be manifest destiny. For other societies were regarded as no longer possessing their own 'laws of motion'; nor was there any 'structure' or 'system' to them, except as given by Western-capitalist domination.³ Yet such ideas, are they not the academic form of the same domination? As though the West, having materially invaded the lives of others, would now intellectually deny them any cultural integrity. World System theory becomes the super-structural expression of the very imperialism it despises—the self-consciousness of the World System itself.

Yet why is it that in Wolf's magisterial book the same kind of thing happens? One searches here in vain for a sustained analysis of how local peoples attempt to organize what is afflicting them in their own cultural terms. Wolf invites us to see the Mundurucú and the Meo as historic agents, but what he actually shows is how they 'were drawn into the larger system to suffer its impact and become *its* agents' (1982: 23; my emphasis). An evident problem is Wolf's nostalgia for the Marxist-utilist theory favoured by many world systematists. I mean the idea of culture as a reflex of the 'mode of production', a set of social appearances taken on by material forces that somehow possess their own instrumental rationality and necessity.⁴ From this comes the contradiction that neutralizes all the anthropological good intentions. On one hand, Wolf argues for the people's active historic role, which must mean the way they shape the material circumstances laid on them according to their own conceptions; while on the other

³ 'The multiple cultures, the multiple "traditions" that have flourished within the space-time boundaries of historical capitalism, have been no more primordial than the multiple institutional frameworks. They are largely the creations of the modern world, part of its ideological scaffolding' (Wallerstein, 1983: 76; cf. Frank, 1966: 19).

⁴ Consider Wallerstein's idea of 'cultures' (i.e., 'ideas, values, science, art, religion, language, passion, and color') as 'the ways in which people clothe their politico-economic interests and drives in order to express them, hide them, extend them in space and time, and preserve their memory' (1980: 65).

hand, he advocates a cultural theory that supposes the people's conceptions are a function of their material circumstances.

But we need to take more seriously Marx's understanding of production as the appropriation of nature within and through a determinate form of society. It follows that a mode of production itself will specify no cultural order—unless and until its own order as production is culturally specified. Production, Marx wrote, is the reproduction of 'a definite mode of life' (Marx & Engels, 1965: 32). A system of production is the relative form of an absolute necessity, a particular historical way of meeting human requirements. Hence the people's cultural assumption of external conditions that they do not create and cannot escape is the very principle of their historic action. Constructed in relation to the forces of nature—and typically also in relation to pressures of other societies—every cultural scheme known to history has been the product of just this pragmatic predicament. Not to suggest, then, that we ignore the modern juggernaut, only that its historical course be viewed as a cultural process. Western capitalism has loosed on the world enormous forces of production, coercion and destruction. Yet precisely because they cannot be resisted, the relations and goods of the larger system also take on meaningful places in local schemes of things. In the event, the historical changes in local society are also continuous with the superseded cultural scheme, even as the new state of affairs acquires a cultural coherence of a distinct kind. So we shall have to examine how indigenous peoples struggle to integrate their experience of the world system in something that is logically and ontologically more inclusive: their own system of the world.

The problem is how to avoid the usual reduction of the intercultural encounter to a kind of physics on one side or a teleology on the other. I mean the common perception of the global economy simply and mechanically as material forces, and the corollary descriptions of local histories as unrelieved chronicles of cultural corruption. True that within a century of Captain Cook's 'discovery' of the Sandwich Islands, American entrepreneurs were seizing the land and making the Hawaiians into a rural proletariat. But not true that the course of Hawaiian history since 1778 was governed by this outcome or that it consisted merely in the replacement of Polynesian by bourgeois relations. The Islands, on the contrary, had seen a significant period of indigenous development, when the ruling chiefs appropriated Western commodities to their own hegemonic projects—which is also to say, to traditional conceptions of their own

divinity. If thereafter Hawaii rapidly succumbed to imperialist pressures, it was precisely because the effects of foreign commerce were amplified by its encompassment in a Polynesian competition for celestial powers. This happens over and over in modern world history: the capitalist forces are realized in other forms and finalities, in exotic cultural logics far removed from the native-European commodity fetishism (cf. Simmons, 1988).⁵ Hence, the World System is not a physics of proportionate relationships between economic 'impacts' and cultural 'reactions'. The specific effects of the global-material forces depend on the various ways they are mediated in local cultural schemes.

Rather than a planetary physics this is a *history* of world capitalism—which, moreover, in a double fashion will testify to the authenticity of other modes of existence. First by the fact that modern global order has been decisively shaped by the so-called peripheral peoples, by these diverse ways they have culturally articulated what was happening to them. Secondly, and despite the terrible losses that have been suffered, the diversity is not dead. It persists in the wake of Western domination. Indeed respectable scholars now argue that modern world history since c. 1860 has been marked by the simultaneous development of global integration and local differentiation.⁶ For a long time

⁵ The most striking examples concern the ways Western commodities are indigenized in other cultural logics. Thus Lederman reports from the New Guinea Highlands: 'The Mendi we know do not see these objects in the same way as we see them: their purposes supplied for us. . . . In our objects, they perceive multiple possibilities for satisfying needs the manufacturers never imagined' (1986: 5). The report is echoed in a recent ethnohistory of the Cree: 'most technical innovations adopted by Indians were modified to fit their existing perceptions and social system, and many European goods were employed in Indian culture for purposes other than those for which they were produced in Europe' (Thistle, 1986: 35).

⁶ See the cogent discussion of the modern development of cultural difference in Bright and Geyer (in press). There is a parallel in the classic World System theory, especially as it applies (or does not apply) to China. The theory holds, on one hand, that the empire of capital is inconsistent with political hegemony: world empire would impose considerations and interests of other kinds on bourgeois enterprise. Hence the escape of capital from the political framework of the state has been necessary to the development of the modern world economy (Wallerstein, 1974: 127; cf. Mancall, 1984: 67). On the other hand, if the World System does not constitute a unified world society, it does suppose a system of autonomous states to bear the costs, as well as a set of complementary local differences in products, demands and labour-forms. Hence local differentiation is a condition of global integration, and vice versa. Of course, all this would be as true in the era of industrial capitalism as in mercantile capitalism.

anthropologists and historians were taken in by a certain mystique of Western domination: the conceit that the world expansion of capitalism brings all other cultural history to an end. It would be wiser, as John Kelly suggests, to add the concept of 'post-Westernism' to the current post-modernist vogue for postisms (Kelly, 1988).⁷

But I mean to focus here on an earlier stage, from the mid-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century, with a view toward illustrating how the peoples of the Pacific islands and the adjacent Asian and American mainlands reciprocally shaped the 'impact' of capitalism and thereby the course of world history. In part the title 'Cosmologies of Capitalism' comes from the observation that often in the islands, in a sort of Neolithic homage to the Industrial Revolution, Western goods and even persons have been incorporated as indigenous powers. European commodities here appear as signs of divine benefits and mythic bestowals, negotiated in ceremonial exchanges and displays that are also customary sacrifices.⁸ Hence the local interests in certain European goods which, by a motivated logic of the concrete, could be assimilated to indigenous ideas of social 'valuables' or sacred kinds. In contrast to relatively limited markets in means of production or short-term booms in muskets and other means of destruction, European traders in the Pacific often found this demand for luxe insatiable (Fisher 1977; Sahlins, in press; Salisbury, 1962; Shineberg, 1967).

Notice that from the point of view of the indigenous people, the exploitation by the world system may well be an enrichment of the local system. Even as there is net transfer of labour power

⁷ The 'mystique of Western domination' encompasses a whole series of related propositions, ranging in value from absurd to false, and including: (1) that before the expansion of the West other peoples had lived and developed 'in isolation'—which just means that *we* weren't there; (2) that the historic adaptations they were compelled to make to one another do not count as such, for everything then was 'pristine' and 'indigenous'; (3) that their interaction with the West however has been a qualitatively different process; since (4) European power uniquely destroys the ancient harmonies and coherence of these exotic cultures; and (5) in the process of their 'acculturation' or assimilation to the West their own cultural distinctiveness is irreversibly extinguished.

⁸ In the earlier decades of European contact, Hawaiians called such things as watches and astronomical instruments *akua*, just as Maori called them *atua* or Fijians deemed various European wonders *kalou*. All these Polynesian terms are usually glossed as 'god'. See note 1 (above) on the inclusion of foreign persons in such categories.

to the metropole through unequal exchange rates, the hinterland peoples are acquiring more goods of extraordinary social value with less effort than ever they could in the days of the ancestors. There follow the greatest feasts, exchanges and sing-sings that ever happened (cf. Gregory, 1982; Lederman, 1986; Strathern, 1979). And as this means the greatest accumulation of divine benefits cum human social powers, the whole process is a *development* in the cultural terms of the people concerned.

It is not 'backwardness'—except from a Western-bourgeois perspective. Nor is it just 'conservatism'. Surely there is a cultural continuity. But continuity is not the same thing as immobility; indeed the *strongest continuity may consist in the logic of the cultural change*. 'Neo-traditional development' might be the appropriate term, given the evident paradoxes in harnessing custom to commerce. But I prefer the improvised neo-Melanesian I overheard at the University of the South Pacific, where the insertion of the English 'development' in a pidgin sentence came out sounding (to me) like 'develop-man'. From the point of view of what the people consider worthy of human beings, this is indeed *develop-man*. It is a cultural self-realization on a material scale and in material forms never before known, yet not for all that the simple penetration of capitalist-market relations. Of course the dependence on the world economy, which has its own reasons and progress, can render the local develop-man vulnerable over the longer run. But again, destiny is not history. Nor is it always tragedy. Anthropologists tell of some spectacular forms of indigenous cultural change turning into modes of political resistance—in the name of a cultural persistence.⁹

So in response to various develop-man impulses, Western merchants searching the Pacific for exchange-value were forced to accede to local demands for prestige-value. But this was

⁹ Cf. Lederman, 1986a: 12; Codere, 1950: 81f. For a number of examples of the develop-man phenomenon, see the volume on *Affluence and Cultural Survival* edited by Salisbury and Tooker (1984). Trigger's analysis of the development of the Huron confederacy in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries is particularly pertinent. This was a total develop-man process in which the political evolution was complemented by an increase in the extent and volume of trade, growth of craft production and enrichment of ritual life. 'The new social order', Trigger observes, 'was based on an expanded application of principles that must already have been present and applied in embryonic form in Huron society in prehistoric times and, in this sense, is traditional' (1984: 22). No doubt the cognate League of the Iroquois could be understood from this vantage (cf. Hunt, 1960)—not to forget all the Plains Indian cultures as historically known.

ultimately because of certain Chinese prestige values, to which the whole of world commerce was held hostage. Ever since the opening of direct trade with the West in the earlier sixteenth century, the Chinese had been vastly unimpressed with European manufactures, even with the latter-day wonders of the Industrial Revolution, and were taking little but precious silver in return for their own goods. During the eighteenth century, moreover, this Chinese allergy to Western commodities was coupled to a rapidly growing craving for tea in Britain and her English-speaking colonies, which resulted in a flood of silver toward the Orient—with reverberating effects on the mines of Potosi and thus on the African slave trade.¹⁰ As is well-known Britain was able to overcome the unfavourable trade balance it contracted from its tea habit only by inflicting an even greater addiction on the Chinese in the form of opium imported from India: an illegal traffic backed up in 1839 by an infamous war. Having few such resources to push nor much silver, the Americans and Australians roamed the Pacific for products acceptable to China. Hence the maritime fur trade of Northwest America (in which the Americans followed the British) and the commerce in sandalwood and trepang in South Sea islands. Shineberg notes that although the Australians 'were fond of expiating on the superstitious nature of the Chinese who would buy sandalwood at high prices to burn before their altars', considering their own balance of trade, 'the colonial tea-drinking habit was no less quaint' (1967: 6). Add in the tobacco and the luxury goods the islanders were content to receive for their part in all this and the Pacific trade proves, as Shineberg says, 'that human frailty knows no race' (1967: 151).

