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EUROCENTRISM, MODERNITY AND CHINESE SOCIALITY: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF EVERYDAY SOCIO-CULTURAL LIFE IN NEW-MILLENNIUM CHINA

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PHD

LINGNAN UNIVERSITY

2014

EUROCENTRISM, MODERNITY AND CHINESE SOCIALITY: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF EVERYDAY SOCIO-CULTURAL LIFE IN NEW-MILLENNIUM CHINA

by
KHO Tung-Yi

A thesis

submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Cultural Studies

LINGNAN UNIVERSITY

2014

ABSTRACT

EUROCENTRISM, MODERNITY AND CHINESE SOCIALITY:
AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF
EVERYDAY SOCIO-CULTURAL LIFE IN
NEW-MILLENNIUM CHINA

by

KHO Tung-Yi

Doctor of Philosophy

This dissertation seeks to contribute to our understanding of Eurocentrism, Modernity, and their impacts on traditional Chinese cultural formations. It is based on ethnographic research conducted in Shenzhen, South China and Qinghai, West China, and explores the impacts of Chinese modernization on everyday forms of sociality.

I conceive of Eurocentrism foremost as an Ontology, a mode-of-being grounded in a cosmology about the nature of reality and human being-and-becoming in the world. I argue that because Eurocentrism is an ontology predicated on materialism and individualism - "matter" being the basis of reality and the "individual", the fundamental unit of society, respectively - it was able to manifest materially and to spread by way of coloniality. Its perpetuation was justified by two interrelated premises: that the West in being Modern was the avant-garde of progress and, concomitantly, that the history of the West should be the fate of all humanity. It is on the pretension of being Modernity's progenitor, along with its corollary of the Modern being Universal, that Eurocentrism was materialized as an ontology throughout the globe. Because of Modernity's historical imbrication with the West, one cannot speak of Modernity without implicating Eurocentrism and vice versa.

The ideologies of Euro-Modernity have permeated the Chinese social fabric since the colonial encounters of the 19th C. The depth of their penetration renders the desire for Modernity in China today ubiquitous: being modern is verily the mark of progress. But since the Modern is of Eurocentric provenance, involving a certain cultural ontology that was itself the result of a momentous religio-cultural revolution in the West, my research is animated by the following query: How and to what extent has the Eurocentrism implied in Chinese modernity transformed traditional forms of Chinese sociality? My research thus consists of an ethnographic study of contemporary Chinese cultural change, examining Modernity's impact on the most fundamental aspects of Chinese culture today: its forms of sociality.

My studies in Shenzhen and Qinghai reveal that while much of Chinese life has adopted the standard ideologies and practices of Modernity, rich socio-cultural practices of communality and kinship remain. These practices of sociality are a crucial cultural resource making possible the felicities of everyday Chinese living. They stabilize and sustain Chinese socio-cultural life as it is confronted by the de-culturing effects of Modernity. This insight is noteworthy since it challenges the ubiquitous faith that becoming Modern will yield a better life in some hoped-for future, mostly by material progress. Against this, my findings suggest that the "better" life in China is already attainable in the here-and-now, inhering not in greater material progress but in the nourishment of the relations that have traditionally bound kith and kin. Hence, life's meaning does not reside in the domain of matter, as per the illusion of Modernity; it is found in the ineffable realm of moral economy and sociality: in the mutuality-of-our-being. This insight harbours potential, for if acted upon, offers up all peoples the possibility of a human future beyond the monoculture of Modernism.

DECLARATION

I declare that this is an original work based primarily on my own research, and I warrant that all citations of previous research, published or unpublished, have been duly acknowledged.

_____

(KHO Tung-Yi)

Date:

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL OF THESIS

EUROCENTRISM, MODERNITY AND CHINESE SOCIALITY:
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CONTENTS

PROLOGUE **1**

I. BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS 1

II. JUSTIFICATION FOR RESEARCH 7

III. IMPLICATIONS OF RESEARCH 11

IV. PROPOSED RESEARCH PROCEDURE AND DISSERTATION LAYOUT 12

1 WHAT IS EUROCENTRISM? **14**

Some Forethoughts **14**

II. WHY 'EUROCENTRISM'? 16

III. AN EXERCISE IN 'ESSENTIALISM? 18

IV. AIMS OF PROJECT 20

V. THE CONTOURS OF EUROCENTRISM: FROM EPISTEMOLOGY TO ONTOLOGY 21

2 THE ONTOLOGY OF EUROCENTRISM **38**

I. INTRODUCING THE ISSUES 38

II. LIFE AND COSMOLOGY IN THE EUROPEAN MIDDLE AGES: ORGANICISM, GEMEINSCHAFT AND CHURCH CIVILISATION 39

III. MODERN EPIPHANIES 45

IV. PURITANISM AND MODERNITY 54

V. EUROCENTRISM AND THE COGNATES OF MODERNITY 56

VI. RE-VISITING THE QUESTION OF EUROCENTRIC HISTORY 61

VII. CODA 65

3 *TI-YONG* AND THE ORIGINS AND NATURE OF CHINESE EUROCENTRISM **70**

I. THE STORY UNTIL HERE… 70

II. "TRADITIONAL" CHINA AND CHINESENESS: HISTORY, IDENTITY, RE-PRESENTATION 72

III. SINO-BRITISH CONTACT, WESTERN IMPERIALISM, CHINESE NATIONALISM 78

IV. *TI* AND *YONG*: SPIRIT AND FUNCTION, OR "CHINESENESS AS ENDS, WESTERNIZATION AS MEANS" 81

V. MEANS (*YONG*) BECOME ENDS (*TI*): THE CULTURAL ICONOCLASM OF MAY FOURTH 87

VI. A CASE STUDY: MEN'S FASHION AS MEANS AND ENDS, C.1890–1912 95

VII. TI-YONG: A CATALYST FOR CHINESE EUROCENTRISM? 102

VIII. CODA: THE STRATIFIED NATURE OF EUROCENTRISM 103

4 ON THE METHODOLOGY OF FIELDWORK: SERENDIPITY, SYSTEMATIZATION AND DISCOVERY **105**

I. OBJECTIVE OF ETHNOGRAPHIC FIELDWORK 105

II. Confronting Complexity: The Multiple Dimensions of Eurocentrism and China 106
III. Research Principles and Methods 111
IV. Discovering "China" 113
V. The China Experience: Shenzhen vis-à-vis Hong Kong and Eugene, Oregon 117
VI. Finding the Field, Sketching the Fieldsite 122
VII. The Situatedness of the Ethnographer: Object, Subject and the Intersubjective 128
VIII. An Afterword on Methodology 131

5 INTIMATIONS OF CHINESE SOCIALITY: EUROCENTRISM AND EVERYDAY EXPERIENCE IN SHENZHEN 134

I. From Culture to Sociality 134
II. Community and the Phenomenology of Sociality 137
III. Ethnography and the 'Organization' of Experience 139
IV. Exhibits of Social Life 141

6 EUROCENTRISM AND CHINESE SOCIALITY: A CASE OF HUI MIGRANT EXPERIENCE IN SHENZHEN 169

I. Background and Methodological Principles 169
II. The Lanzhou Handmade Noodle Shop in Xili, Shenzhen 173
III. Biographies of Modernisation 182

7 EUROCENTRISM AND CHINESE SOCIAL LIFE: A CASE FROM RURAL QINGHAI 214

I. Background and Methodological Considerations 214
II. 'Home' in Minhe, Qinghai 217
III. Mustafa: The Story of an Anti-Modern Outlier 229
IV. Revaluating Modernity 238
V. 'Well-being' and the Meaning of Life 246
VI. ETHNOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS 252
VII. CODA: MULTIPLE MODERNITIES? 261

CONCLUSION 266

I. Theory 266
II. History 277
III. Ethnography 282

Bibliography 290

Acknowledgments

This dissertation project spanned several years and involved a few changes of address, the most significant of which was the transcontinental relocation from Oregon, along the US west coast, across the Pacific, to Hong Kong and Shenzhen in South China. While the project began not long after I got married, it has only recently been completed: when my eight-year-old daughter finds herself in her third year of primary school, and my younger daughter, just a few months shy of her fourth birthday. Although both were born in the U.S., they have now settled into life in Hong Kong. Such is indeed a measure of the sort of life changes my research project has generated.

Evidently, PhD dissertation projects are more than just intellectual enterprises. They are life experiences that entail disruption, displacement, re-settlement, transformation and renewal, not just for the researcher in question but for his significant others as well. Among other things, this verily suggests that dissertation projects are seldom individual but almost always collective endeavours.

In recognition of this, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my wife, Dheen, and daughters, Ela and Ona, for putting up with my frequent and prolonged absences from home over the years it took to complete this project. Despite the many challenges, displacements, and relocations they have had to endure on my behalf, it is nonetheless my wish that they have been enriched by the experience, hopefully by having acquired the cultural resilience and reflexivity necessary to deal with the capricious forces of change and uncertainty that characterize our times.

On the intellectual front, I wish to express my sincere thanks to my supervisors, Lau Kin Chi and Chan Shun Hing, who generously and kindly gave of their time, wisdom, and experience. They granted me the intellectual space to pursue my somewhat diverse interests while reining me in and prodding me on when needed. Special mention must be made of Kin Chi, who has gone beyond the call of duty as teacher and mentor; by extending her generosity to include forms of material support, she has treated me as family: for such exceeding kindness, my gratitude is ineffable. I am thankful to my Shenzhen/Qinghai interlocutors, especially members of the Ma household, for their warm hospitality and generosity in sharing their life stories. It is my hope that what I have written here may be a testament to their determination and strength in grappling with the considerable challenges that Chinese modernity has foisted upon them. I must also register my appreciation to my examiners, Hui

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PROLOGUE

I. Background and Research Questions

What is 'Chinese' about contemporary China? After pro-market economic reforms were implemented under Deng Xiaoping in 1978 to reintegrate China into the capitalist world-system, its economy grew at a (nominal) rate of around 10 percent per annum, a growth rate that would be sustained for the next 30 years. The pace and scale of China's economic transformation during this period is said to be historically unprecedented. Zhu Xiadong (2012: 103) notes, for instance, that whereas China was among the poorest countries in the world in 1978, with its *real* per capita GDP standing at just one-fortieth the US level and one-tenth that of Brazil, it has since been growing at an average exceeding 8 percent in real terms annually. According to Everett Zhang (2011) this was about three times the world's average, giving rise to what the World Bank (2008) has reported is the largest instance of poverty reduction in human history: hence, between 1981 and 2004, some 600 million were lifted out of poverty in China. The result of such sustained economic dynamism is that China's real per capita GDP had by 2010 become roughly one-fifth that of the U.S. and equal to that of Brazil. It had also become the world's second-largest economy after the U.S.

The effect of China's economic dynamism for its international political-economic status was made apparent in 2008 at the opening ceremony of the twenty-ninth Olympics in Beijing. The latter had been an elaborately orchestrated extravaganza to showcase China's resurgence on the world-stage not only economically but also politically and culturally as well. As Tu Wei-ming (2011: 266) notes, "The overall theme of the most spectacular opening event in the history of the Olympics was to be China's emergence as an economic giant, a political power, and, most of all, a cultural presence on the world stage. Indeed, the apparent intention was to drive home the message that China was a newly rising modern nation blessed with the longest continuous civilisation in human history." Referring to the meticulous and selective use of traditional Chinese motifs during the opening ceremony, Tu continues, "The heavy emphasis on the distinctiveness of Chinese culture gives the strong impression that a preoccupation of the Beijing Olympics was to elicit a new definition of Chineseness in the context of internationalism and cosmopolitanism.

The anticipation of a large number of gold medals was further evidence of Chinese national pride." (ibid).

It is the phenomenal event of China's ascendancy in the new-millennium that serves as the geopolitical and economic context for my project. In the meantime, reports streaming out of the United States and Europe reveal the 'advanced' West to be mired in a Ponzi-finance-induced economic crisis that began with the U.S. sub-prime mortgage debacle in 2008 but which has since spread across to and persisted on the other side of the Atlantic. Youth unemployment in the Eurozone at the end of 2013 was hovering at around 25%. In other words, the talents and productive capacities of up to a quarter of the Eurozone's most physically productive members are being laid to waste, their futures being blighted by forces clearly beyond their control. Since the political and economic interest groups that have been called upon to resolve the crisis comprise more or less the same venal cabals whose recklessness and greed caused it, it is hardly surprising that austerity has been uniformly prescribed as the panacea for the crisis. Given the obvious conflict of interests, we have a classic case of the fox guarding the henhouse, and so we witness privately-induced corporate debt being nationalized. On this front, government belt-tightening exercises punish the taxpayer by depriving him (or her) of government services while absolving the finance industry responsible for causing the crisis. Perhaps I have made light of the situation: existing policies supposedly dealing with the crisis have in fact allowed the finance industry to continue profiting from it. Accordingly, with dramatic cuts being introduced across all areas of government spending, the taxpaying public is being fleeced while the perpetrators of the crisis have been given golden parachutes to live another day. Despite the outrageousness of what is happening, there appears to be so little any one individual or any group of individuals within the confines of the current political-economic system can do. It is the undeniable reality that finance rules the roost in this woeful age of neo-liberal globalization: finance capital is the supernal symbol of the times and the apotheosis of this late-stage of capitalism. Unarguably, it is the signifier and the signified, the means and ends, the alpha and the omega of our age.

Nevertheless, while the traditional centres of the capitalist world-system are now staggering under the weight of endemic crises, there is now talk that only China can

save Capitalism from its contradictions.[1] Naturally, the idea of China saving Capitalism is one pregnant with irony, especially when it was not so long ago at the dawn of the founding of the People's Republic in 1949, when it was widely held that only Socialism could save China. Zhu Xiaodong (2012 op. cit.) is correct to remind us that as late as 1978, a transitional China was among the world's poor. Today the talk is ironically of China saving the world's rich, even the Capitalist system itself. Perhaps there is no better way to make sense of this quirk of history than to describe it as a quintessential case of a 'reversal of fortune'. Be that as it may, this dramatic change in China's fortunes has given its ruling elites a boost of confidence, so much so that President Xi Jinping marked his presidential inauguration speech in 2012 by invoking the notion of the 'China Dream'. As dreams are often allusions to reality, it is perhaps felt that the consistently robust performance of the Chinese economy over the past thirty years has brought the nation to the point where open discussions about the fulfillment of the nation's dreams are warranted. And so it appears that the China Dream is invoked with the same air of self-assuredness as was once the American Dream. Perhaps it is really China's time on the world-stage again?

I would at this juncture submit that the juxtaposition of the three overlapping issues above; namely, *China's modern development*, *Chinese cultural distinctiveness*, and *the end of Western dominance*, present us with an intriguing set of matters to consider. Hence, while it is true that China's supposed ascendency has here been made possible by the enduring nature of its economic development on the one hand and the systemic crises of the advanced Western economies on the other, the attempt to also attribute it to the distinctiveness of Chinese culture is questionable. In fact, the attempt to attribute China's contemporary success to its traditional culture appears paradoxical. Nevertheless, it nicely sets up the question that initiates my project: *what is distinctively traditional about contemporary Chinese culture?*

This is not an attempt to be facetious. After all, it was around the turn of the 19th and 20th century that many critical intellectuals believed China's subjugation by Western powers to be caused by an excess of tradition, especially Confucianism with its perceived tendency to inculcate subservience. As Ci Jiwei (1994: 33-4) has written, "The new juxtaposition of Chinese tradition with prolonged national

[1] There is, of course, the ecological crisis about which none of the major players in the capitalist world system seems eager to address. I mention it here to highlight it as an issue that enters all my considerations and discussions even if I am unable to give it adequate attention in my dissertation.

weakness after the Opium War would sooner or later make the Chinese blame their tradition for their plight, their self-identity for the loss of their self-respect." Tradition was seen as a burden, a dead-weight, an impediment. And, therefore, instead of celebrating the values and traditions of its past, China's modernization of roughly the past hundred years has been contingent on purging them. It is because of this explicit disavowal of its past that Tu (2011: 267) has noted, "Rejection of the Chinese cultural heritage was believed to be a precondition for Westernization and modernization." This assault on Chinese traditional culture, Tu adds, "was most pronounced during the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s." (ibid).