Stated more positively and anthropologically, this is also the most general argument of my paper. The general idea is that the world system is the rational expression of relative cultural logics, that is in the terms of exchange-value. A system of cultural differences organized as a division of labour, it is a global market in human frailties, where they all can be gainfully transacted in a

¹⁰ Already in the latter sixteenth century, when New World production of silver was booming, 'a prime beneficiary of this Potosí-led boom was Ming China' (Axtell, 1982: 72). As Antónia de Morga 'explained in his informative discussion of trade in Manila at this time, the Chinese accepted only silver for their products, "for they do not like gold, nor any other goods in exchange, nor do they carry any to China"' (Ibid., pp. 75–6, cf. Spate, 1979). On silver imports to China in the eighteenth century see Pritchard (1929; 1936) or Dermigny (1964).

common pecuniary medium. Just as Galileo thought that mathematics was the language of the physical world, so the bourgeoisie have been pleased to believe that the cultural universe is reducible to a discourse of price—despite the fact that other peoples would resist the one idea and the other by populating their existence with other considerations. Fetishism, then, is the custom of the capitalist world economy, since precisely it translates these real-historic cosmologies and ontologies, these various relations of persons and systems of objects, into the terms of a cost-benefit analysis: a simple chrematistic pidgin-language, by means of which we are also able to acquire social-science understandings at bargain rates. Of course, the capacity to reduce social properties to market values is exactly what allows capitalism to master the cultural order. Yet at least sometimes the same capacity makes the world capitalism the slave to local concepts of status, means of labour control and preferences in goods which it has no will to obliterate, inasmuch as it would not be profitable. A history of the world system, therefore, must discover the culture mystified in the capitalism. As a famous historical theatre of Western exploration, the Pacific seems a good place to start.

China Trade

Nous ne plierons jamais cette nation
à nos goûts & à nos idées.

(Cibot, 1782a: 267)

In September 1793, George Lord Viscount Macartney, the envoy of the Western Ocean barbarian ruler George III, having come to present tributes to the Celestial Emperor and to be 'turned toward civilization' by the imperial virtue—or in his own view, Ambassador Plenipotentiary and Extraordinary of his Britannic Majesty, instructed to establish diplomatic relations with China with a view toward liberalizing the Canton trade while opening new markets for British manufactures, some fine examples of which he was carrying as presents to the Ch'ien-lung Emperor on the occasion of his eighty-third birthday—in September 1793 then, Macartney received the imperial reply to his King's message. Addressed to a subject lord, this famous edict reads in part:

We, by the Grace of Heaven, Emperor, instruct the King of England to take note of our charge.

Although your country, O King, lies in the far oceans, yet inclining your heart towards civilization you have specially sent an envoy respectfully to present a state message, and sailing the seas he has come to our Court to kotow and to present congratulations for the Imperial birthday, and also to present local products, thereby showing your sincerity.

We have perused the text of your state message and the wording expresses your earnestness. From it your sincere humility and obedience can clearly be seen. . . .

The Celestial Empire, ruling all within the four seas [i.e., the world], simply concentrates on carrying out the affairs of Government properly, and does not value rare and precious things. . . . In fact, the virtue and power of the celestial Dynasty has penetrated afar to the myriad kingdoms, which have come to render homage, and so all kinds of precious things from 'over mountain and sea' have been collected here, things which your chief envoy and others have seen for themselves. Nonetheless we have never valued ingenious articles, nor do we have the slightest need for your country's manufactures (Cranmer-Byng, 1962: 337, 340).¹¹

It has been said of the Ch'ien-lung edict (by no less than Bertrand Russell) that China cannot be understood until this document has ceased to seem absurd (Cranmer-Byng, 1957-8: 182). I would not claim to dispel the strangeness; on the contrary, I begin by generalizing it.

The Ch'ien-lung Emperor was not the first or the last ruler of the Celestial Kingdom to dismiss Western things. In 1816, his successor, in refusing to see another English ambassador (Lord Amherst), expressed the same imperial indifference: "My dynasty attaches no value to products from abroad; your nation's

¹¹ The Emperor's edict summarily rejects all the requests Lord Macartney had hoped to 'negotiate', reminding the English king that: 'You, O King, should simply act in conformity with our wishes by strengthening your loyalty and swearing perpetual obedience so as to ensure that your country may share the blessings of peace' (Ibid., p. 340). To mark the presentation of British tributes, the Ch'ien-lung Emperor also composed a poem, which further explicates the theory of his world-constituting virtue:

Now England is paying homage . . .
My Ancestors' merit and virtue must have reached their distant shores.

Though their tribute is commonplace, my heart approves sincerely.
Curios and the boasted ingenuity of their devices I prize not.
Though what they bring is meagre, yet,
In my kindness to men from afar I make generous return,
Wanting to preserve my good health and power.

(ibid., p. x)

cunningly wrought and strange wares do not appeal to me in the least" (Malone, 1934: 173). Nor was the disinterest in European goods a sentiment of Manchu emperors only. It had been going on since the previous, Ming dynasty, upwards of 300 years, and as concerns the British ever since 1699, when the Honorable East India Company established itself at Canton. From the beginning the Company was embarrassed for want of any English goods to put into the trade.¹² Besides, the traffic was increasingly controlled and harassed by Chinese regulations. By the mid-eighteenth century it had settled into the classic arrangements of an insulated 'port-of-trade' (cf. Polanyi *et al.*, 1957). British shipping was limited to Canton, where the Company's supercargoes were required to treat exclusively with licensed Chinese merchants—who passed along the numerous duties and extortions of lower and higher imperial officials as irksome charges on the terms of exchange. The Westerners were also quarantined socially and not greatly appreciated culturally. Dermigny summarizes the situation of European merchants at Canton:

Relegated to their 300 meters of quay, a simple *guichet* on the flank of this enormous China through which passed silver and merchandise only, but by no means language or ideas, they [the Europeans] remained nearly completely marginal to a civilization which they gave up all hope of understanding. To the contempt manifested for them as Barbarians they would respond with a redoubled contempt for the barbarian country that China was in their eyes (Dermigny, 1964, v. 2: 512).¹³

Still the English had put up with it to get silks, nankeens and porcelains, and then more and more because of tea. By the middle eighteenth century tea-drinking in Britain had diffused to

¹² The great historian of this trade, H. B. Morse, writes: 'as early as 1700, there were experienced the two embarrassments which beset the East India Company during its two centuries of trade to China—the difficulty of providing any English products the Chinese would buy, and the strain of providing the silver the Chinese demanded' (1966, v. 1: 113).

¹³ Sir George Staunton, secretary of the Macartney embassy, characterized the Canton trade arrangements of the Chinese as, 'The ancient prejudices against all strangers . . . reduced into a system, supported on the fullest confidence in the perfect state of their own civilization; and the comparative barbarism of every other nation' (1799, v. 1: 8). Besides Morse (1966; 1971) and Dermigny (1964), general descriptions of the Canton system in the eighteenth century may be found in the works of Pritchard (1929; 1936), Greenberg (1951), Fairbank (1969) and Mancall (1984).

all social classes and become, as Lord Macartney said, not simply 'an indispensable luxury' like other Chinoiserie, but 'an indispensable necessity of life' (Cranmer-Byng, 1962: 212). Were England to be suddenly deprived of tea, observed the secretary of the Macartney mission, Sir George Staunton, the effect would be a national 'calamity' (1799, v. 1: 12). Yet historically speaking tea had appeared in Britain only yesterday, around 1650 (Milburn, 1813, v. 2: 527ff; Repplier, 1932; Ukers, 1935). The first tea brought in by the East India Company amounted to 143 lbs. 8 oz. in 1669. By the 1740s, however, the Company's annual imports were running over 2,000,000 lbs., and by 1800 over 20,000,000 lbs. (Morse, 1966; Pritchard, 1929).¹⁴ So if the Chinese Emperor's status as the Son of Heaven was entailed in his contempt for foreign-barbarian manufactures, on the British side, in their own cosmic scheme, 'tea was . . . the god to which everything else was sacrificed' (Pritchard, 1936: 163).

Notably sacrificed were the famous British woollens, offered up on the Canton market at significant losses in order to finance the purchase of teas. (This must be the origin of the [New York] garment industry joke to the effect that they made up their losses in volume—the tea, of course, bringing super-profits in Britain.) During the last decade of the eighteenth century the dumping of woollens increased substantially, which helped reduce silver expenditures (Pritchard, 1929: 155). In 1820 the Directors of the Company reported they had sustained a net loss of £1,685,103 on British products over the past twenty-three years, due to "forcing the trade beyond the demand" (Morse, 1966, v. 1: 75).¹⁵ By now the Industrial Revolution was well under way, and

¹⁴ Nor do these figures accurately chart British consumption since for some years prior to the Commutation Act of 1784, which drastically reduced import duties on teas, more was being smuggled into the country from the continent than was legally imported by the Company. The Act reduced duties from c. 119 per cent to 12½ per cent—and thereby crippled the trade of all other Western nations at Canton. The American trade, however, was just beginning and soon would have good success. For comparative figures for this period, see Milburn (1813, v. 2: 486). Dermigny gives an indication of the increase in tea exports from China as carried by merchants of all countries: from an average 1,530,275 *livres marc* in 1719–24, to 44,858,000 *livres marc* in 1827–33 (1964, v. 1: 74n).

¹⁵ Neither opium nor tea, but rather woollens were the true drug on the Canton market. In the years 1775–95, the Company's average annual losses on woollens were calculated at 5.6 per cent, but the Company's average annual profit during this period was 28 per cent on investment, and for tea alone, 31.4 per cent (Pritchard, 1936: 157, 166).

apart from the woollens manufacturers the producers and merchants of steel and iron goods, of ships and marine equipment, and of cotton textiles were all clamouring for the opening of new markets—especially the cotton kings, after the freeing of the Arkwright patent in 1785 caused a crisis of overproduction. The clamour was one good reason why the Government decided on the Macartney mission—which cost the East India Company another £78,000. Yet no more after the mission than before were the Chinese merchants willing to take risks on these sundry British goods.¹⁶ The one thing always acceptable was silver coin. On the Westerners' part, however, this continuous drain of treasure was not at all to their mercantilist liking.

Until the early 1800s, or for nearly three centuries, China was the tomb of European silver—from which none ever returned. Over 150 million in Spanish dollars thus disappeared into the Celestial Kingdom during the eighteenth century alone. Soon the British (although not the Americans and other Westerners) would be clear of this problem, due not only to woollen imports but especially to the private 'Country Trade' in Indian opium and raw cotton, operating under license from the East India Company. Credit procedures allowed the Company to put the Canton returns of the Country Trade to its own account. Still, during the 250 years before the First Opium War (1839–42) an estimated 350 millions (*reals*) in silver bullion were imported by Western merchants into China (Mancall, 1984: 100). And although Europe's Asian trade was thus clearly complementary to its American trade—whence came the silver that bought the tea that John Bull drank—Wallerstein finds the whole affair 'strange indeed', considering Europe's 'passionate hoarding of bullion', and proposes to exclude it from the capitalist world system, apparently because it was organized on Asian terms (1974: 330; but see Axtell, 1982: 89–90).

These terms were evident not only in the Ch'ien-lung Emperor's reply to George III but in nearly every incident of the Macartney mission, which is why I focus attention on it.¹⁷ Sent to

¹⁶ Company records for 1786 indicate that: "The Patterns of Norwich, Manchester & Hallifax Stuffs have been shewn to the [Chinese] Merchants, but it is not their opinion that any of them will answer for this Market: the Cotton Stuffs are too expensive, & the Chinese manufacture a variety of different kinds which tho' not so elegant are better adapted to their modes of dress" (Morse, 1966, v. 2: 120).

¹⁷ The present account of the Macartney embassy is drawn from Lord Macartney's own journal (Cranmer-Byng, 1962) as well as the chronicles of

'negotiate' a treaty, as he conceived between equal sovereigns of independent states, Lord Macartney came face-to-face—at that by special grace, as he should have been face-to-ground—with the Unique Man whose benevolent rule was the sole means of order in the human world. His Lordship, who wanted to impress the Chinese Court with the powers of his own civilization, represented as the extension of the virtues of his own king, was received by the Supreme Lord whose own virtue (*te*) was the condition of the possibility of any civilization whatsoever. With such universal power there could be no question of treating or negotiating, but only of submitting or 'coming to be transformed'. This means, transformed to culture from the undifferentiated and disordered state of barbarism that the English shared, in such outer realms as Europe, with the wildest monstrosities of nature. Through his sacrificial offices and the example of his sage behaviour, through the virtue of his person as diffused by the conduct of his officials, the Son of Heaven uniquely mediated between humanity and the transcendent celestial source of earthly welfare. His were classical powers of hierarchy: inclusive politically, as they were total culturally.¹⁸

In the ancient imperial tradition, the founder of the dynasty, recipient of a renewed Mandate of Heaven, promulgates a new calendar, new weights and measures, and a new musical scale. He thus institutes human time and space, economy and harmony—all as the extension of the imperial person: "His voice was the standard of sounds", a famous Han historian writes of the legendary founder of the Hsia dynasty, "his body was the

Staunton (1799), Dinwiddie (Proudfoot, 1868), Alexander (MS), Barrow (1805) and Anderson (1795), the official Chinese correspondence (Cranmer-Byng, 1957–8), the East India Company instructions (Pritchard, 1938), and pertinent correspondence from missionaries in China (Pritchard, 1935). The English journals are not of equal value or probity; that of Barrow is particularly suspect (cf. Proudfoot, 1868: 44n, 52). An excellent analysis of the Macartney embassy is developed in James Hives's recent dissertation (1986), to which I am much indebted. On aspects of the Chinese imperium discussed here in connection with the Macartney mission, see especially Fairbank (1942, 1968, 1971), Fairbank & Teng (1941), Granet (1930, 1968), Mancall (1984), Franke (1967), deBary, Chan & Watson (1960), Spence (1975) and Wakeman (1970).