Hence, some knowledge of Chinese history would point to the modern devaluation and evisceration of traditional Chinese culture. The latter, to be sure, has not been feted but impugned. And even if one were ignorant of history, the question about the Chineseness of contemporary Chinese culture arises phenomenologically in the most mundane of ways. One only has to look at the conspicuous cultural symbols of China's modern success to realise that they are all seemingly of Western provenance: mega-cities, skyscrapers, shopping malls, private living regimes, automobiles, Western fashions, etcetera.

I tentatively conceive of 'Eurocentrism' as the tendency to evaluate the entire historical experience of the West as 'superior' and, on that basis, prescribe it as the historical trajectory to be followed by the rest of humanity. In this view, Eurocentrism is a certain Euro-American chauvinism about the superiority of the West. While it may have originated in the West, it can spread and so is by no means confined to it. The West, as such, may be thought of here as a 'spiritual geography' (Douzinas 2010). Being an evaluative posture – 'a way of seeing' - to begin with, Eurocentrism can transcend the boundaries of its spatial and cultural origins. Indeed, it is today as much prevalent in the West as the non-West. My interest lies in investigating its manifestations in the non-West, particularly in China. It is also useful to note that Eurocentrism can either be selfconscious or unconscious.

But what accounts for it? *Why is Chinese development associated with the symbolic accoutrements of the West rather than with those of her own traditions?* Why is Chinese modernity apparently or superficially Eurocentric? Perhaps these questions are rhetorical, since Ci Jiwei and Tu Wei-ming have already pointed us in the direction of a highly plausible explanation: the West features so prominently in Chinese life because of China's humiliation in its hands, beginning with the First

Opium War (1839-42), concomitantly leading to its cultural defeat and subsequent loss of self-identity. Here is Ci (op. cit.: 61) again, just in case: "A China that has suffered from chronic disjunctions of consciousness since the Opium War has at long last let go of its insistence on having its own cultural self-identity and opted for what it considered the only remedy that could bring the cure – wholesale Westernization." Hence, what I am calling 'Eurocentrism' took root in China following its colonial defeat by the West. The historical imbrication of colonialism with Eurocentrism suggests that violence and coercion are always implicated in the spread of the latter, even if amnesia, forgetfulness or memory loss have made the recollection of history onerous.

Nonetheless, the existence of Eurocentrism in China means that Chinese ideas about life's meaning are ultimately being evaluated by criteria furnished in the West. Perhaps this is what Heidegger (1971: 15) was referring to when he spoke about the "complete Europeanization of the earth and man", where discussion is "forced over into the sphere of European ideas," where there is an almost irresistible temptation to "rely on European ways of representation and their concepts," and where these tendencies confirm the "dominance… of European reason."

If we are to allow for the problem of Eurocentrism, our observations above about the nature of Chinese 'development' and 'modernization' can be said to give way to a more general question: to what extent is the meaning of life in contemporary China - including the question about what is good, true, and beautiful – prescribed by the West? In other words, *to what extent are the deeper conceptions of life in China Eurocentric?* We have observed that much of contemporary Chinese experience and development draws heavily on the West for its meaning. As such, the explicit symbols of development in China appear no different from the standard symbols of Western modernity. Yet, because the notion of development in China is invariably of both Western conception and appearance, there seems to exist an inherent tension between being modern/developed/Westernised on the one hand and being (traditionally) Chinese on the other. It is important to recall that this tension was not accidental but was one spawned out of the historical colonial Sino-Western encounter from which the Chinese felt compelled, as a matter of mere national survival, to disavow its cultural traditions and its Chineseness in favour of an alien Western Modernity.

Martinician psychiatrist Frantz Fanon well understood the pathologies that

plague the culture and the being and becoming of the colonized. Recognising colonialism's evisceration of the local culture, Fanon noted: "Colonialism is not content merely to impose its law on the colonized country's present and future. Colonialism is not satisfied with snaring the people in its net or of draining the colonized brain of any form or substance. By a kind of perverse logic, it turns its attention to the past of the colonized people and distorts it, disfigures it, and destroys it." (Fanon 2004: 149). And along similar lines: "The sweeping, leveling nature of colonial domination was quick to dislocate in spectacular fashion the cultural life of a conquered people. The denial of a national reality, the new legal system imposed by the occupying power, the marginalization of the indigenous population and their customs by colonial society, expropriation, and the systematic enslavement of men and women, all contributed to this cultural obliteration." (Fanon 2004: 170).

Against this backdrop, the question of *what renders modern China 'Chinese'* therefore remains pertinent, even compelling. With Western symbols of modernity being conspicuous and preponderant in contemporary Chinese life, one could alternately ask the question using the terms of President Xi Jinping's metaphor: To what extent is the 'China Dream' Western? How much is it an analogue or reconfiguration of the American Dream? Indeed, *how much of the ostensive China Dream is really 'Chinese'?*

I hope to have revealed in the foregoing why my dissertation takes issue with the themes of Eurocentrism, Modernity and their consequences for Chinese culture. By tracing the tension between Modernity and Chinese tradition to its origins in the colonial encounter between China and the West, this project can be interpreted broadly as amounting to an evaluation of the long-term cultural implications of that encounter. Hence, following the line of inquiry I began with above, the research question I eventually settled upon to investigate can be succinctly expressed as follows: *How and to what extent has the Eurocentrism implied in Chinese modernity transformed traditional forms of Chinese sociality?* To be sure, I mean by 'sociality' the interpersonal relations that govern human life, rendering it invariably social.

As my expressed intention to deal with 'sociality' may appear like a diversion from my initial concern with traditional Chinese culture, a brief explanation is in place. Inspired by Raymond Williams' (1989: 4) sense of it being "ordinary, in every society and in every mind", I have invoked traditional culture as being everywhere, and in the values, norms, and symbolic goods of everyday life. Since 'sociality' bears

this quotidian quality of the everyday and the everywhere, I deploy it here in place of 'culture'. Furthermore, I believe that the substitution of 'sociality' for 'culture' is apt for an additional reason. Because 'sociality' refers to the ways people sociate and get along with others, it is the prerequisite upon which all more elaborate forms of culture become possible and are constructed. Sociality, in other words, is the basis and fount of culture.

Based on information about contemporary socio-economic Chinese developments garnered through secondary sources (i.e. academic texts, media reports and general representations), I am inclined to state my initial, very *tentative* and speculative *theses* as follows: *first, that contemporary Chinese socio-cultural developments have continued in line with the Eurocentred trajectory it first started along in the late-19th and early-20th centuries*; and accordingly, that *the tendencies of Eurocentrism have increasingly shifted Chinese forms of sociality and modes of sociation from a group-orientation towards one that is more individually-focused*.

Needless to say, the tentativeness and speculative nature of my theses should be apparent. Accordingly, they should not be taken too seriously at this stage but perhaps be read as the initial prejudices with which I am beginning my project. Their shortcomings, especially in the way I have derived them, should be particularly glaring on two fronts: firstly, that they have relied on secondary textual sources and, secondly, are based upon macro-level socio-economic data. It is in recognising and wishing to rectify these methodological problems that I have proposed to carry out ethnographic research. But more on that later.

II.Justification for Research

As the strongest motives for any action tend almost always to be most profoundly personal, a biographical note seems to be fitting here to help locate the intellectual origins of my project. It is moreover my hope that through this sketch, and by way of the ancillary/subsidiary questions that arise in the course of it, the worthiness of the proposed research undertaking should become apparent.

This is a project in which I have been deeply and personally invested for a long time, not so much as a choice but as something of an existential imperative. Perhaps it is fair to say that its ideas have been percolating in my consciousness before I even knew how to give them expression. As an ethnic Chinese male born in the former British colony of Singapore, I have been dealt the immutable and inescapable fate of

being a 'postcolonial' subject. I have also lived in East Asia, Australia, Europe and the United States, thus having the opportunity to experience what it is like to be an 'insider' in some contexts and an 'outsider' in others. Yet despite the trans-nationality of my living experience, what I found to be invariable was that irrespective of where I was, there seemed always to be a palpable, if not visible, Eurocentred orientation in everyday life. There appeared always to be a Western referent for the valuation of everyday life, for what was considered to be the good, the true and the beautiful. This tendency loomed over all domains of life, in culture, morality, and consciousness. At a more quotidian level, this tendency was evident in the life and lifestyles we pursued: in the clothes we wore, the foods we ate, the forms and content of leisure and entertainment we sought. In short, an all-encompassing Westernisation or Eurocentrism seemed to inform our search for what was meaningful in life.

The 'best' schools in 'politically independent', post-colonial Singapore were generally those that were in some way still linked to the former British colonial system, whether through religion, language, or other cultural and ideological practices. Their elitism was signified not only by the fact that they were English-medium schools – all schools *were*, thanks to the calculating 'foresight' of an Anglophile, Cambridge-educated Prime Minister – but by the fact that many of their students spoke English only, both at home and at school. Their privileged social status was in fact signified by their lack of Chinese-linguistic competence. It is not often that one gets to wear incompetence as a badge of pride, but here it was: Chinese linguistic fluency was in these quarters sometimes perceived as a liability, a cause for embarrassment. Unsurprisingly, the schools deemed 'suspect' happened to be those where Chinese-language was placed on par with English. They were viewed suspiciously also for their alleged links with Red China. In retrospect, the pro-West political orientation of my environment was not in doubt.

Equally humdrum, but no less symbolically significant, I recall the neck-tie becoming a mandatory part of my school uniform. This, despite the humidity of tropical Singapore. The new dress code was introduced after an Englishman became the school principal. On another occasion, I recall a classmate lamenting the fact that Singapore had become politically independent of the British: "If only we were still part of Britain…", he said ruefully to me, in response to which I agreed, sympathetic (!). Such was the consciousness of colonised nine-year olds. Perhaps the fact of

colonization was here more pertinent than that of age, for this sentiment likely also expresses the wishes of the Hong Kong adults seen flying British colonial flags in protest against the PRC government today. I also remember the widespread sentiment of disapproval within my social environment against non-Christian religious practices, against ancestor worship, in particular. Similar attitudes existed against Chinese medicine. The prejudice here, I believe, was against the allegedly non-scientific nature of Chinese medicine rather than against its being non-Western per se. But since Science was putatively the exclusive province of the West, it would perhaps be unsurprising if Chinese medicine were viewed disapprovingly simply based on the (fallacious) equivalence between 'non-Western' and 'non-Science'. In more lighthearted - but no less consequential - arenas, TV programming was heavy in Anglo-American, especially American, influence. So, the West was culturally dominant in most areas of life and there was little doubt about the cultural and geo-political orientation of the Singapore in which I spent my early childhood.

That such pro-Western biases should exist in the West was to be expected but to find them in the geographic non-West, even if it were a former British colony, was perhaps to see firsthand the pernicious, long-lasting effects of colonialism. Still, the tendency of being spellbound by the West is not exclusive to former colonies. This has been demonstrated in the case of Thailand (see Harrison and Jackson 2010), a country that was never formally colonized; concomitantly, making the mystique of Eurocentrism all the more intriguing. Thus began my early interest in questions about colonialism, Western superiority and the sorts of socio-cultural and psychological consequences/distortions they engender. It follows that I am also keen to know what forms of resistance existed against this seeming totality of Western dominance, if any.

I hope that the reasons and motives for my interest in examining the impact of Eurocentrism and Modernity on Chinese culture and society are now clear. Such interests can be said to have emerged quite naturally from my observations of socio-cultural developments in Singapore, the country of my birth and childhood. On that front, the evisceration of local Singapore culture appears to have occurred in favour of a modern, corporate-induced global techno-consumerism one is wary to even call 'culture' except in the most banal sense. This, in large part the result of the longstanding presence of transnational corporate investment on the island. With the economic figures cited at the beginning of this paper demonstrating China's

commitment to and accomplishment of a similar (successfully modern) economic project, I cannot help but contemplate the prospect of the emergence of an analogous cultural wasteland. Of course, one needs to allow for the many significant historical cultural and political differences between Singapore and China. If official historiography is credible, perhaps the most important difference is that Singapore is a modern nation-state 'founded' by the British in 1819 and came to take on its present constitution as a 'politically-independent' entity since just 1965; China, on the other hand, is an ancient civilisation with a continuous recorded history of several millennia. The contrast between the two political entities in terms of the lengths of their recorded histories is striking; and it is significant insofar as time remains indispensable to the cultivation of tradition or culture. Time is the *sine qua non* of tradition, but cultures are eliminated far quicker than the time it takes to build them. Here, the prospect of an age-old civilisation such as China emulating the supposed (global economic) success of a country like Singapore becomes compelling and daunting, for such an event would have to involve an overnight cultural disembowelment of what indeed has been millennia in-the-making[2]. But we are

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[2] As I am aware of the socially constructed - and hence, contested - nature of these categorial representations, I address the complexities inherent in discussing identities associated with 'China', 'Chinese', and 'Chineseness' in Section II of Chapter Three (p. 72). In the meantime, I use these terms in the same way that they are deployed in popular discourse, as signifiers that loosely refer to the place, people and cultural phenomena associated with the territory that is known today as 'China'. In the third section of my project, I undertake an ethnography to empirically ground these notions in Ontology. Although postmodernist and poststucturalist epistemologies adhere to strong-forms of social constructivism and so tend to conceive of reality in anti-foundationalist terms; namely, as discursive and conceptual constructions, I contend that this is confused and erroneous insofar as it mistakes our epistemic constructions of reality – linguistic and conceptual - for 'reality' itself. As our 'linguistic' and 'conceptual' categories refer/point to 'something' beyond them, it is erroneous to be thinking that 'reality' is simply how we speak about or what we know of it. The postmodern/poststructuralist error therefore constitutes a reductionism of Ontology to Epistemology and may fittingly be called a 'linguistic fallacy' in the one instance and an 'epistemic fallacy' in the other; in either case, 'reality' is erroneously reduced to our 'language' or 'concept' of it. This position is mistaken because 'reality' is always more than what we know of or how we speak about it. It is consequently my wish to counter the postmodern conception of reality as being merely discursive - a 'language game' - that I give primacy to Ontology. I refer the reader to the Ethnographic portion of my project, commencing with Chapter Four, as the means by which I deal with the aporia and the radical constructivism/subjectivism of postmodern/postructuralist discourse. In my formulation, therefore, 'China', 'Chinese', or 'Chineseness', although ultimately the outcome of social construction by human agents, cannot simply be dismantled and re-constructed at will by language or concepts, for although we have agentic powers, they are limited. Rather, these are phenomena that are stabilised and so endure through time, institutionalisation, tradition and so, in many ways, structure the world into which we are born. I therefore refer to them as ontologies - modes of Being – with a materiality and structure, since they are not simply discursive acts that can be spoken into existence and disavowed at whim. To consolidate this argument, I uncover the materiality of 'China', 'Chinese' and 'Chineseness' in Sections IV and V of Chapter Four. This critique of postmodern and poststructuralism owes its inspiration to phenomenological understanding as well as to the critical realist philosophy of Bhaskar (1979).

getting ahead of ourselves. While there are such anti-cultural tendencies, I believe that the China also possesses the resources to counter them. Yet it remains to be seen if the Chinese will deploy them to avert such wholesale cultural obliteration. It is for these reasons that I feel compelled to inquire about the degree to which de-culturalisation in China has taken place as a consequence of its chosen modernist path. What effect will such a tendency ultimately have for Chinese society, for its forms of sociation, in particular? Returning to our original concerns: *What is the degree to which Modernity has transformed Chinese socio-cultural life? Indeed, what remains 'Chinese' about contemporary Chinese culture?*

III. Implications of Research

I have attempted to justify the present project of examining Modernity and Eurocentrism in China by pointing to the important findings it will yield regarding the state of Chinese sociality under the transformative effects of modern forces. But I think the implications of such a study are greater still, for I expect that the findings from it will extend beyond a commentary about culture in Modern China to shed light on questions about Modern life *en generale*. Afterall, the critique of Eurocentrism is also a critique of the epistemic and ontic worlds it gave birth to. Anticipating a little, I expect that our proposed study of Modernity and Eurocentrism in China will raise questions about the sustainability of Modernity in general. In particular, it could help open up discussion about human possibilities in the future: What does the Chinese experience offer for the rest of the world's population attempting to replicate its scintillating growth rate and experience of rapid modernization? Does the China model – or China Dream – offer a viable vision for the rest of humanity? Can we all become Modern in the cultural and material senses of the word? Or, should that even be a desirable aspiration to begin with? Again, while it is not the aim of our investigations to respond to these queries, let alone provide definitive responses, I anticipate that they could offer valuable insights. I would add that with the deep and seemingly intractable economic crisis confronting the West, to say nothing about the severe ecological crisis confronting the entire planet, the prospect of such insight renders this project valuable and timely.