¹⁸ "One fact signals the privileged place that the Chinese give to Politics. For them, the history of the World does not begin before that of Civilization. It does not start with a narrative of creation or cosmological speculations. It is joined from the beginning with the biography of the Sovereign" (Granet, 1968: 283).

standard of measures of length." He could thus determine the Numbers which serve to regulate Time and Space, as well as the Music which creates the universal harmony' (Granet, 1930: 16). The first Manchu emperor did not hesitate to employ a Jesuit astronomer to formulate the dynasty's calendrical system (Fu, 1966, v. 1: 3-4; Spence, 1980: 3f). Nor did he or his successors neglect to harmonize the occupations of mankind with the Heavenly passage of the seasons: by the correct sacrifices, of course; but also by the exclusive distribution on New Year's Day of the annual calendar—counterfeit of which was a penal offence and falsification a capital crime.¹⁹ Such gifts of time were among the benefits barbarians could receive in return for submitting tributes, along with the seals to affix to their own dated edicts, patents of office and noble ranks in the Chinese system, valuable presents from the emperor, and often the right to trade for Chinese goods.²⁰

Trade fits into the tribute system, normally as the *sequitur*, since the 'tribute system' in its most general sense referred to the material mode of integration into civilization. Barbarians' tributes were signs of the force of attraction of the imperial virtue, objectifications of the Emperor's civilizing powers. 'The kings of former times', relates an official Ming document, 'cultivated their own refinement and virtue in order to subdue persons at a distance, whereupon the barbarians (of the east and north) came to Court to have audience' (in Fairbank, 1942: 132). Thus the following perception of the Carolingian empire, from a Ch'ing period account:

¹⁹ 'Sole master of the Calendar and by virtue of this prime mover of the whole Chinese territory, such appears, in the tradition of the Han, the Son of Heaven' (Granet, 1930: 382). On the Emperor's grand sacrifices in Ch'ing times, see Zito (1984).

²⁰ In 1660 the Russian Tsar, according to official Chinese court records, sent another Embassy to bring a memorial and to present tribute. In the memorial he [the Tsar] did not follow our calendar, but dated it 1165, and called himself a Great Khan with many boastful words. This memorial was sent to the princes and ministers for deliberation.

They argued: 'We should expel his embassy and refuse his tribute' (Fu, 1966, v. 1: 24).

The Emperor overruled this opinion, and said that the Russians should be feasted by the Board of Rites and given presents—as signs of the imperial tolerance—but denied an imperial audience. In 1676, another Russian envoy, although received by the Emperor, was then not recognized and dismissed, according to official records, for failure to ko-tow (Ibid., pp. 49-50).

During the middle of the T'ang Dynasty [AD 618-906], Charlemagne a wise and learned man, gifted with civil and military talents, became Emperor of the Germans and the French. His fame and virtue spread far afield, and all the barbarians submitted to him (in Schurmann & Schell, 1967: 123).

The tributes of the barbarians were obligatorily special products of their own country. Hence in certain symbolic respects the more bizarre they were the better: as signifying at once the inclusiveness of the imperial virtue, its capacity to encompass a universal diversity, and the emperor's ability to order the fluctuations of the world beyond the Chinese pale by the control of its monsters and its wonders (cf. Mancall, 1984: 16). Consider this flowery encomium penned in 1419 by a Confucian literatus in celebration of the arrival of a tributary giraffe, that is, a 'unicorn' (*ch'i-lin*):

When the virtue of the Imperial Ruler above reaches the Great Purity, below reaches the Great Stillness, and in between reaches the Myriad Spirits, then a *ch'i-lin* [giraffe] appears . . . It is also said: when the virtue of the Ruler penetrates into the dark waters of chaos and his transforming influence reaches out to all living beings, then a *ch'i-lin* appears (in Walker, 1956: 24).

Rendered principally at the Winter solstice and the Emperor's birthday, the barbarians' tributes were in this way connected with world rebirths, securing for them the material benefits of the Ruler's intercession with Heaven. Prosperity was entailed also in the valuable presents received by the tribute emissary from the Emperor, showing that the latter knew how to 'cherish men who come from afar'. Again trade was part of the same set of conceptions: officially regarded as a 'boon' granted to the barbarians, as Fairbank explains, 'the necessary means of their sharing in the bounty of China' (1942: 139). So Lord Macartney's intention to liberalize trade by offering birthday presents to the Emperor was not unintelligible to the Chinese, or at least lent itself to a working misunderstanding.²¹ Nor would such conceptions imply Chinese disinterest in trade or preclude its functional uses in politics or profits. In the long history of the Chinese frontiers, most famously in the north, commerce was often an instrument of policy: whether encouraged as part of a forward

²¹ In granting permission for the Macartney Embassy to enter the country, the Ch'ien-lung Emperor observed that in their request the British had properly expressed 'the highest reverence (*gong*), obedience (*shun*), earnestness (*gin*) and faithfulness (*zhi*)', as well as 'the sincerity of facing toward transformation' (Hivea, 1986: 265).

policy of expansion, or permitted in an effort to neutralize a barbarian threat (cf. Lattimore, 1940; Fairbank & Têng, 1941).

As I say, such structures appear as events in the chronicles of the Macartney mission. But I can only just refer, for example, to His Lordship's refusal to ko-tow before the Emperor, of which perhaps too much has already been made in an Orientalist vein (cf. Pritchard, 1943). Enough to note that Macartney, insisting that one should distinguish between the homage of tributary princes and the respects of 'a great and independent sovereign' such as his own, proposed that he would go through with the ko-tow if a Chinese official of equal rank would do the same before a portrait of George III (Cranmer-Byng, 1962: 100, 119, *et passim*). This proposal, said the Imperial Court documents, 'showed ignorance' (Cranmer-Byng, 1957-8: 156-8). Again, there is Macartney's repeated desire to get down to the business of negotiating, once the embassy had been ceremoniously received by the Emperor and the gifts exchanged. The desire was never fulfilled because so far as the Chinese were concerned, the business was already finished—the ceremonies *were* the business (Cranmer-Byng, 1962: 137, 148; cf. Hivea, 1986). Here it seems relevant to note that during the first fifty years of the East India Company's existence in China, it had not a single (Western) employee who could speak Chinese (Pritchard, 1929: 39). The so-called astronomer of the Macartney mission, Dr Dinwiddie, complained repeatedly about the inability of the English to understand what was going on. '“With what countenance will Lord Macartney return to Europe after his shameful treatment?”' he asks. '“No apology will satisfy. We go home—are asked what we have done. Our answer—we could not speak to the people”' (Proudfoot, 1868: 87, cf. p. 71).²²

²² Previous to the Macartney mission there had been only two Chinese speakers in the Company's service, both now departed from the scene (Pritchard, 1938: 497n). I would not, however, make too much of the English shows of 'ignorance' in regard to the Chinese imperium or Chinese custom. It is clear from Macartney's private and even more from Staunton's published account that they were well aware of the Chinese conception of the Emperor's sovereignty, for indeed their intent was to deny it, break it down, and substitute their own. Thus Staunton knew that the Chinese subjects of the Emperor considered he 'virtually rules the world', that they 'scarcely distinguish the relations or duties of other nations or individuals to him from their own, which are, indeed, unbounded' (1799, v. 2: 25). Staunton also knew the difference between reciprocity and hierarchy in the relations between states, and the Chinese view of such matters: 'Such were the avowed or affected notions entertained by the Chinese government, of the superiority or

However, Lord Macartney was aware that the banners flying on the fleet of Chinese river junks carrying him toward Peking read 'The English Ambassador bringing tribute to the Emperor of China'. He knew, but he diplomatically chose to ignore it, as a tactic in the sustained counter-argument the British were also making in the language of goods. As they understood, the so-called tributes were 'specimens of the best British manufacture, and all the late inventions for adding to the conveniences and comforts of social life', carefully selected to answer to 'the double purpose of gratifying those to whom they were presented, and exciting a more general demand for the purchase of similar articles' (Staunton, 1799, v. 2: 23).²³ So in the several incidents where the distinction was explicitly drawn between 'presents' (what the British were calling them) and 'tributes' (what the Chinese called them), one could never guess what the cunning Occidentals were really thinking. Their 'presents' were really *samples* of their wares. Even beyond that they were *examples* of industrial ingenuity, designed to signify the 'superiority' of British civilization and the majesty of George III. Including instruments for scientific experiments, a globe with the tracks of Captain Cook's discoveries, handsome carriages and sword blades that could cut through iron without losing their edge, these presents, as Sir George Staunton put it, had been carefully chosen to 'denote' the progress of Western science and to 'convey information' to the Emperor (*ibid.*, p. 243). '“It was meant to

independence of the empire, that no transaction with foreigners was admissible to it on the ground of reciprocal benefit, but as a grace and condescension from the former to the latter' (*ibid.*, p. 72; cf. Pritchard, 1935: 50).

²³ The instructions issued to Lord Macartney by the Home Secretary Henry Dundas remind him that:

The Directors of the East India Company, who have ordered one of their ships to accompany the Embassy, have shipped on board a great variety of articles of British goods not for the purpose of Sale, but to be dispersed and distributed by you in most likely manner to excite a taste for and establish the use of such articles in China (Morse, 1966, v. 2: 240; cf. Pritchard, 1935: 222).

Moreover, while Macartney was in China, he sent the ship-of-war that also accompanied him, the *Lion* (Sir Erasmus Gower) to Japan, the Philippines, Borneo and the Celebes, to prepare for a visit from the mission, the instructions to Gower in the case of Borneo saying:

Nothing would be more desirable, or more consistent with the general object of the mission, than any fair and peaceable endeavour to spread the use of British manufactures throughout every part of Asia, from whence any valuable return might be made to Europe, which was eminently the case of Borneo (cited in Staunton, 1799, v. 1: 253).

surprise the Chinese with the power, learning and ingenuity of the British people", says Dinwiddie, "for which purpose a splendid assortment of astronomical and scientific apparatus were among the presents to his Celestial Majesty";—this included a planetarium that had taken thirty years to make, "and was allowed to be the most wonderful piece of mechanism ever emanating from human hands" (Proudfoot, 1868: 26). To the British, then, their presents were self-evident signs of an industrial logic of the concrete: the signs of 'our preeminence' (Cranmer-Byng, 1962: 191). They were supposed to communicate a whole political, intellectual and moral culture (Hivea, 1986: 135f). Yet if ever anyone carried coals to Newcastle, it was British people carrying signs of civilization to the Chinese.

In his journal, Macartney is repeatedly indignant at the mandarins' refusal to be mortified. But from the mandarins' perspective if the 'presents' were indeed 'tributes', expressing the barbarians' sincere desire to turn to civilization, manifestly they could not be superior to things Chinese. At best, they were what they should be: rare and strange exotica from an outer world where categories were crossed, blurred, inverted and confused. So were the British 'presents' interpreted, Staunton learned, on the streets of Peking:

Among the stories that caught, at this moment, the imagination of the people, the arrival of the Embassy was said to furnish no inconsiderable share. The presents brought by it to the Emperor, were asserted to include whatever was rare in other countries, or not known before to the Chinese. Of the animals that were brought, it was gravely mentioned, that there was an elephant the size of a monkey, and as fierce as a lion, and a cock that fed on charcoal. Everything was supposed to vary from what had been seen in Peking before, and to possess qualities different from what had been there experienced in the same substances (Staunton, 1799, v. 2: 21; cf. Cranmer-Byng, 1962: 114; Proudfoot, 1868: 51).²⁴

In a wonderful Orientalist text written some half-century

²⁴ And although Macartney was pleased to believe that he had dispelled the Chinese idea of the English as barbarians by the example of his own civilized conduct, his journal suggests that in popular quarters the Embassy enjoyed a reputation for cannibalism—the same as attributed to the Portuguese in the early sixteenth century. 'A Chinese boy,' Macartney writes, 'who was appointed to wait upon young George Staunton [son of Sir George] would not for a long time trust himself to sleep in the house with our European servants, being afraid, he said, that they would eat him' (Cranmer-Byng, 1962: 226; cf. Franke, 1967: 27f).

later, the English sinologist Thomas Meadows explains that Chinese people, beholding such a technical marvel as an English ship, simply do not get the message that the country in which it was produced 'must' be inhabited by an energetic and rich population 'free to enjoy the fruits of its own labour', that it 'must' have a powerful government, good laws 'and be altogether in a high state of civilization' (1847: 235; Meadows sounds like a modern functionalist archaeologist, although not more mistaken). The Chinese will allow, he adds, that the English can do some extraordinary things, but so do elephants and other wild beasts. Indeed Dinwiddie recorded just this kind of contemporary reaction to the Macartney mission, including the Chinese failure to appreciate the native Western theory of the systematic relation between technology and civilization:

Their prejudices are invincible. Ask them whether the contrivers and makers of such curious and elegant machinery must not be men of understanding, and superior persons. They answer—"These are curious things, but what are their use? Do the Europeans understand the art of Government as equally polished?" (Proudfoot, 1868: 50).