In terms of its intellectual and academic implications, therefore, I expect for my research to make a contribution to a number of fields of study. I believe it will add specifically to discussions about China and Chinese Modernity, as well as to more

general discussions about Sociality, Community, Colonialism, Coloniality, Postcoloniality, Modernity and Eurocentrism across the social and human sciences.

IV. Proposed Research Procedure and Dissertation Layout

As conceived, this project has three practical tasks which I propose to accomplish in the following order: theoretical, historical, and empirical/ethnographic. In short, the first is to theorise and conceptually clarify what the phenomenon of Eurocentrism is, the second is to historically trace the origins of Eurocentrism in China. The theoretical task involves conceptualising Eurocentrism as an ontology, as a mode of being. This theoretical move runs counter to common treatments of it as an epistemological problem but is one that I believe is able to account for Eurocentrism's materially and globally transformative power. It is also as part of this theoretical project that I establish the homology between Eurocentrism and Modernity. The historical component of my project consists of my attempt to establish the origins of Eurocentrism in China. The account traces the beginnings of Eurocentrism in China to the colonial encounter that resulted in the first Opium War (1839-42) and closes around the May Fourth Movement of 1919, by which time it was believed that only wholesale Westernsation could save China. I believe that the rationale for these two intellectual tasks appear straight forward enough.

The final task, as previously noted, is to examine the degree to which social life in contemporary China operates under the influence of Eurocentrism. There is perhaps the need for some elaboration here.

As I will demonstrate in the historical section, I conceive of the Sino-Western encounter dating back to the first Opium War (1839-42) as an encounter between two fundamentally different cultural systems that implicate two ways of being in the world. An observation of social-life in contemporary China at face-value gives one good reason to conclude that the process of Westernisation is well-advanced in China, with its modern architecture, urbanized landscapes, motorized freeways etcetera. But appearances aside, *how deep are the effects of Westernisation, of the penetration of Eurocentrism into Chinese culture?* It is an attempt to give a response to this question that I believe ethnographic research is necessary. In offering my tentative thesis earlier, I had relied on the use of secondary, textual, and macro-level data, aware of the pitfalls of information that has come by way of such extensive mediation on the one hand, and that is so reliant on generalities on the other. Happily,

the ethnographic requirement of being present ‘on site’ to witness local realities firsthand is one way of dealing with such shortcomings. Ethnographic fieldwork is not without its own problems, of course, but I shall defer my discussion of them to the chapter on Methodology.

This dissertation is therefore divided into three key Sections following in the same order that my research was conducted: Theoretical, Historical, and Empirical. It ends with an Epilogue, summarizing and reflecting on the findings from my ethnography.

1 WHAT IS EUROCENTRISM?

I. Some Forethoughts

The term 'Eurocentrism' is sometimes understood as the tendency of 'the West' to view the world and evaluate it through its cultural norms, mores, and standards. Understood in this way, Eurocentrism is an innocuous form of myopia caused by the inability to transcend the prejudices of one's culture, an *ethnocentrism* that is no different from, say, Sinocentrism. But I propose that Eurocentrism cannot be confined to such a limited understanding. Ethnocentrisms are to some degree *unconscious* and *unavoidable* insofar as our ways of seeing are inherently limited by our human finitude, by our ability to see and evaluate only in the light of our own - personal and collective - experiences. Ethnocentrisms tend, therefore, to be passive; they are the result of a certain cultural inertia that obscures one's apprehension of the world. They are most often unintended and are the symptoms of a benign innocence and ignorance.

In contrast to this view, I contend that Eurocentrism has to do with a certain evaluative posture which regards the West as the standard bearer of all that has to do with the good, the true, and the beautiful within and perhaps even beyond this world; it is a posture that entails not just a gaze of emphatic admiration cast upon Europe but a dependence upon it for a vision of the human future. Unlike ordinary ethnocentrisms, which are generally associated with and limited by ethnic and cultural provincialisms, this admiration of 'the West' is held by peoples in both the West as well as the non-West. Eurocentrism is therefore limited neither by the spatialities of 'the West' nor the ethnic or cultural identities associated with it, which typify other ethnocentrisms. Indeed, its susceptibility to being generalized as a syndrome outside the confines of 'the West' is an important reason why Eurocentrism cannot be understood as just another ethnocentrism.

The occurrence of Eurocentrism as a general, global syndrome raises a complication when talking about the West viz. the non-West, since the non-West today has been transformed by Eurocentrism beyond that which the term was originally intended to refer – as the West's antithetical Other. This is of pertinence here, for it calls into question the West/non-West dichotomy and the appropriateness of such a category. It would seem especially that the use of such terms today is

essentialist, anachronistic, and Manichean; for neither 'West' nor 'non-West' serves as adequate categories for what is being described. Because of their dialectical encounter both West and non-West are, as Althusser (1971) would say, 'already interpellated.' But be that as it may, one can acknowledge/accept the mutuality of West/non-West interactions without losing the capacity for ascertaining the very real cultural differences that separate the one from the other. In short, I believe that despite the problems they entail, the categories 'West' and 'non-West' are able still to signify what they are called upon to signify: not just as geographical referents but as markers of genuinely distinct cultural formations.

Eurocentrism is unlike typical ethnocentrisms in still another respect: there is much to suggest the perpetuation of Eurocentrism to be conscious and systematic. The fact that it can transcend its own cultural particularity and manifest in the non-West, as it has, would suggest its prevalence to be the result of more than mere serendipity. The propagation of Eurocentrism, as the belief in the superiority of Western civilization, has been and remains self-conscious and calculated on the part of its proponents. It is an effort that has received tremendous institutional support – political, economic, and intellectual – and that has steadily been consolidated since the Renaissance.[3] And it is an enterprise in which the social sciences have actively and self-consciously partaken: as Wallerstein (1997) has noted, the social sciences have been Eurocentric throughout their institutional history. The humanities, of course, are no less guilty: the systematic attempt to ascribe to Europe an exclusively Aryan (Greco-Roman) paternity while obscuring the Afro-Asiatic (Egyptian) influence of that genealogy in philosophy, philology, history etc. has been thoroughly investigated by Bernal (1987). Ordinary ethnocentrisms do not enjoy such robust institutional endorsement or espousal.

In other words, defining Eurocentrism as just another ethnocentrism is untenable, and I hope by now to have dispensed with such a notion. Yet, the notion remains problematic exactly because it is *tropical* and escapes concise definition. There seems to be a constant struggle to say precisely what we mean by it and mean

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[3] I refer to the Renaissance here not to equate its modes of consciousness with that preponderant during the Modern epoch; indeed, the modes of thought during the two periods can arguably be said to be antithetical to each other. Nonetheless, the Renaissance is highlighted to attribute to it the starting point of what I am calling Eurocentrism. This interpretation is consistent with Amin (1989), Dussel (2000, 1996, 1995), Mignolo (2007), Quijano (2000), and Trouillot (2003). Trouillot (*ibid*), for instance, describes 'the West' as an invention of the Renaissance, which gave rise to a global geography of imagination requiring a 'Savage slot' as its opposite pole.

precisely what we say about it. The surplus of meanings left out in common interpretations of Eurocentrism is perhaps also an indication of the degree to which it pervades all aspects of our reality and overwhelms our capacity for its articulation. As a mark of its elusiveness and ineffableness, Eurocentrism seems to be more easily defined in terms of what it is not. There are no existing conceptual templates that can be of assistance; besides, is it not ontological reality that should suggest the conceptual tools with which we understand, not the other way around?

I do not believe that the difficulties involved in theorizing about Eurocentrism should hinder us. Such challenges certainly do not relieve us of the responsibility of having to give it a more complete/comprehensive articulation. Is this not in fact the role of theory – to cast light where it is most dim? Moreover, it is important to remember that the definitional and conceptual complexities that arise from the ineffableness of Eurocentrism do not deny its ontic existence.

I would therefore suggest that the conceptual challenges we face offer a strategy by which we can trace out the contours suggested by the term 'Eurocentrism', and to identify the complex/constellation of meanings implied by it. So, in order to obtain a comprehensive profile/interpretation/definition of Eurocentrism, the strategy pursued here will involve an accretive process incorporating and building on what I believe are its more limited understandings.

II. Why 'Eurocentrism'?

Objections could nevertheless remain. Does Eurocentrism have to be the basis of a study of China's transformation when it appears that Capitalism is the main force for change in China and around the globe? Can one not do this without invoking the notion of Eurocentrism, which seems to be fraught with significant definitional difficulties? Are we, by employing the term, not gratuitously singling out Europeans and North Americans for blame? Is the emphasis of 'Euro' in Eurocentrism not perhaps an attempt to shift the blame for the ills of the non-West onto Europeans and North Americans; problems that could ultimately stem 'internally', from the incompetence, corruption, and malfeasance of the ruling elites of the non-West, as the Western media so frequently highlights? Why the fuss about and focus on Eurocentrism; why not a critique of global capitalism? Besides, is the critique of Eurocentrism not doomed at the outset by invoking essentialisms?

An adequate response to the foregoing would have to take into account the

following propositions: Eurocentrism is, quite simply, the formative essence of EuroModernity, the entrenched system of global domination since circa 1500. While the ancient civilizations possessed elements of what was later consolidated and defined by Europe as Modernity, the world remained multi-polar, polycentric, and without hegemony despite having the features of a global world-system of trade and finance (Abu-Lughod 1989; Mignolo 2007). This co-existence and cultural efflorescence was quite decisively aborted and overturned with the formation of the Americas post 1492, with the ensuing 500-odd years witnessing all but a uniform consolidation of the institutional factors/arrangements that made the initial European conquest of the Americas possible. This rupture of the erstwhile polycentrism corresponded with the advent of Euromodernity, a project which, although constituted by various 'modern' elements of the ancient civilizations, also singularly distinguished itself from them, surpassing them in the depth, scope, and duration of its effects. This project of European Modernity (or Euromodernity), its ubiquity and its singularly exceptional nature, calls out for explanation.

It is important to make clear that the aim of this project in the first instance is not to single out the people of Europe and North America for blame, but to attain a greater historical understanding of how the world as we know it today came to be. That EuroAmerica or the North Atlantic should be implicated in this process is quite inevitable, for it testifies to the very significant role it has played in shaping the affairs of the modern world. Hence, while Capitalism may indeed be the predominant force in the world today, one still needs to account for how such a state of affairs eventuated. How acquisitiveness - aptly summed up by the fundamental economic axiom of 'more-is-better' - became the universal principle governing human action needs to be accounted for. And such accounts cannot simply be reduced to axioms about human nature, for while economic provisioning is an existential imperative the means by which it is organized and carried out is ultimately still constrained within the larger terrain of Culture. As Sahlins (1976:viii) has astutely observed, it is "the decisive quality of culture" that gives "each mode of life the properties that characterize it." And he adds, it is "not that this culture must conform to material constraints but that it does so according to a definite symbolic scheme which is never the only one possible."

The attempt to grapple with Eurocentrism is therefore equivalent to an effort to understand the cultural uniqueness that enabled EuroAmerica to attain its

predominant status in the world for much of the past four to five hundred years.

III. An Exercise in 'Essentialism?

This raises the question of whether we can sensibly talk of a EuroAmerican or Western culture given the considerable geographic scope such a designation covers. Is there sufficient commonality across the cultures of the 'West' to speak of a West per se, and of a generalized phenomenon such as Eurocentrism? Surely, it is a matter of time before the charge of 'essentialism' - consisting of, among other things, a failure to respect *dynamic* cultural particularities - is levelled.

Yet how seriously one is to regard such an allegation very much depends on what is meant by 'essentialism'. At the outset it appears that it is normally derisively associated with the idea of a certain biological determinism, an 'innateness' and 'immutability,' and hence, with a certain kind of 'reductionism.' The question then becomes one of whether the term Eurocentrism suggests Western culture to be 'natural,' unchanging, and homogenous, reduced to a matrix of characteristic 'essences' and failing, as such, to account for either the dynamism or diversity of practices therein.

Needless to say, I have no intention to suggest here that Western culture is biologically determined or unchanging when I invoke 'Eurocentrism', nor do I wish to ignore the very real cultural differences that exist under the banner of 'the West.' Rather than being an 'essence' in a 'natural', biological, and eternal sense, I contend that Eurocentrism is the result of anthropomorphic and social construction, stabilization, and sanction. After all, if the preponderant world order is one in which private property reigns, one has to inquire how such notions of ownership came to be. Associating such ideas of property with the West would surely invoke Europe, but there is nothing in it to suggest that they are 'innate', 'natural', or immutable, to begin with.

As regards the heterogeneity in 'the West', one can of course acknowledge the cultural differences within this figurative West too, but that still leaves unanswered why it is the West (and not the Rest) that has come to be regarded as the locus of human possibilities over the past four to five centuries. Acknowledging the contribution of certain common socio-cultural elements across the West to its rise and continued dominance is an attempt to account for this phenomenon. Denying cultural difference meanwhile is a whole different matter.

Perhaps the charge of 'essentialism' could be more of a revelation about those making the allegation than of the problem with the notion of 'Eurocentrism.' Salleh (1991: 167- 168) is not off the mark to note that 'essentialism' is often called up "to close debate… because discussion had moved into an area either too complex conceptually for the reader, too murky emotionally, or both." I would also concur with Salleh (ibid) that it is a problem that is "exacerbated by the 'history' versus 'nature' tension ingrained in western ideologies, radical to conservative." On this score, it bears repeating that there is nothing about the origins and perpetuation of Eurocentrism that suggests it to be 'natural'; in fact, it is because of the very un-naturalness of the phenomenon - despite its pervasiveness - that calls for our attention.

Alternatively, one may ask why essentialisms are necessarily so problematic. Is it after all not essentialist – as well as a human conceit - to rule out essences altogether? The claim of 'anti-essentialists' that reality is socially or culturally constructed does not in itself reject the existence of essences: reality can be – and is - socially constructed upon a foundation of essences. Moreover, as Salleh (op. cit.) has indicated above, the essentialist-constructivist (or nature-history) dichotomy is unique to a Western conception of reality; its nature is symptomatic of Eurocentric discourse. More significantly, many anti-essentialist critiques are problematic because they are predicated on an all-or-nothing reductionism when the complexity of reality does not lend itself to being so easily reduced. In truth, it is likely that we do not know enough about the nature of reality to be ruling out 'essences' just yet. And in the end, one may not be able to help acknowledging with Landry and MacLean (1996) that: "You cannot not be an essentialist to some degree. The critique of essentialism is predicated upon essentialism."

Hence, in the same way that phenomenology is a study of essences in the Western philosophical tradition, I will here speak of an essence of Eurocentrism as an ethos and mentality, an amalgam of values, a constellation of habits, knowledge, and practices idiosyncratic to the West and those subjected to its sphere of influence. Further, I will propose that just as the study of the non-West has in the West come under the institutional banner of Anthropology and made the object of systematic study, I will here invert the order of things and, in a similar spirit of inquiry, pursue an anthropology of Euro-America to tease out its distinct cultural dimensions.

IV. Aims of Project

It should be mentioned that the search for such understanding is not motivated by merely an academic or quixotic interest. The deep crisis in which Euromodernity finds itself is today quite evident. The system totters as war, economic and financial crises, environmental despoliation, species extinction, and accelerating social inequalities across the globe cast a grim shadow upon our times. It has become increasingly apparent that Euromodernity is incapable of finding a satisfactory response to its growing litany of problems. It would not by hyperbolic to suggest that is a crisis that has on the line the future of human existence, which is a predicament that urgently calls out for alternatives more in line with the prospect of a more peaceful and convivial human future.