All this helps explain Lord Macartney's failure to induce a general demand for British goods: why, for example, he did not get the Chinese to throw away their chopsticks, as he was convinced they would when he demonstrated the 'convenience' of Sheffield knives, forks and spoons (Cranmer-Byng, 1962: 225–6).²⁵

As it happened, when the Emperor told Lord Macartney he had no need of Britain's ingenious devices, he was not lying. He had them all, and in greater magnificence than ever Macartney could offer, though he kept them notably in his outlying hunting parks and summer palaces, Jehol beyond the Great Wall, where he received the English ambassador; and the 'Garden of Perfect

²⁵ The persistence of Western perspectives on such matters is demonstrated by the mid-twentieth century echo of Meadows' remarks about the English ship in the comments of Cranmer-Byng, editor of the Macartney journal: 'All the scientific apparatus which Macartney took with him, all the obvious superiority of the H.M.S. *Lion*, a 64-gun ship, over the Manchu war junks, was wasted on these men' (Cranmer-Byng, 1962: 36). But then, in another context, Fairbank cites Meadows' observation in regard to Chinese people who had had no opportunity of knowing Westerners:

I do not recollect conversing with one, and I have conversed with many, whose previous notions of us were not analogous to those we entertain of savages. They were always surprised, not to say astonished, to learn that we have surnames, and understand the family distinctions of father, brother, wife, sister, etc.; in short that we live otherwise than as a herd of cattle (in Fairbank, 1969: 19).

Brilliance', Yuan Ming Yuan, also outside Peking. If here the Emperor displayed his universality, his inclusion of the barbarians, it was at a distance from the Chinese harmonies that contrastively set off the capital and the Middle Kingdom as a whole. This symbolic contrast, I mean to show, is a key to the imperial trade policies.²⁶

At Jehol where the Emperor hunted were stored untold riches from the lands of barbarians—who were likewise hunted and collected. In numerous pavilions decorated with scenes of the Emperor's progresses and imperial feats of the chase (in which the Emperor was 'always seen at full gallop shooting wild beasts with arrows'; Staunton, 1799 v. 2, 82) Lord Macartney was able to see for himself:

every kind of European toys and sing-songs; with spheres, orreries, clocks, and musical automats of such exquisite workmanship, and in such profusion, that our presents must shrink from the comparison and 'hide their diminished heads.' And yet I am told that the fine things we have seen are far exceeded by others of the same kind in the apartments of the ladies and in the European repository at Yuan-ming Yuan (Cranmer-Byng, 1962: 125–6).

The English never did see the 'European repository': the impressive set of palaces in the Italianate baroque at Yuan Ming Yuan, designed for the Emperor by Jesuit missionaries and cluttered with all sorts of European wealth. A French missionary who had viewed these palaces found it 'incredible how rich this sovereign is in curiosities and magnificent objects of all kinds from the Occident' (in Malone, 1934: 160).²⁷ Yet the foreign treasures were only part of an assemblage that aimed to make the imperial retreats complete with every imaginable creation of

²⁶ On the imperial retreats of Yuan Ming Yuan and Jehol, see Malone (1934), Siren (1949), Hedin (1933), Danby (1950) and M'Ghee (1862: 203ff). These retreats are notably located north-west (Yuan Ming Yuan) and north (Jehol) of Peking, thus in more sinister ritual directions (cf. Zito, 1984); the European palaces at Yuan Ming Yuan, of which mention is made below, were likewise at the northern border of this summer palace complex.

²⁷ Père Bourgeois goes on to say:

You ask me if the Emperor has any Venetian and French glass. Thirty years ago he already had so many pieces that, not knowing where to put them, he had a quantity of the first grade broken up to make window panes for his European buildings . . . [The] hall which he had made new for the tapestries . . . of Gobelines, which the French court sent in 1767 . . . 70 feet long and of good width . . . is so full of machines that one can hardly move about in it. Some of these machines have cost two or three hundred thousand francs, for the work on them is exquisite and they are enriched with innumerable precious stones (Ibid.).

nature as well as of humanity. As Granet says, even things that no collector could find nevertheless figured there, sculpted or drawn: it was a universal collection of 'evocative singularities' (Granet, 1968: 274). Such diversity was directly linked to the ruler's power. Indeed if the Ch'ien-lung Emperor made Jehol a museum of his prowess, it was in the tradition of the original conqueror Ch'in Shih Huang-ti (reign: 221–210 BC), who 'in order to enjoy all his victories at once and in detail', had as many palaces built in his grandiose gardens as he had destroyed principalities, each edifice reproducing the residence of a defeated ruler (Cibot, 1782b; cf. Yang, 1974: 168).

The synthesis of diversity and conquest made these imperial retreats perfect microcosms. They represented the whole world as the work of the Emperor and within his power. 'All the beasts of the air, of the water, of the earth thronged in his fish ponds and his parks. No species was wanting in his botanic gardens; the waves of his lakes could be seen breaking against the distant lands in which could be recognized the mysterious Isles of the immortals' (Granet, 1930: 394). Written of the great emperor Wu of Han, the description summarizes just as well Lord Macartney's wide-eyed account of the East Garden of the Ch'ien-lung Emperor at Jehol (Cranmer-Byng, 1962: 124ff; cf. Malone, 1928).²⁸ For the Manchu emperor, one would only need to add the condensed collections of human life: the villages and monasteries, libraries and temples, as well as peasant fields of every crop. The libraries housed exhaustive collections of knowledge, the results of a search initiated by the Emperor in 1771 for the most rare and valuable books of the realm (Guy, 1987). Yet merely by contemplating his garden the sage king could cultivate his powers of rule, since in such a setting meditation amounted to the absorption of the universe.²⁹ At Yuan Ming Yuan, there was

²⁸ For a description of the Emperor Wu's famous Shang-lin garden which captures all the symbolism in an appropriate poetic form, see the chapter on Ssu-ma Hsiang-na in Ssu-ma Ch'ien's history (Watson, 1961, v. 2: 297–321). The poem, 'Sir Fantasy', is a political drama in which the wonders of the Son of Heaven's garden encompass the descriptions of the parks of lesser lords, whose own rivalry is likewise represented in competing celebrations of the scale and variety of their pleasure-retreats. Cibot records that the successors of the Emperor Wu through the seventh century similarly 'attempted to assemble everything that was scarce, dispersed and scattered here and there over the most immense regions . . . within their gardens everything was collected, like an abridgement of the universe' (1782b: 310).

²⁹ The Ch'ien-lung Emperor recounted how his father, at Yuan Ming Yuan, 'to appreciate the hard work of the farmers and mulberry growers . . .

even a miniature walled town with streets, squares, temples, market places, shops and civic buildings (Pl. I). If at Versailles Marie Antoinette played the shepherdess in pastoral idylls, at Yuan Ming Yuan the Empress, women of Court and the Emperor dressed up as city-dwellers to join a throng of eunuchs, themselves impersonating merchants, artisans, peddlars, porters, soldiers and even pickpockets, in scenes that reproduced 'all the hurly-burly, the comings and goings, and even the swindling of the big cities' (Attiret, 1843 [1743]: 790).

The Jesuit painter Attiret, to whom we owe this eighteenth-century description, goes on to contrast the apparent disarray of the summer gardens with the balanced arrangements of the imperial palace at Peking. The 'beautiful order' of the latter he likens to our Western notions of symmetry and uniformity, where nothing is without parallels, nothing displaced, but everything responds exactly to what is *en face* and counterposed to it (Pl. II). In Yuan Ming Yuan, however, there reigns a 'beautiful disorder', which could even be called an 'anti-symmetry'. Chinese sources confirm that the apparent disorder—while avoiding submission to 'a symmetry even more tiresome than it is cold and monotonous'—is again meant to imitate nature (Cibot, 1782b: 318). The linked connotations of natural heterogeneity and imperial power are resumed by Attiret's observation that not one of the pastoral pavilions resembled another; instead, 'one would say that each is made according to the ideas and model of some foreign country' (1843: 791). Extending even to the smallest architectural details, the diversity repeatedly evokes from the Jesuit artist the sense of a human mastery of a universal plenitude: 'Not until I came here had I seen doors and windows with such a variety of form and figure: round, oval, square, polygons of all kinds; or in the form of fans, flowers, vases, birds, beasts, fishes—in short, in every regular or irregular shape' (1843: 792). Yet it is remarkable, comments Granet, that when the Chinese have welcomed 'legends or techniques, *jongleries* or ideas tinged with exoticism, they have never admitted these in the house'. Since ancient times an elegant system of classification has reigned over such domestic habitations, a balanced order of things Chinese. Whereas in the parks reserved 'to their hunts, their *fêtes*, their games', the rulers receive 'everything that is

had fields, and barns, and plots of vegetables, by which he understood the importance of rain and sunshine for the crops. The wind among the pines and the moon over the water entered his breast, inspiring thoughts of beauty'' (in Malone, 1934: 64).

brought to them: ideas or gods, exotic or new, astrologers, poets and clowns' (Granet, 1968: 295–6).³⁰ And, one might add, English lords and their curious gifts, such as the fine carriages Macartney brought, which were never used but instead consigned to an undignified place in one of the rococo palaces at Yuan Ming Yuan (Barrow, 1805: 145; Swinhoe, 1861: 331).³¹

The point I want to make is that these imperial gardens and hunting lodges signified a cultural politics, encompassing an economics that was likewise inclusive and exclusive and could thus adapt appropriately to the practical situation. The opposition between the emperor's countryside and the imperial city recapitulated a whole cosmography of civilization—sometimes called 'the inner-outer separation' (Wang, 1968)—which the Chinese have represented also in other ways. Needham reproduces an ancient Chinese plan of the world, laid out as a series of inclusive squares surrounding a central royal domain (Fig. 1). Extending outward from the royal centre, the epitome of a structured order, are barbarian zones of decreasing civilization and pacification, ending in the far reaches of a 'cultureless savagery' (Needham, 1959: 502). By setting China apart while at the same time making it the central source of world order, this theory of civilization lends itself equally to projects of imperial expansion and cultural withdrawal, to hegemonic inclusions or xenophobic exclusions, according to the contingencies of the situation.

This may well be a normal dynastic cycle, including the pendulation between a forward economic policy and a period of xenophobic retreat, coinciding with a territorial expansion that ultimately reveals the limits and weaknesses of the Chinese imperium. For the dynastic conquests in ascendant phases would

³⁰ Wakeman draws attention also to the contrast between the 'meanders . . . and carefully chosen grotesqueries' of the Summer Palace and the 'formality' of the Forbidden City (1970: 8). For Wakeman, it is the contrast, as it were, of the king's two bodies: his private and public personae. However, the argument here is that these are complementary aspects of the same imperium, involving also the contrasts of civilization and nature, Chinese and barbarian, passive and active rule, peace and war, expression and acquisition of virtue, and more. The seasonal movements between the palace and the retreats, as well as the different modes of imperial behaviour in each, would clearly contribute to a richer elucidation of the theory of rule.

³¹ Many of Macartney's presents to the Ch'ien-lung Emperor remained at Yuan Ming Yuan until 1860 when an Anglo-French expeditionary force commanded by Lord Elgin—son of the one who took all the marbles—pillaged and burned the priceless summer palace, thus finally proving the 'pre-eminence' of European civilization by one of the greatest acts of vandalism in history.

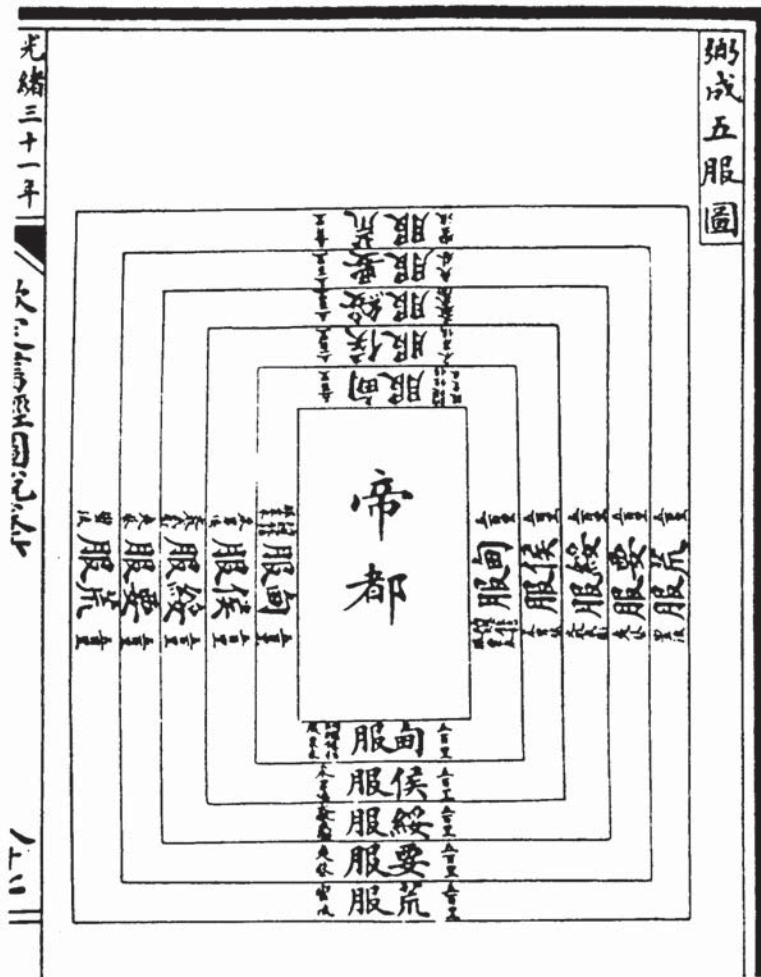


FIG. 1. Traditional conception of the radiation of Chinese civilization (Needham, 1959: 502). Proceeding outwards from the metropolitan centre, Needham writes, 'we have, in concentric rectangles, (a) the royal domains, (b) the lands of the tributary feudal princes and lords, (c) the "zone of pacification", i.e. the marches, where Chinese civilization was in the course of adoption, (d) the zone of allied barbarians, (e) the zone of cultureless savagery.'

encourage just those processes Lattimore identifies as sources of decline, notably the development of gentry power and mercantile wealth (Lattimore, 1940). Diverting revenues from the central government and imposing ruin on the peasantry, the rise of these private powers issues in a crisis of the imperial regime.

The government proves less and less able to cope with the twinned menaces of domestic uprising and barbarian incursion which now appear, the unwanted offspring of its own successes. Hence the close correlation between the achievement of world empire and the inauguration of a political economy of exclusion, by contrast to an earlier, inclusive relation to the barbarian periphery when the new dynasty was proving its claim to the Mandate of Heaven.

Sinologists have made this argument for the Ming period (Fletcher, 1968) as well as for the Ch'ing dynasty at issue here (Dermigny, 1964, v. 2: 468f, see especially 487-95). The spectacular expansion of Ming under the Yung-lo Emperor (reign: 1403-34) is well known, especially the great voyages of the eunuch admiral Ch'eng-ho which ran China's writ from East Africa to the East Indies. In huge armadas, with personnel running into the tens of thousands, Ch'eng-ho sailed as far as the Persian Gulf and African coast, 'collecting vassals like souvenirs' (Cameron, 1970: 124; Lo, 1958; Needham, 1971: 487f; Fairbank, 1942: 40-1; Dermigny, 1964, v. 1: 300f). By contrast the later Ming saw a radical decline in foreign tributary embassies, together with an imperial disinterest in foreign trade—just when the Europeans came in (Fairbank & Teng, 1941).³² A similar withdrawal had marked the later T'ang dynasty (post-eighth century), when strict trade restrictions were imposed in the name of the ethical integrity of the Middle Kingdom. Yet a century before Chinese noblemen dressed *à la Turque* were camping out in felt tents on the streets of Peking. In the earlier 'fullness of T'ang' a passion for the exotic in every shape and form—from green-

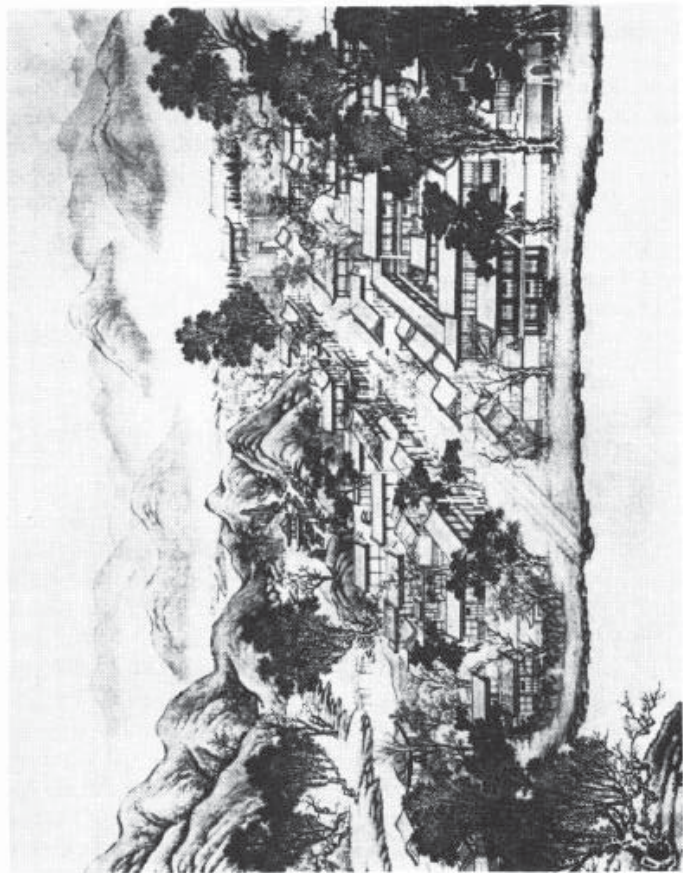
³² Using Watanabe's study (1975) of Ming tributes, one may construct a graphic representation of the decline in foreign-tributary relations in the last half of the dynasty:

	Number of Tributary missions to China	
	Years 1368-1505	Years 1506-1643
By land	611	145
By ocean	355	7

Mutatis mutandis, it is all as in the Sung dynasty's official history:

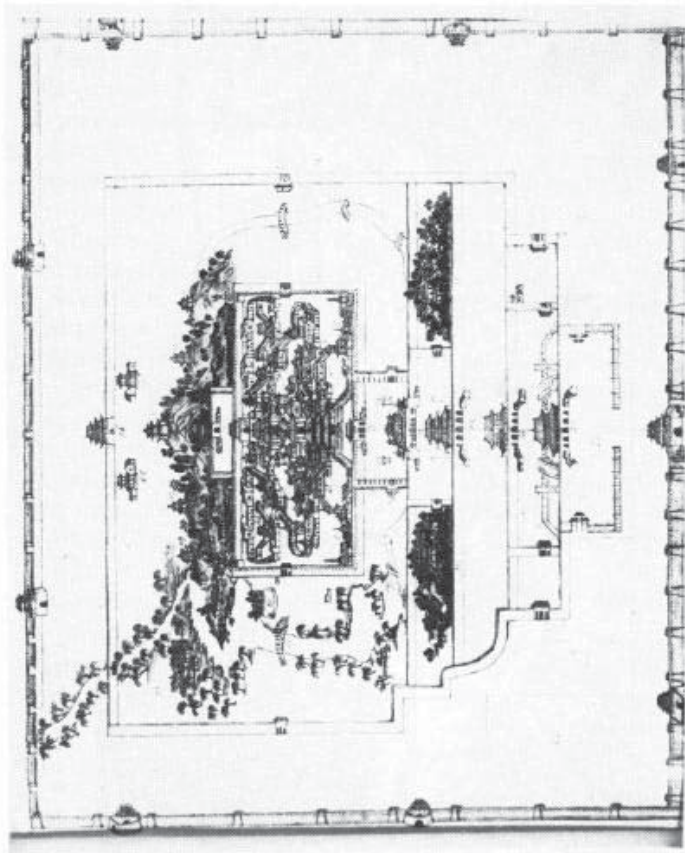
'The *te* of T'ang having declined, the [missions] of distant *lung-fu* areas did not come.' Then, with Sung unification, foreign countries came from all directions in response to the dynasty's awe-inspiring majesty and virtue (*wei-te*) (Wang, 1968: 47).

PLATE I



She Wei Ch'êng in Yuan Ming Yuan. Street flanked by shops leading toward a gate in the background. From Siren 1949; original painting by T'ang Tai and Shên Yuan, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.

PLATE II



Imperial City, Peking, from the album (v. IV) of the original Dutch manuscript of A. E. van Braam, *Memorial wogens de ambassade der Nederlandsche Oost-Indische Compagnie voor den Kijzer van China in de jaren 1794/95*, as reproduced in Duyvendak 1938 (facing p. 46).

eyed Inner Asian dancing girls to the sandalwood of India or the spices of the Moluccas—had gripped all classes of Chinese society (Schafer, 1963).³³ Still, this kind of oscillation, as Joseph Fletcher observes of the comparable Ming cycle, entailed no change in the Chinese theory of Empire. The inclusive and exclusive policies were alternative practical modalities of the same concept of hierarchy. In later Ming, Fletcher writes, the emperors,

began to fulfill their mandate more passively. More and more, China stood aloof, disdained trade, and viewed the acceptance of Central Asian tribute as a concession; nevertheless, it would be a distortion to regard the early Ming explorations simply as the events of an isolated episode. That the Ming tried to draw the world closer during the early history of the dynasty and not afterwards reflects the Ming's early strength and its later weakness. It does not reflect a change of doctrine or an abdication of the emperor's world supremacy. The early initiative and later withdrawal occurred within the context of the same institutions and imperial claims. The foreign expeditions and diplomatic concessions of the Hung-wu and Yung-lo periods represent Ming values in a period of strength, while the antforeignism and anticommmercialism of the later Ming are their expression in a period of weakness (Fletcher, 1968: 215; cf. Dermigny, 1964, v. 1: 296).

We see how inadequate is the idea of Chinese 'self-sufficiency' which Western scholars have been repeating tautologically and for too long to explain Ming and Ch'ing indifference to European commodities (Cranmer-Byng, 1962: 12; Fairbank, 1942: 139; Greenberg, 1951: 5). Even in the earlier Ch'ing there had been more than traces of a revived commercial cycle, complemented by the interest of the long-ruling K'ang Hsi Emperor (reign: 1662–1722) in European arts and sciences (Mancall, 1984: 60–3, 85f; Spence, 1975; Pritchard, 1929: 104ff; Wills, 1979). But now there were new factors in play, including the Manchu failure to control a developing private trade in the southeast, in which also were engaged barbarian forces of an unprecedented kind (cf. Fu, 1966: 122–3; Fairbank & Têng, 1941). Outside the orbit of Chinese civilization, these Western forces were eccentric to its tempos. Unlike the traditional frontier peoples and vassals, the Europeans could never be controlled or bought off (cf. Lattimore, 1940). Indeed, their demands on China generally augmented over time, according to their own

³³ Schafer notes:

The Chinese taste for the exotic permeated every social class and every part of daily life: Iranian, Indian and Turkish figures and decorations appeared on every kind of household object. The vogue for foreign clothes, foreign food and foreign music was especially prevalent in the eighth century, but no part of the T'ang era was free from it (1963: 28).

entrepreneurial rhythms. The Manchu dynasts found Western silver quite useful for their own world-system projects. But during the rule of the Ch'ien-lung Emperor, precisely at the greatest extent of Manchu conquests and the height of the imperial powers, the Son of Heaven preferred to satisfy his interest in things foreign through the contemplation of his own gardens. From what he saw there, he could always be sure of his world-constituting virtue.

The Sandwich Islands

While the Celestial Emperor had no need of British manufacturers, the kings and would-be kings of the Sandwich Islands, by reason of their own heavenly status, could not get enough. Nor was their avidity confined to European material goods, which they considered generally superior to their own; they wanted the identity of the European great, whose names and habits they adopted as signs of their own dignity. By 1793, the same year the Ch'ien-lung Emperor commended the tributary English king for showing him the proper reverence, the three most powerful Hawaiian rulers had been pleased to name their sons and heirs 'King George' (Bell, 1929 I(5): 64).³⁴ An agent of the American Fur company describes the Honolulu sporting scene in 1812:

At the race course I observed Billy Pitt, George Washington and Billy Cobbet walking together in the most familiar manner, and apparently engaged in confidential conversation; while in the center of another group, Charley Fox, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, Bonaparte and Tom Paine were seen on equally friendly terms with each other (Cox, 1832: 144).