But what prospect for peace, let alone conviviality, given the dismal circumstances just described? Perhaps as a start we can refer to Abu-Lughod's (1989) seminal work, which sought to establish that a more culturally tolerant and diverse global milieu did exist before the onset of European hegemony. Our previous reference to Sahlins (op. cit.) highlighted the role of human design as manifested in culture, shaping the modes of human life. Elsewhere, through his studies of Aboriginal life, Sahlins (2004 [1972]) has overturned the modern, economistic myth that greater material affluence is the basis of human happiness. Such studies suggest that there *is* a choice to the contemporary globalization of Euromodernity, and that alternative modes of existence, always subject to collective human design, are always possible. It follows that the corresponding effacement of cultural heterogeneity around the world is neither inevitable nor excusable, which should encourage us along in the process of seeking genuine alternatives to it. Despite its appearance, I hope it is now evident that the concerns of this project are anything but academic.

Indeed, one of the hopes of this project is that we should discover in the process of correcting the distortions of Eurocentric historiography the elements with which to construct a more hopeful human future. Such an effort has however to be guided by a certain reflexive intelligence. The attempt to transcend Eurocentrism by disinterring the past and learning from it should not be couched in a glorification or romanticization of that past, lest we banish Eurocentrism only to capitulate to other, similarly parochial ethno-chauvinisms. Besides, there are also practical considerations to bear in mind: one has to recognize the realities of 21st C political

economy, of the imposing and the immediate - the here-and-now imperatives - of a global capitalist order. We do not begin with a clean slate, and any alternative seeking to transcend Eurocentrism has to be conceived with the latter's obstinate irrepressibility in mind. The alternative to Eurocentrism will have to be spawned while existing within the structures that perpetuate it.

V. The Contours of Eurocentrism: From Epistemology to Ontology

I will in here chapter provide an account of the various interpretations of Eurocentrism and examine their shortcomings. I submit that the preponderant problem with most interpretations or conceptions of Eurocentrism is their failure to probe sufficiently deeply to grasp its essence. As noted, Eurocentrism exists in multiple guises and on several stratified planes of reality. It is therefore quite natural to expect that different meanings are implied upon its invocation. I would contend that most common definitions of 'Eurocentrism' are not so much incorrect as they are inadequate at capturing what is essential to it; and insofar as I attempt to do the latter, my effort may be cast as a phenomenology of Eurocentrism.

My attempt at a definition will therefore involve a survey of the various interpretations of Eurocentrism. I will conclude the chapter by offering my own understanding, which I hope will be comprehensive albeit its still provisional nature. My effort to provide a working definition of Eurocentrism here is guided foremost by the criterion/consideration that it accounts for Western dominance of the world - politically, economically, and culturally. Hence, while some may argue that the ancient civilizations of China, India, and Mesopotamia contained the ingredients of what I am calling Eurocentric, what is spectacular about Eurocentric modernity is the fact that it has taken root globally. This globalist, universalist characteristic is critical to the problem that is Eurocentrism. This has not happened in the case of any of the 'centrisms' associated with the aforementioned civilizations - even if they may have at an earlier point than Europe displayed some elements/aspects of Euromodernity. This uniqueness calls for an explanation.

I began this chapter by dispensing with the notion of Eurocentrism as an ethnocentrism. But that still leaves unanswered the question of what Eurocentrism is. It is this issue to which I now turn.

(i) Western Criticism of Eurocentrism

In *The Colonizer's Model of the World*, Blaut (1993: 10) argues that Eurocentrism is "a *unique* set of beliefs, and is uniquely *powerful*, because it is the intellectual and scholarly rationale for one of the most powerful social interests of the European elite." He adds that in order to justify European colonialism, which initiated the development of Europe (and the underdevelopment of non-Europe) in 1492 and which has since continued through its neocolonial forms, "the development of a body of Eurocentric beliefs, justifying and assisting Europe's colonial activities, has been, and still is, of very great importance." (ibid). "Eurocentrism," Blaut adds, "is quite simply the colonizer's model of the world." And he argues that it is so "in a very literal sense: it is not merely a set of beliefs… It has evolved through time, into a very finely sculpted model, a structural whole… a general framework for many smaller theories, historical, geographical, psychological, sociological, and philosophical." (ibid).

For Blaut, Eurocentrism is foremost associated with what he terms a 'diffusionist' model of history. In its classical 19th C variant, the diffusionist model was predicated on the belief of a world consisting of a two-sector Inside and Outside, with all significant cultural inventions emerging from the Inside, or Greater Europe. Central to this model was the conviction that Europe, prior to 1492, was more advanced and progressive than all other civilizations. In contrast, Non-Europe, which constituted the 'Outside', was considered to be a perpetual recipient of the inventions 'diffusing' from the centre, a fate rendered by the fact that it was not only unprogressive, but plagued by "alienness, savagery, cruelty, cannibalism, deceitfulness, stupidity, cupidity, immodesty, dirtiness, disease, and so on." (Blaut, 1994: 60).

How such a diffusionist model constitutes Eurocentrism should be apparent. Diffusionism puts Europe on the centre stage of history where it is seen always to lead the way. According to this view, civilization emerged in the Holy Land, passed to Greece and Rome, then via the experience of modernity reached its highest levels in Northern Europe and, later, in the United States. And while other civilizations may be acknowledged to have existed – the African, Chinese, Indian, Islamic, and the Incan and Mayan of Central and South America – they are not believed to have reached the level of Greece or Rome before they stagnated. It is because of this ideological prioritization of Europe in all areas of human experience through time that Eurocentrism rears its head in so many places.

Blaut argues, for instance, that the traditional account of modernity is Eurocentric for asserting some notion of a 'European miracle'. This account, which Blaut considers a myth, explains the rise and uniqueness of Europe strictly in terms of factors internal to it; and the bumptious, self-glorification is unrestrained. The notion that Europe is superior finds its justification in a whole gamut of arguments rooted in biology/race, culture, demography, political-social-religious institutions, and even the natural environment!

These arguments are posited either individually or in some combination with others as part of a more systematic body of ideas. And, as Blaut notes, it is because of their systematic nature that Eurocentric historiography is so persistent: the defeat of any one argument only results in the re-appearance of the axiom of innate European uniqueness in another format.

It is outside the scope of this work to review these arguments in detail. Their line of reasoning and their implications can nonetheless be anticipated. Like all arguments that proceed from axioms, those that Blaut regards as Eurocentric run from the fundamental assertion that Euro-America and Europeans are somehow innately superior. And this axiom is deployed whether what is being discussed refers to the categories of Nature or of Culture. This is the position of those who attribute Europe's rise to some internally-inspired 'European miracle.'

Some of the arguments about the superiority of Euro-American Nature are well-known and have formed the ideological and scientific basis for classical Western racism. Biological arguments about European superiority, for instance, have historically been advanced to serve as the ideological - indeed, scientific - legitimation for the pernicious racist institution of slavery. Moreover, arguments asserting the superiority of Euro-American Nature extend beyond the realm of the Human to include Non-Human Nature as well. As Blaut points out, even the natural environment and climate of Europe have been claimed to be more conducive for progress whereas that of non-Europe is said to have held it back.

In the realm of culture, Eurocentric arguments typically fall back upon some notion of the superiority of Western rationality. Early proponents of this view, which included philosophers such as Descartes and Bacon, considered the growth of reason/rationality to be the motor of progress and the single factor separating the countries of modern, northern Europe from their predecessors and their savage contemporaries.

It is worthwhile noting that Weber was perhaps the best-known proponent of this view in the modern period. Weber argued that it was the rationality of the West that allowed it to develop capitalism while it was its lack in non-Europe - as expressed in its many traditions, superstitions and the like - that caused the latter's stagnation.

The Eurocentric history that is of concern to Blaut appears merely to assert what needs to be proven. Furthermore, all assertions appear to enjoy some currency so long as they continue to underscore the notion of the innateness of Euro-American supremacy; that is, so long as Euro-American dominance is naturalized as the result of innate attributes.

Although some of these arguments would today seem both outlandish and anachronistic, it would be a grave mistake to dismiss them on such an account. It would be as erroneous to rule them out as merely 'historical fictions' and to underestimate their impact in shaping our reality. The institutionalisation of slavery on the basis of the racist constructions discussed above should after all serve as a sobering reminder of the power of ideas: beliefs have their powerful material correlates and they should at no time be regarded as simply abstract or benign.

More importantly, the notion of Western, Euro-American superiority persists even if it is not readily acknowledged. One needs only to observe contemporary international affairs to be reminded that the relationship of the West to the non-West continues to be one of that between rank unequals, between superior and subordinate, where the superiority of the former is presumed and its right to intervene, self-conferred.[4]

This was the norm in the epoch of classical colonialism but, significantly, it is still the case now. While West/non-West relations today are no longer ordered by overtly Eurocentric justifications articulated in terms of Euro-American uniqueness as (erroneously) ascribed to genes, race, or culture (as was the case during classical colonialism), they continue to be predicated on the Euro-American belief that it is morally superior, and on its right to act on such a basis.

Hence, while Western intervention, conquest, and occupation were in the more distant past justified on the pretext of spreading Christianity (circa 16th-17th C), the justification later shifted to become the propagation of civilization (circa 18th – 19th

[4] See, for instance, Editorial in *The Economist*, June 2, 2011: Following the headline, 'One for the Opposition,' reads the sub-heading 'The best way for Turks to promote democracy would be to vote against the ruling party.'

C), then progress and development (20th C), first via Keynesian-liberalist state intervention (mid-20th C), then via neo-liberal free-markets (late-20th C). Today, early in the 21st C, the ostensible pretext for Western interventions around the world has shifted once more: it is now to spread human rights and democracy.

The rhetoric may have changed but the mission and modus remain the same. Also unchanged despite much posturing to the contrary, is the West's apparent disregard for life, especially in the non-West: the demands of the West are to be met regardless of what they cost. History has shown time and again that one resists the West at risk to life and limb: non-western governments who have sought to pursue an autonomous path outside the ambit of Western control have invariably had to face military interventions against them by the West. What seems to be a repetitive feature of history, most significantly, is the West's unwavering conviction about its moral superiority. And this is sufficient cause, apparently, for its interventions around the world. No doubt, such hubris has in large part to do with the Eurocentric historiography Blaut takes issue with; it is proof that Eurocentric ideas carry very tangible material consequences.

Blaut's contribution is therefore important, for he corrects the historical record by meticulously dismantling and boldly taking issue with the prevailing body of Eurocentric beliefs. And because so much of the Eurocentrism Blaut seeks to rectify is based on assumption and claim with little empirical basis, his corrective often involves little more than a simple revelation of the facts. The importance of such a task should be self-evident.

Yet, despite Blaut's assiduous scholarship one is left with the sense that his conception of and response to Eurocentrism is both limited and limiting. Because the problematic of Eurocentrism is for him primarily one about the perpetration of distortions throughout the gamut of Western scholarship, his response is one tailored quite specifically to tackling this problem. Eurocentrism then becomes chiefly an epistemological problem, a set of ideological constructions with pretensions to truth deployed to give support to the Euro-American colonial enterprise. Transcending Eurocentrism would therefore first involve exposing it for the ideology that it is – as a form of 'false' consciousness - then providing an alternative account that corroborates more closely with empirical realities. This is what Blaut has sought to do.

While necessary and perhaps an apt initial response to the challenge of Eurocentric epistemology, it seems to me inadequate to be conceptualizing Eurocentrism solely or even chiefly as an epistemic concern. Does Eurocentrism, after all, not entail something more than ideology; does it not stand for something larger than a body of falsehoods in the domain of ideas?

It appears that treating Eurocentrism as a problem in epistemology or ideology tends to confine it to the ivory tower of academia, to be seen strictly as a matter for the attention of scholars. Perhaps it provides heady stuff for the intellect, but Eurocentrism is certainly more than that. One must remember that the greatest challenge that Eurocentrism poses lies most immediately and imposingly in the mundane: not in reified theoretical constructs but in the lived experiences of the everyday. It is lived out and lived with, felt before it is thought out. Indeed, it needs to be noted that Eurocentrism is foremost a political problem; it is the inspiration for and, simultaneously, the outcome of colonial arrangements structuring the world for the better part of the past 500 years.

Although working in a different context and with other concerns in mind, Rieger's (2009) description of 'Empire' seems to offer an alternative formulation of Eurocentrism that is mindful of its political dimensions. Rieger defines 'Empire' as having to do with (p. 2) "massive concentrations of power that permeate all aspects of life and that cannot be controlled by any one actor alone… Empire seeks to extend its control as far as possible; not only geographically, politically, and economically … but also intellectually, emotionally, psychologically, spiritually, culturally, and religiously… The problem with empire has to do with forms of top-down control that are established on the back of the empire's subjects and that do not allow those within its reach to pursue alternative purposes."

Is this not also the problem of 'Eurocentrism,' a phenomenon whose reach has extended beyond the geographic and encroached upon the economic, the psychological, spiritual, and cultural; and that, most of all, has hindered the pursuit of alternative modes of existence? Indeed, it would not seem out of place to equate Eurocentrism with Empire, for the former is foremost a Political phenomenon, vast in scope and reach, preponderant in shaping the world for much of the past 500 years, and involving concentrations of power only afforded to empires.

Blaut's formulation of and engagement with Eurocentrism respectively as ideology and ideology-critique is, therefore, but only one dimension of the problem.

We can certainly ask if there is something more fundamental and essential about Eurocentrism than its status as EuroAmerica's self-legitimating colonial ideology. How does Eurocentrism manifest in the psychological, spiritual, and cultural dimensions of our reality, for instance? Can we talk about Eurocentrism as an essence, an attitude, a mentality, or a posture that infuses psychology, spirit, and culture? Further, how do they play out and subsequently become the conventions of behaviour - the norms, folkways, mores, and social practices that are constituent of culture?

Besides, there are two aspects of Blaut's ideology-critique of Eurocentrism that is paradoxically prone to the Eurocentrism it seeks to overcome. First, there is a sense of an overriding concern with history; yet it needs to be asked if this historical self-consciousness is not itself a function of Eurocentric predilections/tendencies. Dirlik (1999) seems aware of this problematic relationship when he questions if there can there be history after Eurocentrism.

Second, the kind of Eurocentrism with which Blaut takes issue is of the variety that deprives the non-West of any role in bringing about modernity. Blaut's anti-Eurocentrism involves correcting this historical distortion, but appears to leave unquestioned the overall (unanimously favorable) evaluation of modernity. While this is likely unwitting, it is tantamount to capitulating to Eurocentrism of the most fundamental kind. Blaut's anti-Eurocentrism is, accordingly, a form of Eurocentric anti-Eurocentrism: one that disagrees with Weber's diagnosis of stagnation in the non-West but which seems, nonetheless, to be in agreement with his evaluation of Western modernity as the fitting standard bearer of human progress. To state matters differently, Blaut disagrees with the description of the non-West as unprogressive but adheres to the scales by which progress and regress have ultimately come to be defined.

Like so many working in a postcolonial context, he is rightly indignant at the Eurocentric tendency to inflate its accomplishments at the expense of writing the Other out of history. Consequently, mainly with recourse to the historical record, he seeks to dispel the largely self-proclaimed myth of Euro-American uniqueness and reminds us that the West and non-West are after all not so different. But this is not without problem, for in dispensing with the thesis of European uniqueness Blaut glosses over the very real differences between the West and the non-West that enabled the former to emerge and establish its global hegemony.

It would therefore seem necessary that in taking Eurocentrism to task, one would have to account for the very real factors that made Euro-American ascendancy, then domination, possible. Such a task would involve more than just the refutation of Eurocentric history, the terrain to which the term 'Eurocentrism' is normally confined; it would involve comprehensively accounting for the sociological and anthropological factors that gave rise to the emergence of Euro-America in the first place. Perhaps one can describe my task as involving the search for the embodiment – literally - of Eurocentrism.

(ii) 'Non-Western' Critiques of Eurocentrism: Subaltern Studies and Postcolonialism

It seems appropriate at this point to consider the contributions of others similarly engaged in the struggle against Eurocentrism. The Subaltern Studies Collective (SSC), which is a diverse group of intellectuals primarily from the Indian subcontinent emerged in the 1980s with its chief concern being to critique Eurocentric history and historiography of India, which was a symptom of western colonial discourse as much as some nationalist Indian discourses resisting that colonialism. The SSC therefore sought to formulate an alternative narrative to counter what they saw as the biases of Eurocentric historiography. Since then, the group has shifted away from focussing exclusively on South Asia to take up an interest in all postcolonial societies generally, but its initial concern with the problems of historiography remains quite emphatic.

Despite both undertaking efforts to tackle Eurocentric historiography, the contributions of Blaut and the SSC differ from each other in ways that highlight the nuances surrounding interpretations of Eurocentrism. These layers of difference may be read as a measure/statement of how far along the battle against Eurocentrism has come, and how much it has yet to go.

When Blaut denounces Eurocentric history, he is focused on the gratuitous inflationary tendencies of Western scholarship in evaluating Europe's civilizational achievements vis-à-vis non-Europe. Blaut's foremost contribution, therefore, lies in his revealing of certain aspects of classical European scholarship as sham, as constitutive of what he calls the 'colonizer's model of the world.' This unmasking of truth claims as falsehood seems to be the crucial first step in the dismantling of Eurocentrism.

The SSC appears, then, to proceed from where Blaut leaves off. Their challenge to Eurocentric historiography goes a step further than just the repudiation of what Western scholars say about Euro-America or about the Indian subcontinent. Appearing to be invigorated by the understanding that history is written by conquerors, the members of the SSC seek to reclaim the right to speak and to construct narratives of their own pasts and present.

But even such a characterisation of the Subaltern Studies project could be at risk of understating the radical nature of its ambitions. Robert Young's *White Mythologies* (1990), for instance, gives an account of poststructuralism whose central feature involves a thorough questioning of historicism as a totalising universal narrative that subsumes all in its path to the temporality of the West. This challenge to the concept of History also defines the SSC project, and it is here that its radical content lies: the issue is not so much about the veracity of the claims of History *a la* Blaut, but the very notion of History itself.

Yet, even though the SSC shares with poststructuralism (and postmodernism) certain epistemological premises such as their disenchantment with the concept of universal history and their skepticism of 'master narratives', its critical stance towards Eurocentrism is unique because of its relation to and responsibility for Postcolonial Theory. Unlike either poststructuralism or postmodernism, which may in some respects be considered to be Eurocentric critiques of Eurocentrism (Grosfoguel, 2008), Postcolonialism is very literally a non-Western critique of Eurocentrism. The conscious effort made by scholars of the SSC to identify with the postcolonial societies from which they derive is here significant. Indeed, in contrast to Eurocentric Scientific Reason that disavows the entanglement of the knower in the production of 'objective' knowledge, Postcolonial Theory deliberately foregrounds the non-European, postcolonial, and subaltern heritage of its proponents as a condition for its knowledge production.

At this point it is pertinent to ask whether the SSC and the postcolonial project with which it is associated is merely a form of identity – nationalist, ethnic, culturalist, and nativist – politics. Does postcolonial discourse risk drowning intellectual work in a cesspool of cultural relativism in which the ethnic and cultural identities of its proponents become the legitimating criteria for discourse, as some have feared (see for instance, Moghadam 1991)? On this question, SSC member, Dipesh Chakrabarty (1992) is unequivocal. His postcolonial project of

"provincializing Europe," he asserts (p. 287), "cannot be a project of 'cultural relativism.'… For the point is not that Enlightenment rationalism is always unreasonable in itself, but it is rather a matter of documenting how – through what historical process – its "reason," which was not always self-evident to everyone, has been made to look "obvious" far beyond the ground where it originated. And this, Chakrabarty argues (p. 286), "does not call for a simplistic, out of hand rejection of modernity, liberal values, universals, science, reason, grand narratives, totalizing explanations, and so on." The goal of Chakrabarty's postcolonial project of "provincializing Europe," then, is verily the task of the present project of taking issue with Eurocentrism: it is to document how a particular (European) cultural experience transcended its own particularity to proclaim universal relevance. And Chakrabarty is adamant that this can be done without succumbing to cultural relativism.

How successful the SSC has been in the latter regard – to be anti-Eurocentric without capitulating to cultural relativism - remains for others to judge. I merely wish to point out that one of the very important contributions of the SSC to the critique of Eurocentrism is to put renewed emphasis on the sociological basis of knowledge, that is, to stress the impact of the socio-cultural environment on the knower in determining what s/he knows.

Postcolonialism underscores the fact that knowledge is produced at a particular social location in which the 'irrationalities' of ethnicity and race, class and gender, belief and ideology intrude. Given this, Universal Reason as much as the master narrative of Universal History under which all other rationalities and histories are subordinated, is little more than a Eurocentric conceit: there is no such thing as a view from nowhere, no God's eye-view of the world. It is with this realization that the SSC has vigorously challenged for and reclaimed the right to speak and to retell the South Asian past.

It should be apparent that the SSC's intervention represents a bona fide challenge to Eurocentrism. Moreover, the fact that its proponents are the very victims of the Eurocentric History that is being contested further provides a fitting sense of justice to the enterprise: the colonized have rightfully partaken of their own de-colonisation, at least in the realm of historical production. In this regard, the very particular and concrete experiences of colonial victimhood give the critique a force, urgency, and sophistication not felt in the works of someone like Blaut, whose

attempt at writing non-Eurocentric history evokes a sense of abstract academic detachment.

Nonetheless, it should be added that the same ivory tower abstractness appears also to plague the efforts of the SSC insofar as re-writing History remains its abiding concern. Indeed, while the Subaltern Studies project may be said to have countered Eurocentric historiography with its own accounts of South Asian history, one has to be more modest about its success liberating itself from the very historical self-consciousness that is the *sin qua non* of Eurocentrism. In other words, while Eurocentric readings of history may have been 'corrected' with a 'recovery' of particular pasts, the concern and orientation still appear to be with historicisation and historical thinking: the battle against Eurocentrism continues to be fought out on the terrain of history, the very birthing ground of Eurocentrism! This is problematic, for the decolonization of one form of Eurocentrism (erroneous historiography) seems only to be followed by capitulation to another (historical consciousness). But is the critique of Eurocentrism applicable only to the writing of history? Indeed, this issue was raised previously but is relevant reiterating here in the light of postcolonial interventions: is historical consciousness - the very urge to give an account of the past – not in itself a Eurocentric tendency even when deployed by the subaltern? Perhaps the constant resurfacing of this issue merely highlights how intractable the question of history really is.

Chakrabarty is not ignorant of the manner in which History has been implicated with Colonialism and Eurocentrism, for he observes (op. cit., 285): "History as a knowledge system is firmly embedded in institutional practices that invoke the nation-state at every step… (Its importance lies with what) European imperialism and third-world nationalisms have achieved together: the universalization of the nation-state as the most desirable form of political community. "

Guha is similarly aware of the problems of History, whether of the colonialist or nationalist variety. He considered both to be 'elitist' and non-inclusive (1997: xiv-xv): "What is clearly left out of this un-historical (elitist) historiography is the *politics of the people.* For parallel to the domain of elite politics there existed throughout the colonial period another domain of Indian politics in which the principal actors were not the dominant groups of the indigenous society or the colonial authorities but the subaltern classes and groups constituting the mass of the labouring population and intermediate strata in town and country – that is, the people.

This was an *autonomous* domain, for it neither originated from elite politics nor did its existence depend on the latter."

According to Guha, it was in efforts to go against the trend of Eurocentric and elitist historiography to foreground this neglected domain that the Subaltern Studies Project was born. As he observes (op. cit.: xv), the latter "sought to undo the crimping and concealing effects of that failure (of elitist discourse) by means of an alternative mode of thematization – that is, by thematizing the structural split of politics as its central concern." The Subaltern Studies Collective was therefore committed to writing an alternative history in order to recover "the past appropriated by conquest and colonization" (Guha 2002: 2), for as Chakrabarty has conceded (op. cit: 287), it is a history that "does not yet exist."

Given the dominance of Eurocentric historiography and its obliteration of non-Western pasts, one can only acknowledge the import and urgency of such a task. Nonetheless, all critiques of Eurocentrism that place an emphasis on history seem to be hampered in a significant way.

Apart from the fact that Eurocentrism is implicated in the very notion of history, as previously observed, such historicist-critiques of Eurocentrism continue to smack of a certain ivory tower esotericism. This is somewhat paradoxical, for as Guha's remarks above demonstrate, the Subaltern Studies project overtly expresses a commitment to the cause(s) of the marginalized who have been written out of elitist narratives of the past. The emergence of postcolonialism as an intellectual discourse has in fact been attributed to Third World anti-colonial – quite specifically, Maoist - influences; Young writes, for instance (p. 14): "From 1968 onwards, the vast range of intellectual work produced in anti-colonial struggles was gradually brought together, articulated with critical and dissident Western discourses, and then used against hegemonic Euro-centric knowledge and power. The inspired and energized theoretical intervention that was the product of that political conjunction was to become known as 'postcolonialism.'"

Yet the esoteric and academic nature of much postcolonial work today seems to be far removed and detached from the harsh, simmering realities of subaltern anti-colonial struggles that inspired it. While the postcolonialism of the SSC, for instance, is committed in word to countering the elitism of colonial and nationalist historiographies, its efforts to rework such histories have in practice been rather abstruse, inaccessible to the very constituencies they are supposed to uplift.

The elitism of colonial and nationalist historiography seems to have been replaced by an elitism of a different sort: that of the so-called Third world intellectual. That many of the SSC's most prominent members have found fame in the First World and are comfortably tenured in its foremost academic institutions seems to provide support for this claim. It also raises the question of whether the writing of history – whether of the upper or lower-case variety - is not inherently an elitist enterprise. Indeed, is history - even supposedly subaltern history - not inevitably a top-down process, vested in those with the authority to claim 'better' knowledge and to record it for posterity?

The paradox of so-called Third World postcolonial intellectuals living and writing from the First prompts one to ask if such a sequestered academic existence does not beget an unwitting complicity in, and even worse, collusion with the Eurocentric institutions that postcolonialism sought to dismantle in the first place. It is here that the most potent postcolonial argument, which emphasises the sociological and experiential determination of knowledge, loses its potency. Can the subaltern speak? Yes, but who can claim to write on its behalf? Surely, the postcolonial scholar tenured in the upper echelons of the First World academy can hardly claim to share the same circumstances, experiences and concerns of her counterparts back home, to say nothing of what she may have in common with fellow nationals of more socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds: landless peasants, mendicants, and the like.

All this certainly points to the difficulties surrounding the question of history and historiography, writing and agency. In this context, and especially after so much ink has been spilt in its name, one has to ask whether postcolonial writing has been an effective way to overcome Eurocentrism.

On this score, I believe that the foregoing has quite definitively shown the limitations of conceptualizing Eurocentrism as a problem in epistemology, in theory and historiography. It is evident that Blaut's *Colonizer's Model of the World*, the postcolonialism of the SSC, and the several other works that space did not permit us to review, while varying in their degree of sophistication and authenticity, all share the common feature of formulating Eurocentrism as a problem of historiography. Not surprisingly, this treatment has elicited a phalanx of anti-Eurocentric critiques focussed on rescuing the past from the scourge of Eurocentred historical accounts,

and they have all involved an alternative reading, reconstruction, and retelling of the past.

Insofar as Postcolonialism has been a movement involving former colonial subjects authoring their own history with the insistence that non-European societies adhered to temporalities different from Europe, it has constituted a most novel and refreshing theoretical intervention. Postcolonialism unambiguously represents an authentic non-Western critique of Eurocentrism. It has attempted to theorise difference by stressing the alterity of Europe's Other in the face of an unrelenting tendency to bring all under a Western temporal schema.

Moreover, Postcolonialism should be acknowledged for its audacious attempt to break down a longstanding and tacit acceptance of a Eurocentric division of labour in the domain of intellectual production. This division, which may be likened to a form of intellectual apartheid, has involved an institutionalised boundary separating the producers of knowledge, who have traditionally come from the West, from their acolytes everywhere else. This is classical Eurocentrism as Blaut has described it; as he observes (op. cit.: 1) "Inside leads, Outside lags. Inside innovates, Outside imitates… Europe , eternally, is Inside. Non-Europe is Outside. Europe is the source of most diffusions; non-Europe is the recipient."

It should be apparent that this division of labour is analogous to that existing in the global political-economic domain: activities to which accrue the greatest prestige and remuneration remain quite exclusively the monopoly of the West. In the realm of intellectual production and innovation, it is Theory that is feted, and so it is perceived that it is rightfully in the West that Theory is produced and then disseminated, consistent with Blaut's theory of diffusionism discussed previously.

The perception that Theory is the hallowed crown jewel of the Western intellectual academy has been observed by Young to hold still today, and even among the more ardent sympathizers of the non-West in the West. Young (2004: 5) notes, for instance, that although Western Marxism "regularly expressed sympathy and solidarity with the struggles of peoples outside the West, this was never accommodated within its own political thinking at a *theoretical or philosophical level*. Theoretical debates remained resolutely focused on Western issues, Western conditions, Western theorists, and other forms of Marxism, where they were acknowledged at all, tended to be dismissed as inauthentic Marxist nationalisms." He continues (ibid): "Marxist theory in the West would not accommodate other forms of

exploitation, oppression, or resistance, nor would it take seriously the theoretical work in these areas developed outside the magic circle of Europe and North America…. It was never the case that the subaltern could not speak: rather that the dominant would not listen."

It is in defying the status quo of epistemic colonisation and affirming the right of postcolonial peoples to theorise the conditions of their own existence that the Postcolonial and SSC interjection should be celebrated. I would contend that Postcolonialism is nonpareil: indeed, it is difficult to think of another non-Western intellectual *movement* that has emerged to resist the Eurocentrism of Western theory in the past 500 plus-year history of Western colonialism. It is for this reason and in this regard that Postcolonialism signifies a watershed.

(iii) The Limits of Anti-Eurocentric Criticism in the Postcolonial World Today

Nevertheless, despite the significant accomplishments of Postcolonialism, the state of the non-West today leaves much to be hoped for. In fact it may be argued that things, as a whole, have deteriorated rather than improved since the struggles of national liberation ended with the non-Western nations gaining de jure independence over half a century ago. Whereas the Third World in the 1950s and 60s saw the occurrence of the Bandung Asia-Africa Conference (1955) and the formation of the Non-Aligned Movement (1961) with leaders such as Tito (Yugoslavia), Nehru (India), Sukarno (Indonesia), Nasser (Egypt), and Nkrumah (Ghana) collectively taking up the cudgels against imperialism, the postcolonial situation lacks anything comparable today, marked by the conspicuous absence of similarly inclined leaders, initiatives, and institutions.

Instead of South-South cooperation in the spirit of Bandung or the Non-Aligned Movement, we witness a global political-economic order in which 'political' concerns have largely been given over to 'economic' priorities. The preoccupation of political leaders in the South in recent times has been to ratify bilateral trade agreements, often with countries in the North, and usually at the expense of a considerable loss of national sovereignty. Moreover, such an orientation often results in the implementation of beggar-thy-neighbour policies, to say nothing about the prospects of South-South cooperation.

So, rather than taking issue with unequal exchange and exploitation in the global capitalist system, the paramount concern of most leaders in the South today seems to

be to secure sufficient foreign direct investment and trade in the belief that they would facilitate economic growth and development, industrial modernization, technology transfer, jobs, and the like for their countries. The fear among national governments in the Global South is not of exploitation per se but its lack, seemingly in agreement with Joan Robinson's (1962: 45) famous quip that "the misery of capitalist exploitation is nothing compared to the misery of not being exploited at all."

The pre-Independence concern with colonialism has therefore been displaced by an incessant fear of being considered redundant by capital, and hence, of being left out of its circuits. It is a fear that inevitably results in national subservience to - if not wholesale collusion with - Transnational Capital. At the very least, one would agree that there has been a co-optation of national governments by the imperatives of Capital. The righteous indignation once directed at the perniciousness of colonialism seems to have surely dissipated, mellowed into an amoral acceptance of more ethically ambiguous (neo-)colonial relations. In the meantime, the institutions that oversee and police the global capitalist system remain resolutely under Euro-American control, as exemplified by the influence wielded by organizations such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organisation.