Within the decade the Hawaiian 'Billy Pitt', a.k.a. Kalanimoku, will indeed be 'Prime Minister' of a unified Sandwich Islands kingdom, with his classificatory brothers 'Cox' Ke'eaumoku and 'John Adams' Kuakini respectively ruling as the governors of Maui and Hawai'i Island.

Clearly these foreigners by whom Hawaiian ruling chiefs took consciousness of themselves were not unruly barbarians from the

³⁴ On the efforts of the Hawai'i Island King Kamehameha (later conqueror of the Archipelago) to 'live like King George' in the early 1790s, see Sahlins (1981: 30). This work and others (Sahlins, 1985a; Kirch & Sahlins, in preparation) can be consulted for greater detail in events of Hawaiian history discussed here. Unfortunately the present necessity of providing comparative materials from Hawaii involves the double academic fault of repeating myself in a too condensed way.

margins of the earth. Rather, they came from the sky beyond the horizon: from the mythical Kahiki, the celestial and overseas homelands of gods, sacred chiefs and cultural good things. Like the royal ancestors who brought thence foods, rites, tabus—the means of human life and the distinctions of social order—the White men or *Haole* were perceived as bearers of powers civilizing and divine (cf. Sahlins, 1981, 1985). Well into the nineteenth century the history of the Islands was shaped by this correlation between foreign and Polynesian powers-that-be.

From the time of Cook, who was searching a northwest passage to the Orient, Westerners had come to Hawaii because of the China trade. But nearly everything in the intercultural encounter was the opposite to their Chinese experience. Macartney had refused to ko-tow to the Chinese Emperor, as it would impugn the dignity of his own King; whereas, when Cook first stepped ashore at Kaua'i Island the Hawaiians promptly prostrated before him, as they did for those high chiefs whom they called *akua*, 'gods' (Malo, 1951: 54). And if the great Hawaiian chiefs competed to distinguish themselves by taking on European identities, it was because unlike the Celestial Emperor, the Unique Man, they confronted each other as perpetual rivals who in their own divinity were virtual doubles (cf. Valeri, 1972, 1981; Sahlins, 1985b).

Traditionally Hawaiian ruling chiefs had vied for ancestry and tabu status by strategic marriages with noble women and violent sacrifices of royal adversaries. Such exploits could represent in social practice the theory of sovereignty encoded in myth and enacted in annual rite: theory of usurpation by the upstart warrior, who is archetypally a stranger, and whose victory over the god or king of ancient lineage involves also the seizure of his predecessor's sacred wife. The realm of the political, then, appears as a practical version of the cosmological: a transposition of the Polynesian scheme of the appropriation of the bearing earth (= the sacred wife) from the god (= the reigning king) by and for human kind (= the usurper-warrior). But as thus transposed to practice, the competition for divine honours becomes permanent and indecisive. By virtue of a long history of strategic intermarriages, contending chiefs are all able to trace their lineage one way or another (i.e., bilaterally) to the same godly sources. Genealogy turns into an argument rather than an entitlement. And a kind of entropy appears in the system of rank, a tendency to move toward an undifferentiated state, for by some line of descent or another an ambitious chief could pretend to

seniority over political rivals who on similar grounds supposed themselves superior to him. In traditional times a chief rich in lands and followers could always hope to turn such assets into a legitimate claim of distinction. Thus the role assumed by the late eighteenth-century visitations of Kahiki: in analogous ways the chiefs searched distinction in the relations and goods of Western commerce. The whole of this history seems epitomized by an incident of 1793, when the soon-conqueror of archipelago Kamehameha formally greeted the British commander Vancouver while clad in a fine Chinese dressing gown which he considered 'the most valuable garment in his wardrobe' as his predecessor (Kalaniopu'u) had received it as a present from Captain Cook (Manby, 1929: 40).³⁵

However, the report of certain Americans alongside English and Frenchmen among the *tout* Honolulu of 1812 reflects an important shift in the international order of the trans-Pacific commerce. By the turn of the nineteenth century, Yankee entrepreneurs had captured the Northwest Coast—Canton fur trade, the possibilities of which were originally disclosed by Cook's third voyage, and initially exploited by British shipping.³⁶ Cut off from the British West Indies after the Revolution, the merchants of the fledgling United States had turned to the markets of the Far East. The problem was that they had precious little silver to offer for Chinese goods. 'To find something saleable in Canton was the riddle of the China trade', Samuel Eliot

³⁵ Since Cook did not see China and such a present is not mentioned in the chronicles of his voyage, Kamehameha's story seems unlikely, except that fur traders such as Meares and Colnett were perceived by Hawaiians as connected to Cook and perhaps one of these brought the Chinese gown to the Islands.

³⁶ For American participation in the Canton market during the maritime fur trade and subsequent periods see Latourette (1917), Morse (1966), and Pitkin (1935), and for the particular impact on Hawaii, Bradley (1968) and Morgan (1948). The British fur traders included Indian 'Country Traders' (cf. Meares, 1790). The fact that the Indian Country trade in opium and raw cotton at Canton was well on the way to resolving the problem of British silver expenditures probably made it easier for the Americans to displace the British on the Northwest Coast. In the first decade of the nineteenth century the Americans also extended their operations to sealing off the California coast and the Falklands. A sense of the shifting presence of British and Americans in the Pacific at this time can be had from a sample of the shipping in the Hawaiian Islands (based on Judd & Lind, 1974). In the years 1786–99, British ships outnumbered Americans in the Islands by a ratio of 6:5; whereas, in the period 1800–10, Americans took a 19:1 lead (cf. Howay, 1930–4).

Morison observes, but 'Boston and Salem solved it' (1961: 46).³⁷ Morison perhaps exaggerates, inasmuch as Pacific sea-otter pelts and other fine furs never yielded the Americans more than about one-sixth of the funds they needed to pay for China goods (Pitkin, 1835: 245f). The rest had to be covered in specie, such as they got from the neutral carrying trade in Europe during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars.³⁸ This continuing silver drain gave American traders an equally persistent interest in products of Pacific islanders that could fit the categories of Chinese consumers.

Thus the search for sandalwood, such as the Chinese had been importing from India and the Indies since the T'ang dynasty for use in noble architecture, fine *objets d'art* and to disseminate the whiff of an increasingly influential Buddhism. As incense and in image, 'the divinely sweet odour of the sandal expressed to the senses the antidemonic properties concealed within its godlike body' (Schafer, 1963: 137). A thousand years later, by virtue of powers undreamed of in this philosophy, the properties concealed in sandalwood trees of the New Hebrides, Hawaii and the Fiji Islands, used to drive out Chinese demons, could thereby be transformed into teas that in turn generated pecuniary returns to American entrepreneurs at whatever the cost to whom it might concern.

In Hawai'i the sandalwood trade superseded an earlier commerce in 'refreshments' that had already made the Islands 'a great caravansary' on the Northwest Coast-Canton fur trade route (Fleurieu in Bradley, 1968: 22). The strategic location of the group was one reason for the refreshment trade. Another was the superior ability of Hawaiian chiefs, by comparison to the Northwest Indians, to supply provisions to the shipping (Howay, 1930). I say 'chiefs' because (as I have elsewhere documented), they took main control of this trade, using traditional privileges

³⁷ Of all commodities, Latourette writes, specie was, 'the one which the United States could least spare at that time. They had no silver or gold mines of importance. What came into the country was largely smuggled in from the Spanish colonies and was greatly needed to pay European bills. Specie was consequently hard to obtain for such luxuries as China goods, and when secured, much popular irritation was felt at its use for such a purpose' (Latourette, 1917: 28).

³⁸ Americans were in the neutral carrying trade until the Jeffersonian embargo of 1808-9; thereafter the European trade was resumed but with an altered set of markets. The War of 1812-14 also reduced American trade in the Pacific and China (cf. Pitkin, 1835: 302).

such as their tabuing-powers to organize it in their own interests (cf. Sahlins, 1981). Suffice it here to note that the chiefs were able to impose their own demands: at once on Westerners for armaments; and on the Hawaiian people for labour and produce, largely unpaid. By 1810 the Hawai'i island ruler Kamehameha, through a superior access to European trade—grounded in a privileged relation to the manes of Captain Cook—had unified the group in a conquest kingdom. Hawaiian sandalwood was about to become the staple commercial interest of the Islands. To American merchants it became even more interesting around 1820, as returns declined in the maritime fur trade. Whereas in Hawaii, the sandalwood trade literally enriched the customary conflicts between the king and ranking chiefs, which more and more appeared as demonstrations of indigenous *mana* in the most appropriate forms of foreign wealth. The rivalries became so serious that *Haole* inside-dopesters were predicting a partition of the kingdom among 'the grandees' after Kamehameha's death, a kind of decentralization that had also happened before (Whitman, 1979: 89; Chamisso, 1981: 431-2; Rocquefeuil, 1823, v. 2: 342f; cf. Sahlins, 1972: 144f). But as it happened now, the King died in 1819, thus bringing the Polynesian political cycle into conjunction with an equally characteristic capitalist economic cycle—and launching the Hawaiian great on their brilliant careers of conspicuous consumption.

America in 1818-19 was in the grip of a financial crisis. Among New England merchants the shortage of specie put a premium on Hawaiian sandalwood as a means of carrying on a China trade. The Americans thereupon

descended upon the islands in a swarm, bringing with them everything from pins, scissors, clothing, and kitchen utensils to carriages, billiard tables, house frames, and sailing ships, and doing their utmost to keep the speculating spirit at a fever heat among the Hawaiian chiefs. And the chiefs were not slow about buying; if they had no sandalwood at hand to pay for the goods, they gave promissory notes (Kuykendall, 1968: 69).

They were not slow about buying—only about paying. Contemporary documents give the impression of an *opéra bouffe* staged in naïve tropical settings richly furnished from an international division of labour: these huge Polynesian notables covered in variegated costumes of fine Chinese silk and English broadcloth, being hauled through the dusty lanes of Honolulu in pony chaises or wheelbarrows by straining menials clad in loincloths,

or playing at scenes of European dining in thatched houses at teak tables set with English silver and crystal—with all the good things imported on the never-never. Whereas the common people enter only as supporting characters: arduous work, given the sheer bulk of the ruling chiefs. Although many of the chiefs were now professing Christians, they would never learn to mortify their own flesh. The family that *de facto* governed the Islands after Kamehameha's death (the Ka'ahumanu people) included five brothers and sisters weighing in at contemporary estimates of 250 to 350 lbs (Bloxam, Narrative 15, 28 May 1825; Dampier, 1971: 48). Signifying the control of land, food and people, and the means of their productivity—all godlike powers—fat was beautiful in the Hawaiian system. But in recompense for the prolonged labour of working sandalwood, the underlying people were only poorly fed, or not fed at all; nor did they share in the commercial returns. Their labour was exacted as a kind of ground rent due to the chiefly 'lord of the land' (*haku'āina*; cf. Mathison, 1825: 384–5).

Meanwhile the elite consumption fever was being fueled by two intersecting systems of rivalry: on one side the American merchants competing with each other for custom; on the other, the Hawaiian chiefs with the custom of competing with each other.³⁹ And all the while the traders were undercutting one another—as by advancing ever more elegant goods while denigrating their competitors—they were appealing to the chiefs' emulative spirit of self-regard. As the Hawaiian historian says: 'The chiefs were all bent at this time at securing honors for themselves' (Kamakau, 1961: 265). By the close of 1821, the King and chiefs are reported to own 'Ten large and elegant Brigs, besides a large number of Sloops & Schooners, all of which they have purchased from Americans' (USCD, Jones: 31 Dec. 1821). This includes *Cleopatra's Barge*, a luxuriously fitted and leaky vessel sent out by a Boston firm to dazzle the local nobility, which King Liholiho (Kamehameha II) agreed to buy for \$90,000 in sandalwood—that the firm's Honolulu agent Bullard could not collect (Bullard, Letters). Still Bullard reported optimistically to Boston: 'If you want to know how religion

³⁹ 'Till now', goes the characteristic complaint of a *Haole* merchant about his competitors' trading practices, 'I never knew the rascality of mankind, everyone here is ready to cut his neighbor's throat, truth is never spoken, treachery is the order of the day. I am disgusted with my fellow [White] man' (J.C. Jones, ML: 6 July 1821).

stands at the Islands, I can tell you; all sects are tolerated and the King worships the Barge' (ibid., 1 Nov. 1821).