The military dominance of the West, particularly the United States, should not be overlooked either. With an annual budget of nearly US$690 billion and roughly a thousand bases scattered throughout the globe, the US military perennially looms as a ubiquitous presence, ready to be deployed should any of the above institutions of 'soft power' fail to obtain the acquiescence hoped for. This is accompanied at the same time by the activities of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), which we should note, is a relic of the Cold War. Instead of dissolving with the end of the Cold War, which was the reason for its being, however, NATO has today been revivified to serve as the military force for North Atlantic political ambitions.

An impartial appraisal of current realities would suggest two interrelated and incontrovertible observations. First, *de jure* independence has resulted not in *de facto* autonomy for the Global South, but in the latter's continued dependence on the established networks of erstwhile colonialism. Second, formal decolonization and national independence in the non-West has not served as a deterrent to the West

pursuing its colonial ambitions; in fact, it has reverted to the overt militarism typical of classical colonialism.

How are we to evaluate the contribution of Postcolonial criticism in the light of these developments? To begin, it is clear that any claims made about its success must be tempered with a considerable humility. For while Postcolonial discourse has forced a widening of the traditional epistemic boundaries, the realities on the ground – the ontology of Eurocentrism - seem only to have escalated, which is not unlike a case of fiddling while Rome burns.

And so it is here that the limited nature of all the above critiques of Eurocentrism - including Postcolonialism - become apparent, for in conceiving of Eurocentrism as faulty history, or as an ideology of power, it confines the critique of Eurocentrism to just that: *critique*. In other words, the critiques of Eurocentrism examined thus far may be considered to be no more than epistemic revolts, which by their nature are innocuous by being limited to the realms of discourse, texts, and writing. Meanwhile, the practices that sustain Eurocentrism continue to flourish, oblivious or apathetic to the stirrings on the epistemic front. This is not surprising, for as we have seen, such practices have little use for erudition.

How then should we conceive of Eurocentrism to ensure that its critique is not lost upon the reality it wishes to change? How can we connect epistemological critiques of Eurocentrism to its ontological existence? It should be apparent, after all, that Eurocentrism is more than a set of ideological constructions proclaiming the innate supremacy of the West. Surely, it is also more than a problem in the writing of history, or in the conceptualization of history. The world today – its political, economic, legal, socio-cultural formations, and symbolic systems of representation – bespeak a Eurocentric ontology that is constituted by a constellation of beliefs, attitudes, and practices that bring it into being. What are they? Perhaps more importantly, how do we as individuals and in groups reproduce, if unwittingly, the Eurocentric milieu that surrounds us?

It is in responding to these queries that the present work is likely to make a contribution. Hence, instead of dealing with Eurocentrism as an epistemic problem, as a willful aberration in the writing of history, I will examine it as a set of concrete cultural, psychical, social beliefs and practices – a cosmology - that helped set the stage for Euro-America's emergence and subsequent global domination.

While I am aware that the issue of global domination could evoke the world-systems analyses that Wallerstein inspired, I will not employ in my study such a structural-macro approach. This is not just to avoid duplicating efforts already out there; it is also a self-conscious methodological stance based on the understanding that macro social-structures exist through our deliberate as well as unwitting participation in sustaining them. There is no social structure, as such, that is God-given or that exists in nature; they require our complicity to exist. Regardless of whether we are aware of it, we are somehow implicated in the 'structures' of our social milieu. If a Eurocentric world-order exists, it does so by virtue of practices that bespeak a certain human cosmological orientation, or a culture. What does this orientation involve? What are the contents of such a culture? I will tease these things out in the chapter that follows.

2 THE ONTOLOGY OF EUROCENTRISM

I. Introducing the Issues

It was argued at the end of the previous chapter that there was a need to recast the notion of Eurocentrism away from its usual conceptualization as an epistemic problem and to reconsider it as an ontology, as a structural conjuncture of habits, knowledge, and practices predicated on a unique cosmology. It is believed that only by doing so can the effects of Eurocentrism be more tangibly appreciated, its seriousness made more real, and hence, its symptoms better mitigated. It is only by recasting Eurocentrism as mundane practice that it can be dealt with as a concrete problem that, often unbeknownst to us, we partake of.

But where should we start? Notwithstanding what has been said about the limitations of conceptualising Eurocentrism as a problem of historiography, we cannot dispense with history just yet, for the beginnings of Eurocentrism as an ontological problem may still be best illuminated by history, by placing ourselves back at the time when the lights in the West began to flicker before they would grow into a beaming incandescence over the next few centuries. Those lights no longer shine with the same luster or intensity as we write, but even as they dim in the West

today, the legacy of the West remains everywhere. And the question remains: how did the bright lights of what is known variously as the West, EuroAmerica, or the North Atlantic come on in the first place? Clearly, this is a historical question, and seeking recourse to history is unavoidable despite my earlier caveats about historiography.

The concern of this chapter is therefore to draw out and historically locate the cosmological features that set the West apart from the rest of humanity and gave succour to its ascendency and ensuing global domination. This cosmology is constituted by the complex structure of habits, knowledge, and practices I am referring to as 'Eurocentric'. This structure, which is cultural, pertains foremost to perceptions about the place of the individual within the larger cosmological order, with natural consequences for what we today call Society and our existence within it. While Eurocentism has today become so deeply woven into the fabric of contemporary societies around the world that its distinction from what is 'traditional' or 'local' is made with difficulty, enough time (four centuries!) has passed since it fulfilled its revolutionary role of sweeping away the mediaeval order to usher in the status quo of modernity; so much so that questions about its nature, hitherto withheld or neglected, now need asking. Given that over four hundred years separate those momentous events with the present, one would think that the dust would by now have settled to allow posterity a clearer vision of the past: what really constitutes this cosmology that broke the back of traditional Western values? An attempt to throw light on this question seems timely.

There can obviously be several points of departure, but one can begin, both as a matter of thematic convenience as well as for ease of exposition, by stating that it is implicated broadly across much of the realm of Modern human experience. To be sure, the cosmological features of Eurocentrism play out, in conception as in practice, in (i) human-human relations as well as in (ii) human-nature relations.[5] The goal of the present chapter is to say something about these features.

[5] In reality, neither of these domains is isolated from the other - since humans are a part of nature - and this rather modern demarcation is taken up here as a means to communicate with the modern reader already conditioned to think in terms of such a distinction; it is not to be taken as a statement of the nature of reality per se.

II. Life and Cosmology in the European Middle Ages: Organicism, Gemeinschaft and Church Civilisation

"If the citizens themselves devote their life to matters of trade, the way will be opened to many vices. Since the foremost tendency of tradesmen is to make money, greed is awakened in the hearts of the citizens through the pursuit of trade. The result is that everything in the city will become venal; good faith will be destroyed and the way opened to all kinds of trickery; each one will work only for his own profit, despising the pubic good; the cultivation of virtue will fail since honor, virtue's reward, will be bestowed upon the rich. Thus, in such a city, civic life will necessarily be corrupted."

– St. Thomas Aquinas

On Kingship (II, 3) [cited in Fanfani, 2003]

A cursory/preliminary examination of the present will reveal that the most cherished institutions taken for granted in both the West and the non-West today were forged in the cauldron of European revolutionary experience beginning around the mid-late 15th C. Indeed, the fact that the institutions that emerged from this experience are unequivocally assumed to be the norm toward which all human trajectories should converge is perhaps proof of the extent to which the old/traditional order was overrun and effaced, and the new, enthusiastically embraced. Some quick examples can serve to illustrate my point here. In the realm of the political, one has only to think of the way the nation-state is commonly perceived. Its status as the exemplar /archetype of our collective political existence - if accepted not because of its presumed superiority, then because of a sense of inevitability - is for the most part unchallenged. The same goes for state-centric political institutions such as representative democracy: this idealized notion of individual political freedom is in practice confined to little more than the individual's right to vote in formal elections. The mediated and effete nature of the resulting political representation notwithstanding, the ceremony of 'democratic elections' is regarded as the high-point of political life, a goal toward which all aspiring 'free' nations of the 'civilized world' should gravitate. In the economic realm, there is the principle of property rights whose security constitutes the *raison d'etre* of the State: the concept is sacrosanct, and to doubt it is sacrilegious. Concomitantly, the sanctity of property implies a claim, seemingly inviolable, to the proceeds that stem from it. Profits are thought to be a right that exist by virtue of ownership regardless of whether the latter involves a service to humanity. Private property thus confers to its owner the Right to do what s/he wants with it, unfettered by the cumbrous restraints of social obligation. The elevation of a principle of

commercial civilisation to the status of natural law, therefore, also goes by unquestioned.

But if there were a role for critical inquiry, it is perhaps to seek understanding even at risk of sacrilege. The former, after all, demands a boldness to unsettle the things already thought to be settled; to look into the whys, hows, and wherefores such institutions came to be. It demands that we ask, for instance, what the preponderant social formations were before the emergence of the State; and what political practice involved before the advent of *de jure* democracy. To persist in the same spirit, one should also ask how economic affairs were regulated before they became subject to impersonal market forces. And, of course, to ask when the pursuit of individual self-interest and pecuniary gain became the almost exclusive motives for economic activity.

Studies examining the conditions of life in Mediaeval Europe prior to the emergence of such (Eurocentric) institutions point to them as being the result of a specific historical and cultural evolution. This would seem to suggest that the milieu from which they evolved was distinctly different from that which followed, particularly in the sense of being governed by a different cosmology. In her classic study of the links between the Scientific Revolution, women, and ecology, Merchant writes (1980: 1): "The world we lost was organic. From the obscure origins of our species, human beings have lived in daily, immediate, organic relation with the natural order for their sustenance. In 1500, the daily interaction with nature was still structured for most Europeans, as it was for other peoples, by close-knit, cooperative, organic communities…For sixteenth-century Europeans the root metaphor binding together the self, society, and the cosmos was that of an organism."

What does it mean to say that the world we lost was 'organic'? The organic metaphor here strikes a chord with the writings of Tonnies (1957 [1887]), who deployed the term to describe *Gemeinschaft* (community) as the mode of collective life that was prevalent during the European Middle Ages. Against this, he contrasted the *Gesellschaft* (society), the description he gives to the mode of life that followed. These are ideal-types of different modes of social association about which Tonnies (op. cit.: 35) says: "Human wills stand in manifold relations to one another. Every such relationship is a mutual action, inasmuch as one party is active or gives while the other party is passive or receives… The relationship… and also the resulting association, is conceived either as real and organic life – this is the essential

characteristic of the *gemeinschaft*, - or as imaginary and mechanical structure – this is the concept of *gesellschaft*."

Tonnies (op. cit: 38-39) elaborates: "In the most general way, one could speak of a *Gemeinschaft* comprising the whole of mankind, such as the church wishes to be regarded. But human *Gessellschaft* is conceived as mere existence of people independent of each other… (*Gemeinschaft*) is the lasting and genuine form of living together... In contrast, *Gesellschaft* is transitory and superficial. Accordingly, *Gemeinschaft* should be understood as a living organism, *Gesellschaft* as a mechanical aggregate and artifact." He continues (ibid): "Everything real is organic in so far as it can be conceived only as something related to the totality of reality and defined in its nature and movements by this totality." Gierke (1900: 22) tells us much the same: "Medieval Thought proceeded from the idea of a single Whole. Therefore an organic construction of Human Society was as familiar to it as a mechanical and atomistic construction was originally alien." He proceeds, "In the first place, Mankind in its Totality was conceived as an Organism… Mankind constituted a Mystical Body, whereof the Head was Christ." (ibid).

Hence, organic life, which for Tonnies is represented by the ideal- type of *Gemeinschaft*, involved a social existence based on a system of mutual reciprocity and concordance, of humans united to each other and to God by obligations relating to a common end. It is organic because it is predicated on feelings of kinship and neighborliness, on what he calls a 'natural will' entailing a "special social force and sympathy which keeps human beings together as members of a totality." (op. cit.: 53).

Tawney's (1927: 35) descriptions about the mediaeval order would seem a fitting approximation of the organicism being invoked: "Society was… held together by a system of mutual, though varying, obligations. Social well-being exists, it was thought, in so far as each class performs its functions and enjoys the rights proportioned thereto." There was consequently a certain unity in plurality, and plurality in unity. The organic unity inheres in a community's members thinking of "such a grouping as a gift of nature or created by supernatural will," and that "to be fixed to a given calling is just as necessary and natural as being born… the pursuit and means of making a livelihood… is retained as something inherited which it is a duty to retain and nurture." (Tawney op. cit.: 24).

The notion of organicism was also quite explicitly invoked in descriptions of society's dynamic workings. In a section titled "The Social Organism", Tawney observes (op. cit.: 35): "From the twelfth century to the sixteenth… the analogy by which society is described … is that of the human body… Society, like the human body, is an organism composed of different members. Each member has its own function, prayer, or defence, or merchandise, or tilling the soil. Each must receive the means suited to its station, and must claim no more… Between classes there must be inequality; for otherwise a class cannot perform its function, or… enjoy its rights. "

Troeltsch (1931: 287-288) gives support this view: "The unity and solidarity of the organism arises first of all out of the idea of the community and of the Church, in which all the members are members of Christ or of the Body of Christ, and the various sections of the Church, the clergy, monks, laity – with their various functions – act as the complement of each other in mutual love, and in their common love of God to form the united body of the Church, or the *Corpus mysticum*… Thus the whole of Christian Society appears as an organism composed of groups and classes both from within and without the Church, inspired and shaped by the realization of the absolute aim of salvation, an analogy to the comprehension of various elements and groups in the sub-human and individual human organism."

Moreover, the organicism of the Middle Ages constituted a 'totality' because its values were adhered to across the social strata, consolidated by a conception of the universe that regarded reality to be universal, 'unchanging' and 'unchangeable,' pre-ordained by a 'supernatural will.' Tonnies observes (ibid): "In all systems of ranks or estates, traces of this condition are to be found because (and to the extent that) a complete emancipation from the social relationships established at birth seldom occurred and was often impossible. Thus man as a rule submits to the social status in which parents and forebears, or… 'God,' has placed him as if it were his lot to bear, even though it be felt as a burden, which, however, is habit and is lightened by the recognition that it cannot be changed. Indeed, within these limits there can exist an intellectual self-consciousness which affirms this estate (rank) even though it be recognized as one of the less significant."

The organicism or unity of the *gemeinschaft* of Middle Ages Europe therefore involved what Tonnies referred to as 'understanding', featuring a rough commitment to similar sentiments, aspirations, attitudes, and beliefs, despite the variances of individual social standing. There was unity despite plurality. As Tonnies (op. cit.: 48)

notes, "Wherever humans are related through their wills in an organic manner and affirm each other, we find *Gemeinschaft*." Such mutual understanding was the result of "the idea of a natural distribution and of a sacred tradition" dominating all aspects of life and "all corresponding ideas of its right and necessary order." Tawney (op. cit.: 33) gives credence to this view, noting that because purpose was set by "the divine plan of the universe… all activities fall within a single system"; they are "related to a single end, and derive their significance from it." [which may be contrasted with the relative insignificance attached to "the concepts of exchange and purchase, of contract and regulations." (op. cit.: 68).] It was by this understanding of the seemingly immutability of one's place within the cosmic providential order that meaning, purpose, and hence, stability, were accounted for in Medieval Europe.

Naturally, the practical consequence of this *weltanschauung* was the manifestation of what Merchant refers to as "close-knit, cooperative, organic communities," with their corresponding implications for the erstwhile communal mode of economic provisioning. On this score, it should be noted that property ownership was not only communal; it is significant that it was inextricably bound to the performance of a social function: that of providing for community needs. Tonnies elaborates on the nature of this obligation (op. cit.: 48): "The relationship between community and feudal lords, and more especially that between the community and its members, is based not on contracts, but, like those within the family, upon understanding. The village community, even where it encompasses also the feudal lord, is in its necessary relation to the land like one individual household. The common land is the object of its activity and care and is intended partly for the collective purposes of the unit itself, partly for the identical and related purposes of its members." In Tawney's (op. cit.: 37) words: "Society was interpreted… not as the expression of economic self-interest, but as held together by a system of mutual, though varying, obligations. Social well-being exists, it was thought, in so far as each class performs its functions and enjoys the rights proportioned thereto." Outside the great commercial centres, it was just such a natural economy of needs that reigned while pecuniary concerns, competition, mobility, and large-scale organizations remained in check.

Although it has already been alluded to, it is worth highlighting that the sense of inevitability, necessity, and pre-ordainment that characterized the organic world during the Middle Ages reflects the paramount importance of Religion, of

widespread belief in the Divine, in daily life. The Church at the time, much like the State today, assumed an all-encompassing role by intervening in the mundane everyday affairs of its members. It did this foremost by propounding a system of ethics that permeated every aspect of life, and that didactically prescribed what was good, true, and beautiful. Concomitantly, it delineated the Holy from that which was profane. It was, as Troeltsch (1912: 21) referred to it, a "Church-civilisation" that was "based on the belief in an absolute and immediate Divine revelation and the embodiment of this revelation in the Church as the organ of redemption and moral discipline."

It should hardly surprise then that what was regarded to be profane included activities that whetted the human acquisitive passions. It should surprise even less that, despite its own indulgences, the Church sought to regulate the economic activities of its members by appealing to traditional morality and theological doctrine, at times with the explicit threat of excommunication. The attempted discipline was ascetic. There was no question about the place of material affairs within the larger order of things. "Economic interests are subordinate to the real business of life, which was salvation, and that economic conduct is one aspect of personal conduct upon which, as on other parts of it, the rules of morality are binding." (Tawney op. cit.: 43).

The subordinate position given to the Material vis-à-vis the Spiritual in the Mediaeval Age cannot be adequately underscored. As Tawney (op. cit.: 44) has observed: "There is no place in mediaeval theory for economic activity which is not related to a moral end… The outer is ordained for the sake of the inner; economic goods are instrumental… Riches exist for man, not man for riches." Furthermore, "At every turn… there are limits, restrictions, warnings against allowing economic interests to intervene with serious affairs. It is right for man to seek such wealth as is necessary for a livelihood in his station. To seek more is not enterprise, but avarice, and avarice is a deadly sin. Trade is legitimate… But it is a dangerous business… Finance, if not immoral, is at best sordid and at worst disreputable." (Tawney op. cit.: 44-45). Usury was condemned in no uncertain terms. In short, mediaeval society was conceived as a spiritual organism, not an economic machine; the economy was but a subset of a larger, functioning unity that had to be controlled with reference to moral ends.

It was, to use Troeltsch's (1912: 22) phrase, 'a *civilisation of authority*' that inspired the highest aspirations after eternal salvation and that sought to integrate "the immutable Divine with the mutable human in a cosmos of ordered and organized functions." Moreover, by way of Church ordinances of salvation, this authority led humans from the present world of original sin to the other, higher world beyond this life. The consequence was a devaluation of the earthly sensuous world and the commitment to asceticism as a way of living and knowing life.

III. Modern Epiphanies

The emergence of Eurocentrism as both ideology and materially transformative force occurred in just such a milieu. What followed saw the organicism of the Gemeinschaft displaced by the mechanism of the Gessellschaft. But the world-changing significance of this transformation prompts us to ask how it happened. How did the paragon of stability that was the Mediaeval order come to an end?

As one would expect, this transformation has been attributed to the increased importance/emphasis placed upon economic affairs. The latter had in turn been prompted by changing economic circumstances within the world-system, which in turn was spurred on by political, demographic, and geographic factors that put an end to the erstwhile world-order, a system in which the Orient was the core and Europe, the periphery. Abu-Lughod (1989) has argued that Europe "pulled ahead" in the 16th C world-system "because the 'Orient' was temporarily in disarray."

There is neither the need nor the space to account for how the Orient fell into 'disarray.' Suffice it to say, such circumstances provided an opening for Europe to play a more significant role in the emerging world-system. In this context the galleys of the Italian city-states are said to have dealt a deathblow to the centuries-old, Orient-centered world-system – revolving around the Middle East, India, and China - by opening up the North Atlantic for traffic. This had occurred by the end of the 13th C. By the end of the 15th C Portugal had rounded the Cape of Good Hope and discovered the sea route to India. And as Abu-Lughod (op. cit.: 19-20) points out, "By the opening decade of the 16th C Portugal had rights at important African ports of call, defeated the Egyptian fleet guarding the entrances to the Red Sea and Persian Gulf, had moved on to establish beachheads on the West Coast of India, and had

taken over the key point of Malacca that had guarded the crucial strait through which… all ships bound for China had to pass."

Hence, whereas the economic energies in Europe had during the early Renaissance been concentrated in Italy, the subsequent 'Discoveries' would see to their expansion throughout the region. Tawney describes it thus (op. cit.: 77): "Economic power, long at home in Italy, was leaking through a thousand creeks and inlets into Western Europe for a century before, with the climax of the great Discoveries, the flood came on breast-high."

Without having to go into details, one can infer the consequences: an exponential expansion of trade, an outburst of commercial activity, and the concomitant growth of financial activity and speculation, all of which subsequently found in cosmopolitan Antwerp its centre. It has been said that by the middle of the 16th C, the existence of financial houses across the Continent of Europe – in Antwerp, Lyons, Frankfurt and Venice first, then in second order, Rouen, Paris, Strasbourg, Seville and London – had together developed a considerable class of financial specialists and technical expertise. Together they formed an international clearing-house, where bills could be obtained and where the paper of merchants of any nationality changed hands.

Our concern pertains to how this deluge of economic activity was received. It is natural to expect such a stimulation of the economic passions to have caused considerable unease in a social setting governed by religious ends, and in particular, in a setting where all manner of human activity was closely regulated by the strictures of the Church. Indeed, it did. The crux therefore lies with knowing how this conflict between the acquisitive tendencies of the new civilization and the ecclesiastical teachings of the Church - between what might be perceived as the Material vis-à-vis the Spiritual - was resolved, for it was a paradox that was intractable.

Its resolution is one that we now know to have had the most profound consequence for the subsequent course of human development, for the latter remains in its thrall still today. This contest between Spirit and Matter saw the latter, the practical considerations of life, prevailing over transcendental concerns, as befitting the vibrant economic expansion taking place on the continent at the time. This recalibration of values, the move away from the non-things of Spirit towards the things of Matter, marked the turn towards Materialism, the philosophy that regards

matter as the basis of all reality. And it was, to be sure, a movement that undermined the religious sensibility with which all humans had lived since time immemorial.

Henceforth, we find that the foundational conception of religion as the standard-bearer of human institutions and activities becomes increasingly shaky. This development is most advanced in England, with its geographic positioning as the entrepot between Europe and America, its achievement of internal economic unity at least two centuries ahead of France or Germany, its constitutional revolution, and the emergence of a powerful class of bourgeoisie, bankers, and merchants. It is consequently England where the social transformation is fastest and most complete and where the result is a *secularization* of society as well as its theoretical understanding. Tawney (op. cit. 19-20) argues that, "The theological mould which shaped political theory from the Middle Ages to the 17th C is broken; politics becomes a science, ultimately a group of sciences, and theology at best one science among others. Reason takes the place of revelation, and the criterion of political institutions is expediency, not religious authority. Religion, ceasing to be the master-interest of mankind, dwindles into a department of life with boundaries which it is extravagant to overstep."

Naturally, the displacement of religion as the source of authority on matters of economic conduct did not occur without a struggle. The intensification of economic energies in the routines of daily life was met by a vigorous appeal to traditional religious doctrine, as taught by Scripture, the canonists, the Church Fathers, and the Schoolmen, all of which sought to reiterate that economic exigencies were subordinate to the transcendental, and that secular temptations were but a transient distraction to life's larger purpose, which was laid out by a divine plan. Aquinas captures that commitment well when he wrote, "The perfect happiness of man cannot be other than the vision of the divine essence." (cited in Tawney, op. cit.: 33).

It was the critical period between 1500 and 1700 that this battle was waged, and while it began with recourse to medieval teachings such as that just quoted, their appeal gradually weakened over time until, finally, they were abandoned almost altogether. It has sometimes been argued that it was the Protestant Reformation that was instrumental in changing popular perceptions about the ethics of a commercial and capitalist civilisation. In particular, Weber argued that it was the piety inspired by Protestantism that gave birth to capitalism. This view has to be taken with caution and considerable qualification. Tawney and Troeltsch have reminded us that, almost

without exception, early reformers like Luther and Calvin insisted on ancient ways on the questions of social morality, and that without question economic matters were to be subordinate to life's moral purpose. If anything, they sought to impose a harsher discipline, since the passion for reformation was spawned out of disgust with the generalised corruption of society and the Church, resulting in the latter's laxity and inability to offer moral guidance in response. But what was to be reformed was not the overall scheme of mediaeval organic Church-civilisation, which was to remain; the Protestant Reformation, rather, was called upon to reconstruct or restore its main elements - doctrine, ecclesiastical government, and conduct - along the lines of classical, primitive Christianity. Troeltsch (op. cit.: 35) notes, for instance, that early Protestantism was "conceived as a strictly ecclesiastical supernaturalistic civilisation resting on an immediate authority with a strictly defined sphere, distinct from the world and its interests," and that, indeed, "it actually endeavoured to carry through by its own methods this tendency of mediaeval civilisation more strictly inwardly and personally than was possible for the hierarchically constituted Church of the Middle Ages to do. " In other words, life was still to be led according to the medieval scheme, but via the Reformation in a renewed commitment to the laws of God. There was never an intention for the rules of good conscience to be relaxed, for they were to bring under control economic activities and social relations.

As it turned out the consequence of the Reformation was indeed revolutionary, but that result was as unintended as it was powerful. It was not something the early Reformers would have wished or could have imagined, especially given that the seed of the revolution was sowed in Luther's innocuous search for the assurance of salvation. Indeed, how could one be assured of salvation? Luther had asked a mediaeval question, but it was a revolutionary answer that he came upon. Salvation was to be found through faith in the all-accomplishing power of the Bible, not in the external authority of the church or in the sacraments they offered. Religion was to be personalized, and the Bible – God's Word - was to be the only standard of one's faith. Hence, it is said, "As the soul needs the word alone for life and justification, so it is justified by faith alone, and not by any works… therefore the first care of every Christian ought to be to lay aside all reliance on works, and to strengthen his faith alone more and more." (quoted in Tawney op. cit.: 109).

Luther had regarded the corruption both of society and the Church with the same degree of despair. The encroachments of the merchant and financier into society and

the avarice of Rome were connected; both were regarded as an example of the relapse into the paganism of the Renaissance. The capitalist exploitation of the peasants and craftsmen found its analogue in the papacy's exploitation of the Church. The remedy in either case, Luther believed, lay in the saving power of the Gospel. He believed that the Church had to cease being an empire and that its future rested with its transformation into a congregation of believers.

Luther's progressivism in theological matters was however not matched by his views on society. He was known for being essentially backward-looking, maintaining a great suspicion of the conniving arts of economics and power, as much as the anxious accumulation for tomorrow. In this he took on the posture of a peasant and a monk. Men ought to earn their living by the sweat of their brow. At the same time, they should not worry about the future but trust Providence to provide for the morrow. It is little wonder then that Luther should admire most highly the life of the peasantry, for it was a life innately amenable to these principles and that was least corroded by the calculations of commerce. Trade, when confined to the exchange of necessities, was permissible, provided the seller was compensated no more than the cost of his labour and risk. There was honour labouring as a craftsman since it fulfilled a calling in community service. The honest shoemaker or smith was also godly, whereas covetousness and idleness were unforgivable since they broke the organic unity of the body of Christ. Of course, Luther regarded Rome to be implicated in both.

Regarded to be just as heinous and unforgivable was the notion that trade and religion were separate departments operating along different lines of logic. To this idea also, Luther reserved his most severe denunciations. And such was his economic conservatism that he could not see in a Christian society any room for the middle classes whose engagement in international trade, banking and credit, and capitalist industry were dissolving the mediaeval world he clung onto; to him these belonged to the kingdom of darkness which a Christian should avoid. Luther's emphasis on the mediaeval teachings took on a literalness that was rarely matched in the later Middle Ages, yet he was repulsed by the existing institutional attempts that tried to give them expression. On the matter of usury, for instance, he went further than the canonists and denounced them for their compromises: "The greatest misfortune of the German nation is easily the traffic in interest... The devil invented it, and the Pope, by giving his sanction to it, has done untold evil throughout the world."

(quoted in Tawney op. cit.: 104). Besides, he was not content to leave it at that. Not only were loans to be made without interest, he condemned interest payments as compensation for loss and the practice of investing in rent-charges, both of which were permitted by the canon law of his day. Luther is known to have refused usurers the sacrament, absolution and Christian burial.

Nonetheless, his theological innovations carried implications he could not have anticipated, and they were nothing short of revolutionary. The idea that salvation no longer relied on an external authority but on personal faith in the accomplishing-power of the Bible meant that good works, the sacraments, and the Church diminished in importance. They were no longer considered necessary. And, naturally, it was not just the mediating role of the Church in salvation that was at stake. Because of its central importance as the backbone of the social order, the entire Mediaeval organism, with its articulated unity of reciprocal obligations and the singular spiritual purpose to which it was committed, was ruptured. This rupture gives rise to the difference Troeltsch (1912) makes between early and late Protestantism. It appropriately also marks the transition from Gemeinschaft to Gessellschaft. There is, at any rate, no longer a Church-civilisation based on a creed embracing the whole society: its doctrinal foundations are in the process of complete disintegration.

While the collapse of Church-civilization may be attributable to Protestantism, it pays to note that the initial form it took was not univalent but was divided between the two Confessions, Lutheran and Calvinistic, which differ significantly enough to justify us speaking about "two" Protestantisms. Hence, while the personalization of religion can be said to have had its roots in Lutheranism, it is through the active impetus of Calvinism that gave it its world-transforming significance. Troeltsch (op. cit.) argues that whereas Lutheranism remained stagnant, Calvinism flourished and its practical impact on matters pertaining to ethics, politics, organisation, and social questions became the far more significant of the two. Indeed, Calvinism has been the most characteristic and influential variant of Protestantism post-Reformation. Given its undeniable importance and contribution to the formation of the modern world - with its attendant cosmology of Eurocentrism - it is appropriate that we sketch out its characteristics and revolutionary dimensions. It appears that Calvinism's distinct development from Lutheranism, after discounting for the dispositional and character differences of their leaders, had much to do with the general conditions of the time.

Hence, in contrast to Lutheranism, which was socially and politically conservative and tended towards a kind of insular piety, Calvinism was a radical and active force that led to it becoming an international movement. The sociological background of Lutheranism, like most mediaeval thought, was that of traditional rural society compared to Calvinism, which was essentially an urban movement. Whereas the material conditions with which Luther had to deal were those of a natural economy involving the petty transactions of peasants and craftsmen in townships, what Calvin encountered was a rapidly expanding monetary economy in the cities, with its elaborate systems of credit, finance, commerce and trade. It follows that Calvinism was spread by migrant workmen and traders, and found its strongest following among groups for whom the system of traditional ethics must have seemed an irrelevant and pesky restraint. Calvinism had its headquarters in Geneva, and its most influential exponents were later to be found in the great commercial centres like Antwerp and its industrial hinterland of London and Amsterdam. Befitting such demographics, its leaders addressed their teaching foremost to the classes engaged in trade and industry, which constituted the most modern and progressive elements in the life of the time. Not to be lost in all of this - and underlining conspicuously the sociological basis of religious belief - is the plain biographical fact that whereas Luther was a monk, Calvin was trained a humanist lawyer. Hence, whereas Lutheranism endures the world in suffering and martyrdom, Calvinism overcomes it for the honour of God by untiring, disciplined work. Both sects still had as their ultimate goal a spiritual purpose, but one pursued it passively, the other actively.

Given such a milieu it is no wonder that unlike the Lutherans, who viewed capital and finance with peasant-like distrust, the Calvinists felt right at home with these instruments of commerce, acknowledging the practical necessity of capital, credit, banking, finance, and large-scale trade and industry. In the process they broke with the traditional view of economics as need-based subsistence provisioning as they did with its accompanying system of social ethics. Greed was no longer viewed with the same degree of suspicion. In the first place equivocation would have existed over what was said to constitute greed. But absent from the Calvinist worldview henceforth was the stigmatization of the middleman as a parasite, and the usurer a thief.