By this time in fact the King had formally abolished the old religion, yet he and the other ruling chiefs continued to testify to a divinity of ancient memory in their own nature. Hence their appropriation of Western distinctions between 'plain' and 'fancy' goods, and their appreciation especially for those fineries whose lustre, reflecting a celestial brilliance, accorded with their received ideas of aristocratic flash. 'Send out articles of a showy kind', the merchant John C. Jones wrote to his suppliers (ML: 9 Mar 1823); 'everything new and elegant will sell at a profit, coarse articles are of no use' (ibid., 31 May 1823); 'fine cloth would have commanded any price' (10 Oct. 1822).⁴⁰ Trade goods were glorious artificial extensions of sacred chiefly bodies already stretched to their organic limits. Indeed, just as in the case of the chiefs' *avoiropois*, all their indulgences seemed designed to magnify their persons, including the expenditures on the large corps of domestic retainers kept to minister to their bodily wants and pleasures (Steward, 1930: 138; Corney, 1896: 105; Judd, 1966: 21). The chief's retinue was like a superbeing, its numerous members functioning to sustain the one life with which all were identified. At the same time, given the traditional indeterminacies of chiefly honours, the entropy of the ranking system, each chief was bent on proving in the new medium of commercial prowess that he was equal to and better than, the same as and different from, the others. The elite economy was an arena of differentiation, where invidious distinctions were played out between the powers-that-be and those that only would-be.

Thus certain other characteristics of this Polynesian market: the endless pursuit of novelty, the rage for the latest Boston fashions, and the hoarding of foreign goods taken as signs and projections of the 'civilized' person. Another trader writes to his Boston suppliers that having sold fifteen bedsteads he had

⁴⁰ The instructions on appropriate Boston cargoes for the Hawaii trade that Jones was sending to the firm of Marshall and Wildes, amounting to a current catalogue of Polynesian splendours, are an interesting example of the way the indigenous conception of *mana* shaped the course of capitalist profit. The catalogue ranges from 'superfine broadcloth & cassimere' or domestic table cloths, writing desks and trunks covered with red leather, to the steamboat for which 'the King and Pitt would give any price.' 'You'd be surprised how fast these people are advancing toward civilization', Jones writes, telling how just the other day Mr Pitt asked for three gold-adorned carriages (ML: 31 May 1823). The carriages were of the general type Macartney had brought to China, but which left the Emperor and court unimpressed.

exhausted the Honolulu market since 'they are all alike'. He adds that 'your best silks are but little wanted' because stuff of the same kind had come out before in a competitor's ship, 'and they [the Hawaiians] want such patterns as they have never seen before' (Hunnewell, Letters: 30 Dec. 1829). This pursuit of individual distinction had been running strong since Kamehameha's death—'Everyone that comes brings better and better goods, and such as they have not seen will sell when common ones will not' (Bullard, Letters: 4 July 1821). And precisely as the commercial goods contributed to personal distinction, they were not at all destined for general distribution. They were ostentatiously hoarded up, a conspicuous thesaurization: amassed even to the point of waste, as if any depletion of the accumulated foreign goods were the sign of a personal diminishment. The chiefs were disinclined to make any inroads on their stocks-in-hand, even when needed for some ceremonial purpose. They preferred then to buy more of what they already had in abundance:

These people have an incurable reluctance to part with anything they have stored away. There is now an immense amount of property stowed away in cases & dirty houses which is rotting away, but which the chiefs will not take out of their repositories even to use themselves. The King [Liholiho] some time ago was in want of duck [cloth] when it was scarce & bought a few bolts at a very high price, when at the same time he had two or three hundred bolts which was stored away rotting (Hammatt Journal: 18 Aug. 1823).

Related to production by such interests of consumption, the Hawaiian nobility soon showed themselves unable to compete with advancing capitalist modes of exploiting the Islands' resources. As Adam Smith said: 'It seldom happens that a great proprietor is a great improver' (*Weal. Nat.* III. 2). The ruling chiefs had a greater ability to accumulate goods than they had to make others pay for them. Even were they inclined to productive investments, all they had were commercial debts—which the common people lost interest in working off by forced labour perhaps faster than they were losing the population numbers to do so. The chiefs too were dying out: a mortality that is usually taken as the reason they gave the authority over to White men. But the explanation reverses matters. The chiefs were obsolete as a ruling class, and simply failed to make use of available social means of reproducing themselves as such.⁴¹ In a similar situation

⁴¹ Cf. The minutes of the Hawaiian Council of Nobles during the Session of 1845, where an ennoblement procedure was discussed and adopted (AH/Leg. Journ.).

of misfortune the Kwakiutl Indians recruited women and commoner men to noble positions, thereby sustaining the celebrated 'potlatch' system for nearly two centuries. And if the Kwakiutl chief had no daughter by whose marriage he could transfer ancestral names and privileges, and thus constitute enduring alliances with other lineages, he could marry off his son's left side or else make someone a wife out of his own left foot (Boas, 1966: 55).

The Kwakiutl

The early contact histories of British Columbia and the Sandwich Islands are linked by the same European names—Cook and Vancouver, Portlock and Dixon, Meares, Colnett, Ebenezer Townsend, Peter Corney—but the relationship the Kwakiutl fashioned with such Westerners, then and later, was different from the Hawaiian experience. This much was the same: for the Indians too wealth and power were traditionally obtained from beyond society, and especially from sea and sky; so in analogous ways certain Western commodities were subsumed as indigenous values. Still, to mention only the most striking difference, the Kwakiutl acquired cosmic powers not by consuming the riches of the market economy, as though to inflate their own persons, but by ostentatiously giving goods away, in a manner that signified the incorporation of other people.

Western commerce had made possible a spectacular process of develop-man on the Northwest Coast, the elaboration of the famous potlatch system (cf. Boas, 1897, 1921, 1930, 1935, 1966).⁴² Ceremonial and aesthetic as well as political, this was a total cultural development that for over 150 years resisted the equally broad assault of Western imperialism, whether in the form of Christian missionaries, legal sanctions of the Canadian government, or the relations of capitalist production in the lumber, fishing, canning and prostitution industries. The Kwakiutl could not be faulted for their aptitudes as wage workers, or even as entrepreneurs, but White men often wrung their hands about what the Indians did with their earnings, which was to pile

⁴² On Kwakiutl potlatching and cosmology, apart from Boas' classical descriptions, I have relied heavily on the interpretive accounts of Goldman (1975), Dullabaun (1979) and Walens (1981), as well as the studies of Codere (1950, 1957, 1967), Drucker & Heizer (1967) and Barnett (1938). An important study of analogous ideas among Nelson Island Eskimo by Fienup-Riordan (1983) has also been most useful.

up Hudson's Bay blankets and other bizarre stuff for colossal giveaways.⁴³ In 1881 the first Indian Agent sent a report of the 'apathetic state' of the Kwakiutl, from which he 'must endeavour to lift them'; their apathy, as he described it, consisted of being 'surrounded with boxes of property all ready for the potlatch' (Codere, 1950: 82). Summarizing an extensive study of such official documents, Codere writes:

Throughout the years, the Kwakiutl are described as industrious but not progressive; as measuring up to almost any standard of enterprise, skillfulness, adaptability and productivity, but as failing to possess these premium qualities in relation to the proper goals, or to be inspired to them by the proper motivations. It is as though Kwakiutl were able to exploit the new culture to their own ends ... (ibid., p. 8; cf. Fisher, 1977).

Potlatches involving Hudson's Bay blankets escalated after the establishment of Fort Rupert in 1849, reaching a high of 33,000 in one affair of 1933, but including such expenditures as 200 silver bracelets, 7000 brass bracelets and 240 washbasins in an 1895 distribution, and more recently the likes of sewing machines, gramophones, watches and pool tables (ibid., pp. 90-1; Codere, 1961: 464). The blankets replaced the worked skins of various animals and cedar bark robes distributed on analogous occasions (although in smaller quantities) in earlier times. Distinctions of rank formerly made by different types of skins were no longer so signified, a change that seems correlated with the participation of commoners and women in positions traditionally reserved to the nobility. But I draw attention especially to the contrast between this standardization of the main commercial-prestige good, the Hudson's Bay blanket, and the differentiating consumption of the Hawaiian elite, who always demanded 'such patterns as they have never seen before'—with no intention either of lavishing their riches on others. Whereas, by giving trade blankets to others, the Kwakiutl testified to different sacred powers.

Hunters on the sea and land, the Indians lived by inflicting

⁴³ 'The Coast Indian demonstrated a comprehension of the economic values of the day. But what did he do when he was paid off after his season of industry? Did he spend his hard-won earnings for things regarded as beneficial and progressive by Victorian standards? Did he invest them sagaciously for future benefit? He did not. He blew the works in a potlatch' (Drucker & Heizer 1967: 28).

death.⁴⁴ They reproduced human life by killing sentient beings whom they considered to be, underneath their animal skins or guises, persons like themselves. Animals are of common origin with humanity, part of the same universal society. Indeed the lives of people and game or fish are interdependent: for if the animals willingly give themselves to the Indians, it is because the Indians know how to assure the rebirth of their prey through the ritual respects they accord the remains—a cycle of reincarnation that typically passes through a human phase when the animal is consumed as food. Arcane beliefs perhaps, but they were critical to the fur trade and potlatch. As a distribution of worked animal skins donned by the recipients as robes, the potlatch is exactly the same kind of ritual reincarnation staged as a social event.⁴⁵ Recall that animals are humans under the skin. Hence the distribution of skins as blankets recreates the animal victims in living human form: moreover, in large numbers and in a respectful way, as worked-up and cultural goods. Of course in the fur trade the animal skins had to be given up. But what other than their own total modes of production and reproduction could compel the Indians to take stripped woollen blankets as 'economic' equivalents?

Hudson's Bay blankets had yet other powers concealed in their unassuming appearance. In potlatches they were given away by chiefs to validate their privileges and add greatness to their names. The blankets represented the chief's attainments in *nawalak*, a generalized life-giving power which myth tells can kill enemies effortlessly, restore the dead to life and accomplish miracles of hunting and wealth-getting (cf. Goldman, 1975; Dullabaun, 1979). Just so, the gifts are said to 'swallow' the recipients who are chiefs of other lineages (*numaym*) and tribes. At issue are certain powers of inclusion: an attempt at hierarchy, which is also the transcending of social boundaries.

For precisely by translation into the common medium of blankets, the unique ancestral privileges (*tlogwe*) of the different Kwakiutl lineages could be matched and compared—that is, as the generic *nawalak* (cf. Dullabaun, 1979). Each lineage begins

⁴⁴ 'The Kwakiutl universe', comments Walens, 'is predicated on a single, fundamental assumption: that the universe is a place where some beings are eaten by other beings and where it is the role of some beings to die so that other beings may feed on them and live' (Walens, 1981: 12).

⁴⁵ And perhaps the more necessary inasmuch as certain animals used for skins, among them sea otter and deer, were customarily not eaten by Kwakiutl; cf. Walens, 1981: 135-6.

with a distinct and inalienable stock of privileges bestowed by the founder. In the typical narrative, a specific animal descends from the heavens to a particular place on the beach, takes off his animal mask and becomes the human ancestor. The mask itself is one of these permanent lineage treasures, as are certain totem poles, house posts, carved boxes, feast dishes and the names that confer given place and precedence in the pan-Kwakiutl potlatch order. Means and signs of the lineage's existence, creators of food and riches, these 'precious things', as Marcel Mauss observed, 'have in themselves a productive virtue' (1966: 220-1). Indeed the chief who possesses them recreates himself as the ancestor, and thus crossing the space between present and past, man and spirit, he is able to traverse the paradigmatic boundary of life and death.⁴⁶

This, the heroic overcoming of death, is the Kwakiutl mode of cultural production. Of course it describes hunting, which not only brings life out of death but, as animals are basically human, courts the risks of a *cannibalisme généralisé* (cf. Walens, 1981: 101). Yet in the same way Kwakiutl shamanism, warfare, trade, marriages, or the ceremonies of the winter solstice are so many analogous and interrelated projects of derring-do, involving the capture of powerful forces beyond society and their transformation into beneficent sources of human existence.⁴⁷ Likewise Kwakiutl politics: the chiefs increased the 'weight' of their inherited names by appropriating privileges from other lineages and tribes—external powers they could ultimately validate by

⁴⁶ 'To cross what should be an absolute divide and return safely is an exceptional feat confined to the exceptional person who has been chosen or accepted by the spirits' (Goldman, 1975: 100).

⁴⁷ In the Winter ceremonial (which was also a time of heightened potlatch activity) the benefits are diffused to the collectivity and the cosmos itself: through the recapture of chiefly initiates who had been abducted and possessed by various spirits of the wild, in ritual dramas that thus recapitulated heroic ancestral feats of mythic time. As the journeys of the initiates endowed them with spiritual powers, so their successful reincorporation into the community restored the year itself to life, that is, brought it back from the darkness and death of the solstice (Goldman, 1975: 98f). Moreover, the principal initiate, the *hamatsa* dancer, victim of a great cannibal spirit, survives and transcends the cannibal proclivities he ritually demonstrates on his return from the wild. Slowly he is reborn and restored into the human community: proof of man's ability to overcome the generalized cannibalism by which he lives. Here it is notable that (impersonated) animal spirits help in the restoration of the *hamatsa* dancer, which thus seems to show the continued willingness of the animals to give their own flesh—on the condition of certain ritual sacrifices of human flesh.

potlatch-distributions that again subordinated ('swallowed') the names and claims of rival-others. Dullabaun summarizes these homologies in the Kwakiutl negotiations of power:

Power must be acquired. . . . The mode of acquisition always involves crossing some kind of categorical boundary. So, for example, one leaves the beach (where the villages are located) and goes deep into the forest to acquire a treasure. Or one travels a long distance over the sea to acquire powers through marriage from these distant fathers-in-law. The most radical kind of boundary crossing (and hence the source of the most valued power) occurs when a person (an initiate in the winter ceremonial) imitates his patron spirit and in so doing becomes the spirit (i.e., takes the spirit's name and powers) (Dullabaun, 1979: 49).

Transactions of power involved a second fund of privileges (*tlogwe*), mostly like the original lineage treasures except that they were alienable, as indeed they had been obtained in heroic encounters of the ancestors with spirits of the sea or forest. The most important acquired privileges were rights to the winter ceremonial performances in which such ancestral feats were re-enacted—in a context where lineage boundaries were also transcended: by the organization of larger communities along the lines of ritual societies. Negotiations of acquired privileges were thus the decisive moves of tribal politics. And family histories were chronicles of the victories thus achieved in marriage and war. The chiefs gained treasures from noble fathers-in-law in marriage—as the so-called payment of the marriage debt, which followed the bride—and in war through the right of the slayer to seize the ceremonial honours of his victim. Once again involving the appropriation of powers across a social boundary, the one and the other are humanized versions of the deeds of legendary heroes in the spiritual outer realms. The son-in-law stands to his father-in-law as the warrior to his victim—or as the hero to his patron spirit.⁴⁸ So Kwakiutl say of marriage, 'The chiefs make war upon the princesses of the tribes' (Boas, 1966: 53; 1935: 65n). The object of an ambitious chief was to marry the daughters of all the others. For these others, the alliance with a

⁴⁸ Dullabaun explains:

A man becomes his spirit (takes his name) and obtains the spirit's treasures that enable him to catch game, i.e., obtain food. The son-in-law takes the name of his father-in-law and catches the game (the wife). Marriage and war are parallels in this respect: when a man captures another in war, he takes the captive's name, any dances that he owns, and his body (which is consumed). In marriage, the son-in-law takes names and dances as well as blankets, animal skins and food. These latter are consumed, burned or more typically, given away (Dullabaun, 1979: 87-8).

powerful chief, on whom one bestowed further privileges, was indeed a practical alternative to battle.⁴⁹ Whereas for the rising chief, the attendance of numerous relatives at the potlatches following on his marital conquests 'showed you were a prominent, you were a big man, and you were related to all the different tribes. That's what it meant' (Spradley, 1969: 247). And as a result of the chief's marriages, his descendants could boast in family histories: 'Therefore I am full of names and privileges. And therefore I have many chiefs and ancestors all over the world' (Boas, 1921: 844).

Notice the incorporative phrasing: marriage appropriates new ancestors; it includes the powers of other lineages in one's own. It remains only to demonstrate the heritage in potlatch, thereby turning the incorporation of ancestors into the encompassment of contemporaries. And need one demonstrate here that the blankets which will thus transcend the boundaries between groups and combine them in a higher order, embody in their own production these same social qualities? Or better, they incorporate the same qualities in a stronger form, since Hudson's Bay blankets are the product of the successive negotiations of life and death in the hunt, Indian and foreigner in trade.⁵⁰ Representing in this way generic powers (*nawalak*), the blankets, counted and distributed, make it possible to compare on a scale of greatness chiefly names and lineage privileges (*tlogwe*) that are otherwise incommensurable. Each lineage has its own unique powers, unrelated in origin to the others: the gift of an independent ancestor, associated with a particular territory. In this respect the cosmology of Kwakiutl politics is the converse of the Hawaiian. In Hawaii the sacred ancestral powers are ultimately one, united by common descent in a universal genealogy. Accordingly the political problem to which Hawaiian chiefs devoted herculean efforts of consumption during the sandalwood trade was how to

⁴⁹ In his excellent autobiographical account, the Kwakiutl leader James Sewid tells how his father's father was given a daughter in marriage by a certain Bella Coola chief, whose own people had previously attacked Sewid's grandfather's people. So the Bella Coola chief 'let him marry his daughter so he [Sewid's grandfather] could get all their masks and songs so he wouldn't attack their villages' (Spradley, 1969: 200; for the mythical analogue, see Boas, 1966: 53).

⁵⁰ Just as marriage negotiations take on the guise of war expeditions, an early notice of trade between a group of Tsimshian and a party of Vancouver's people indicates that the Indians ritually donned war regalia for the purpose of the exchange (Vancouver, 1801, v. 4: 133f; cf. Gunther, 1972).

differentiate their sacred claims. If they were obsessed with fashionable differences in Western goods, it was in order to make qualitative distinctions out of their quantitative gradations in standing. Whereas the Indians wanted more and more of the same good, a standardized sign of universal powers, which when publicly distributed made quantitative comparisons of their qualitative differences.⁵¹ The expansion of capitalist trade opened new vistas of social greatness to Kwakiutl chiefs, and withal a spectacular process of local develop-man.⁵²

Conclusion: Tea and Other Goods to Think

Things like this had initially happened all around the Pacific because of that god Tea to whom the British were prepared to sacrifice 'everything else', especially everything that belonged to other people. Or the historian might have said 'the goddess Tea', in so far as its rituals were touted in the eighteenth century as domesticating and its virtues as non-intoxicating, properties that contrasted with its more masculine rivals for popular consump-

⁵¹ Codere remarks on the traditional disposition of Kwakiutl to produce goods in standardized forms, as it were, a preadaptation that allowed them to appreciate certain possibilities of the Industrial Revolution:

The habituation to standardized and pluralized manufactured objects was carried over into the new economic situation in their acquisition of European manufactures. One of the most interesting features of the potlatch was the distribution of great numbers of manufactured goods of the same category (Codere, 1950: 18).

⁵² We need not enter the lists of recent debate about whether the protocol of 658 potlatch names among Southern Kwakiutl was put together after the construction of Fort Rupert in 1849 or had already existed in 1760. Goldman (1975) argues the latter position against Codere (1950) and Drucker & Heizer (1967), who have sought to document the post-contact development of the Southern Kwakiutl confederation. For present purposes it is enough to note, first, that the expansion of warfare, intertribal marriage alliances and feasting beginning in the late eighteenth century set the Kwakiutl in a political field that ran far beyond the writ of their own lineage-based potlatch protocol (the 658 names). Secondly, many of these relations, as manifested in potlatches, aimed at hierarchical inclusions, which cannot be said for the protocol list of 658 names. As Goldman shows (1975: 27-8), the so-called ranking of these names supposed no principle of logic or hierarchical order. The order was presumed to have been established by fiat in a mythical or an early-human time, and consisted merely of a precedence list—which seems to have been used differently on occasions of different kinds (cf. Drucker & Heizer, 1967). Unlike *nawalak* and the implication of incorporation in the potlatch system, there is nothing here of a rank *principle*.

tion, beer, ale and gin.⁵³ One readily grasps the function of tea as delivering a docile and effective working class into the maws of the developing capitalism. But if the spread of the tea-habit were to be studied seriously, one might suppose that here no less than elsewhere the practical function is a situational mode of a native scheme of cosmic proportions. Certainly it involves some peculiar Western ideas of the person as an imperfect creature of need and desire, whose whole earthly existence can be reduced to the pursuit of bodily pleasure and the avoidance of pain. A theological tragedy of long standing, this description of the human condition became a philosophical creed in the seventeenth century and then the everyday fare of the eighteenth—as witness the rapid dissemination of what Sidney Mintz has called ‘drug foods’ among the European popular classes (Mintz, 1985). The development of modern Western ‘civilization’ has depended on an enormous soft-drug culture, at least as a condition of tolerability, marked by the daily general consumption of such substances as tea, coffee, chocolate, tobacco and sugar—a list without much redeeming nutritious value.

If these opiates became rituals of the people—or indeed like religion they made bearable the earthly existence of fallen man—was it not because people were condemned to continuous misery by their insatiable bodily needs? Such had been the tragic Western sense of human nature at least since Augustine. Man is fated to a life that is penal not only because it is mortal, but because he is alone in a natural world that ‘does not make good what it promises; it is a liar and deceiveth’ (in Deane, 1963: 45). Its deception consists in the impossibility of satisfying human lusts, notably the avarice for temporal goods. Man therefore never ceases hoping in this world, and never attains what he hopes for. Pursuing one thing after another, he finds ‘nothing remains permanently ... his needs are so multiplied that he cannot find the one thing needful, a single and unchangeable nature’ (ibid.). Only the state, law and morality—imperfect earthly reflections of the heavenly city—have kept this society of self-regarding men from dissolving into a war of each against all: described by Augustine in the same way that Hobbes, more than a thousand years later, will characterize the natural state. But by the seventeenth century, the Augustinian values were on the way to being overthrown. The earthly underside of man, with all its

⁵³ ‘The tea-pot was a household god, a homely, companionable little god, fitting into every circumstance of life, and always bringing some definite measure of content’ (Repplier, 1932: 40).

attendant miseries, was about to become a moral virtue. Or at least, in Locke’s whiggish reading of the penalties of the Original Sin, human suffering was the beneficent gift of Providence—as ‘the great spur to human industry’.⁵⁴

So by the time of Adam Smith, every person’s permanent misery—that is, scarcity and need—had become the premise of economic wisdom and the source of national welfare. The social and moral sublimation of temporal desires had indeed been dissolved by an on-coming capitalism. What for Augustine was slavery, the human bondage to bodily desires, was in the bourgeois view the essential human freedom. Man became the pleasure–pain machine invented by Hobbes and favoured by the Enlightenment *philosophes*: a creature that moves to those things that do him his own good, and away from things that do him evil—motions to-wards and from-wards that were supposed to comprehend the entire universe of human behaviour. The new rationality was based on an exquisite sensitivity to pleasure and pain, especially to pain, which is at once more enduring than pleasure and the condition of its possibility. But then, the capitalist economy had made a supreme fetish of human needs in the sense that needs, which are always social and objective in character, had to be assumed as subjective experiences of bodily affliction.

Whereas Asia in the eighteenth century entered into the consciousness of Europe as a cure. Land of spices and drugs, of the preservers of food and life, the Orient, as Dermigny says, presented to Europe not merely a spectacle dazzling to the eye but a presence that insinuated itself into the whole body. ‘What it procured for a sick and sinful Europe—sick no doubt because it was sinful—were means for restoring health: remedies’ (Dermigny, 1964, v. 1: 18).⁵⁵

So whatever the pain, ‘have a cup’a tea, everything’ll be all right’. Interesting that like coffee and chocolate, tea was not sweetened in its country of origin, though in the West all these drinks were taken with sugar from the time of their introduction. It is as if the sweetened bitterness of the beverage represented to the taste the kind of transformation it could effect in one’s moral existence. And perhaps nothing better demonstrates the social

⁵⁴ *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, II. x. 6.

⁵⁵ Nor were the curative powers of the Orient restricted to the physical body alone. Fascinated also by the vision of an immense and well-governed Chinese empire, the philosophers passed easily to exotic prescriptions for the body politic. A country ‘that furnishes remedies for the health of the body’ could also become ‘the exemplary empire for the order of societies’ (ibid.).

genesis of these magical effects than the fact that in Britain tea soon took on psychological values far removed from its chemical properties. After all it contains caffeine and was early advertised as a stimulant (Repplier, 1932: 5–6). Now Englishmen regularly drink tea to calm their nerves. But it would take another lecture—the Frazer lecture—to catalogue all the powers ascribed to this brew by her devotees. Truly she is a goddess worthy of the sacrifices the world has made for her.

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Abbreviations

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