It was not that Calvin was lax when it came to the question of social ethics. The fact of the matter is that the world that Calvin and his followers inherited was one in which the high tide of commerce was submerging all the old landmarks. And so it was that they had to make peace with the practical realities of the time.

Hence, the accumulation of wealth was not in and of itself a sin, only that which was conducted for the purpose of ostentation and epicurean self-indulgence. Thanks in no small part to Luther's innovation, Calvinism recommended ideals that saw in the accumulation of wealth the weighty solemnity of men disciplining themselves through their labours and dedicating such to the glory of God. It is important to note that material accumulation was only incidental to a larger purpose that had at its core the devotion of one to his calling for the glory of God. It was therefore quite different from the old regime of salvation by works in that the former involved a set of prescribed works that ensured one's entry into Heaven.

Under Calvinist-inspired Protestantism it is the dedication to one's worldly affairs that is one's calling. One's dedication to this calling in turn serves as a demonstrable testament of faith in the fact of one's salvation. In other words it is not a series of individual works undertaken to atone for one's sins but a holy life, faith-led and singularly devoted to one's calling in secular affairs, that was being demanded of the Protestant. This personalization of salvation is what is being implied when we refer to late Protestantism as a highly individualized religion.

It is therefore not an exaggeration to consider such a religious perspective revolutionary since it broke the longstanding ethical fetters that had put a check upon human conduct, even if such an outcome had been unintended. Its immediate impact was to confer upon the burgeoning social interest group of merchants and financiers a new respectability that was hitherto unknown, since their activities, if not previously ruled to be beyond the pale of moral decency, were at best regarded to be of dubious propriety. What this religious cum moral revolution did was to give the profits of trade and finance the same legitimacy as the wages of the worker and the rents of the landlord, conspicuously marking the fact that economic provisioning had moved beyond the simplicity of mere rural subsistence-production towards urban commercial accumulation and expansion. Since this was the socio-economic background against which Calvin operated, he considered capital and credit to be an unavoidable part of social life that had to be resolved in the light of existing circumstances.

Calvin's treatment of the issue of capital may rightly be said to have revolutionized Christian social ethics, for it involved a dismissal of the frequently quoted teachings of the Old testament and the Fathers as being anachronistic, designed for conditions that no longer exist. The payment of interest for capital was now thought to be as reasonable as the payment of rent for land, and it left it upon the individual conscience to ensure that it was not excessive as dictated by natural justice and the golden rule. Extortion was still to be avoided by Christians, but according to this view, the money-lender was no longer a pariah but an indispensable member of society so long as the rate of interest was reasonable. What was most important was that lending at interest was no longer viewed with the same contempt; it was not in itself considered any more predatory than any other economic transaction. This acceptance of commercial practice as being basic to daily reality was of great significance, for it meant that Calvinism and its derivative faiths stood in support of practices that were soon to define the future civilization. It provided a re-configuration of what was to constitute a godly Christian life, based not on a renunciation of the acquisitive appetites but on their single-minded dedication to the glory of God. It was, after all, the consciously elect man who was the lord of the world, and it was in God's power and for God's honour that he strived to shape the world. This theological understanding goes far in explaining how the practical considerations of an increasingly urban, industrial, and commercial milieu were able to give shape to the social ethics of late Protestantism.

IV. Puritanism and Modernity

It may be apparent in light of the above that Protestantism's relationship to Modernity may not be so straightforward. Is it after all Protestantism that gave rise to Modernity a la Weber, or did modern capitalist imperatives modify Protestant teachings and social ethics as to render them agreeable to the practices of commercial life as described above? It is likely that both processes were at work, first the one, then the other, then both, in dialectical fashion. Weber could have been right about Calvinist asceticism producing on a large scale the capitalist spirit upon which capitalism was based, but it is as likely that such Reformed asceticism was the result of the unique economic circumstances in Europe at the time. Hence, while the direction of causality may not be clear, there should be little argument about the existence of a strong correlation between Protestantism and Modernity. Moreover, of

importance here is not so much the determination of which came first but recognition of the fact that the traditional system of social ethics of the Mediaeval Ages was ploughed under by the irrepressible currents of commercial activity: the social teachings of classical Christianity had been substantially modified due to the onslaught of economic activity, and Calvinism played a significant, if unwitting, part. As has been noted, Calvin's qualified concessions to practical affairs appeared among his later followers as an idealization of a life of commerce, with the latter being not just means to economic ends but as service to God and proof of one's salvation. There was little more powerful than for secular affairs to receive spiritual sanction/endorsement.

Evidently the institution of a system of capitalist enterprise would not have been possible without a distinct mental, moral, or cultural orientation. Since material life is symbolically constructed, modern capitalist priorities are dependent on a cultural arrangement that privileges the material sphere above spiritual and ethical considerations. Materialism – the belief that matter forms the basis of reality - is culture, and the Modern attitude implicates materialism more than any other. The corollary is that the acquisitive tendencies are exalted and the fundamental axiom of modern economic thinking, "More is Better", can be blithely uttered as a statement of universal fact. Yet far from being universal, such an aphorism holds water only in a culture that has given itself over completely to materialism; that is, a culture that, ironically, has been de-cultured insofar as the term 'culture' denotes the celebration of human life and ingenuity beyond the needs of physical/material reproduction.

Indeed, universalist pretensions notwithstanding, the equation of material progress with human advancement is uniquely a cultural phenomenon whose lineage has just been described. Indeed we have seen that it is much owing to the Calvinist revolution that the elevation of economic affairs as the *raison d'etre* of life has occurred. The Calvinist revolution's historic significance and power are all the greater because the rank materialism associated with the secular concerns of trade and finance, for so long treated with suspicion, had by its completion at the end of the seventeenth century received religious endorsement. Far from being a capitulation to the forces of evil, material success was seen as a blessing of will and a duty-bound conscientiousness to serve God. Economic affairs, which were once regarded as being perilous to the soul, could now be reconciled with spiritual concerns. It was not just that trade was one thing and religion another, which was

effectively a concession the Church had to make in the face of unstoppable economic forces; in the scheme of late Protestantism, commerce had verily become a religious affair. Church teachings concerning economic morality had ceased to remain relevant since social morality coincided with economic wisdom. Within the scheme of late Protestantism, both were one and the same. As Tawney (op. cit.) correctly observed, the Puritanical insistence on secular duties imposed by divine will meant that conscientiousness in business came to be thought of as being among the highest of human virtues.[6]

The implications of this are significant. A culture that gives religious sanction to human acquisitiveness is not only uninhibited/unhampered when it comes to the pursuit of wealth; it is empowered and driven in the very process by the knowledge that God is on its side. Such a posture of self-assuredness was likely to be the catalyst the Protestant West needed for the complete transformation of erstwhile human relations with respect to both human and non-human Nature so that the historical economic opportunities that swept through Western Europe could be exploited. (cf. Descartes and Bacon). The so-called European miracle that, inter alia, encompasses Europe's economic rise, its industrial revolution, and the celebration of Reason and scientific knowledge, was in effect the consequence of such a religious-cultural revolution. That is to say, European Modernity (is there any other form worth distinguishing from it?), as commonly understood, was an offspring of this momentous religious-cultural revolution.

Hence, although its clearest expression has been found in the way the domain of the economic has been feted, the revaluation of the standards of morality that was the legacy of the Calvinist revolution means that these transformations were not merely economic in nature but also entailed an array of novel socio-cultural forms that tended to emphasize economic outcomes as if the latter were the sole *raison d'etre* of human existence. That is to say, although the cultural re-orientation initiated by the Calvinist revolution resulted in economic affairs taking centre stage in human

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[6] Puritanism was the most potent and pervasive offshoot of Calvinism in England with a far-reaching conception of theology and Church government that influenced perceptions about business, politics, family life, and the minutiae of individual conduct. The other dominant branches of Calvnism that took root in England include Presybetarianism and Congregationalism. Presbetarianism had attempted to grow into a State Church but did not succeed owing to an inadequate following. Congregationalism was built upon upon the insistence of the Churches to self-organize and on the idea of Churches to be independent of the State, thus leaving behind a legacy of civil and religious freedom. It is likely that because neither issued prescriptions with the same breadth and depth as Puritanism, neither could effect the sort of change produced by the latter.

development, it was merely the cornerstone – as much epistemological as ontological - upon which a corresponding array of cognate cultural institutions have developed.

V. Eurocentrism and the Cognates of Modernity

It is not difficult to anticipate from our historical vantage point what such cognate cultural institutions would consist. For a system of ethics founded on material and economic progress is not an ethical system of social responsibility. A system that sees virtue in the fulfillment of human acquisitiveness can hardly be a system of morality, regardless of the ends to which they claim to be devoted. The moral self-sufficiency of the Calvinist may nourish the individual will and ego but it liquidates any sense of solidarity or social purpose, since it follows that in a theology in which salvation is predicated on one's personal relationship with God, social commitments are superfluous. In such a theological scheme, material riches are the result of individual character and industriousness, whereas indigence, of their lack. Fraternity gives way to liberty as surely as social obligations, to individual rights. Hence, whereas economic concerns had previously been tied to a moral and, ultimately, common social end, the individuation that characterized late Protestantism had the effect of disconnecting economic activities from their larger social purpose. And, henceforth, wealth was acquired to fulfill individual 'wants' that were potentially unlimited, for they are based on whim as much as desire; this in contrast to 'needs', which can be thought to be circumscribed by the basic biological requirements to maintain human life. Whereas social life in erstwhile *gemeinschaft* organization involved an obligation to give back to the community - serving thus as an obstacle to the excessive accumulation of personal wealth - the amassment of wealth was now an end unto itself. And it could be pursued without restraint, for the social encumbrances had been dropped.

The changed social conditions required a novel assertion of political rights that were distinct from the erstwhile mediaeval doctrine based on Divine Law (*Lex Dei*). It is no surprise that a milieu swept away by the currents of trade and commerce should be one whose identifying political principles are given by rights that are rational and individual, not obligations that are reciprocal and collective. Tonnies' distinction between *gesellschaft* viz. *gemeinschaft* - or Gierke's (2002[1868]) analogous ideas of *Obrigkeit* (Sovereignty; authority) vis-à-vis *Genossenschaft* (Fellowship) - comes immediately to mind.

It follows that since there was no longer a Church-civilization, a civilization of hierarchical authority, but one constituted by autonomous, freely associating individuals, its political principles were couched not in Divine (*Lex Dei*), but Natural, Law (*Lex Naturae*). The latter involves the idea that there is such a thing as natural justice based on human reason, that there is a 'common law' natural to all humanity. Since it is a notion that can be found in Aristotle, the Stoics, Roman law, and the Canon Law of the Church, its history is necessarily complex, continually undergoing modification through time. Unsurprisingly the conditions prevailing in Europe at the time instigated further adaptation. We are unable here to deal with its complex history of ongoing evolution, but what is important for us to note, as Gierke (1958) has emphasized, is that the version of Natural Law that emerges from the speculations that occur between 1500 and 1800 is distinct from all previously existing varieties in one important respect: it was *Secular*.

The significance of such an outcome for social organisation was tremendous. Gierke (op. cit.) describes the secularised version of Natural Law as the intellectual force that dissolves the mediaeval system. I have so far suggested that the social milieu of sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe was one that was in a state of extraordinary flux, at the point of bursting to maintain the conditions of its mediaeval features. As such, the conditions were fitting for intellectual ferment, and the times were rife with social speculation. There was, after all, the problem of the new system of national States and the principles on which their relations should be based. Men pondered about the source and the nature of the body of law by which their relations should be adjudicated. There was also the issue of the new system of national Churches; of their relation to the State; of the nature of both Church and State, and the common framework under which they could both fit. Such problems demanded a new wealth of conceptions, and it was the theory of Natural Law that provided them. Indeed it is natural-law theory that ushers in the modern State, for it guides all political struggles and efforts that result in its formation. It was therefore upon an appeal to Natural Law that the process Luther began - but whose revolutionary consequences he did not intend – was brought to a close: the Church-civilisation that had been organized around the principles of Wholeness, organic unity and functional hierarchy was replaced by a system of Sovereign States whose subjects – individuals - were by definition politically free, equal, and rational; bound neither by duty nor obligation but by contract and rights. The Sovereign State thus derived its legitimacy

from a constitution while its citizens, in at least the more progressive accounts of a Rousseau or John Adams, exercised their political rights by way of electing authorities of their choice. Both notions – the constitution-backed state as much as choice-based election of authority - were fitting examples of contract-based social organisation. Both entities, the State as much as its citizen-subjects, were predicated on the idea of the sovereign individual as the rational subject of history. It was here that Hobbes, Rousseau and Adams famously lent their imprimaturs; the latter two favoring a balance of power (republicanism) to counter Hobbes' sovereign power (absolutism), but all seeking nonetheless to resolve differently what they shared in common: a view of society that consisted of an implicit contract among rational, self-seeking individuals. All three thinkers, it pays to note, appealed to Natural Law for their conceptions, making it reasonable to argue that regardless of the form it took, a contract-and-rights based Society - or *Gessellschaft* - was to be the inevitable feature articulated by secular Natural Law.

And, to be sure, the secularity of Natural Law resided not merely in its content. It was secularized as an institution, becoming Law that was *independent* of the Church. But that was not to be the end of the matter either, for the goal of secularization also entailed the subordination of the Church to Natural Law, which had been unprecedented. As has been noted, the tendency was to "subject the Church to Natural Law rather than Natural Law to the Church… to determine the nature of the Church, and the proper scheme of its relations to the State, by principles which are themselves independent of the Church." (Gierke xli-xlii). The secularisation of Natural Law therefore meant its emancipation from the Church and, via an unreserved affirmation/avowal of Reason, its increased rationalization.

The emancipation of Law from Church significantly also implied the emergence of an independent State; hence it is here that we see the coeval relationship between jurisprudence and State. Statecraft thus became a system of political arithmetic involving the need to balance the 'equally' legitimate interests, rights, and liberties of one faction of society against that of another. Since material conditions create the need for their ideological justification, a phalanx of ideas supportive of the new order was soon circulating, their originators bearing names such as Locke, Smith, and Bentham, apart from Hobbes and Rousseau who have been mentioned. The common point of departure for some of these thinkers has been memorialized in verse: "Thus God and Nature linked the general frame, And bade self-love and social be the

same." (Pope, 1734). Because the pursuit of selfish private interests was instrumental to producing social virtue, so the thinking went, the individual must be given free reign. Property was the touchstone for liberty and freedom. If the heavy hand of the State should ever have cause to intervene, it should be to secure the sanctity of private property.

Hence in 1689, John Locke, in his *Second Treatise of Government*, was making the case for unlimited property as a natural right of the individual having priority and overriding governments. His innovation was in fact to argue for a limited government in order to protect unlimited property. This zealous commitment to individual liberty and freedom was a reflection of the times, providing an interesting contrast to the ideas of social order that persisted through the Reformation up until 1648. Mediaeval conceptions of social order are verily *passé* by 1787, as indicated by the title of Bentham's essay, *Defence of Usury*, which GK Chesterton quite aptly identified as signaling the very beginning of the 'modern world'.

Indeed, the cultural cognates spawned by the individualistic economism of late Calvinism find abundant expression in the writings of Hobbes, Locke and Bentham. There is not the space to comprehensively detail all their contributions here, even though we have briefly highlighted some of them above. While Hobbes and Rousseau have made the case for the intervention of the state to secure the right to property, Locke's intervention pushes the case in the interest of proprietors further, memorably calling for limited government to ensure that the natural right to property is unlimited. As is well known the (erroneous) juxtaposition of government as being antithetical to private property interests is deeply etched into modern consciousness and remains quite unshakeable until today.

Meanwhile Bentham justified the unequal distribution of property as a criterion for the greatest happiness of the greatest number. Little wonder that he should emphasize security as the most important goal of law; he writes: "In legislation, the most important object is security… Unless laws are made for security, it would be quite pointless to make them for subsistence. You may order production; you may command cultivation; and you have done nothing. But assure to the cultivator the fruits of his industry, and perhaps in that alone you would have done enough." Bentham proceeds to argue that, "The laws provide for subsistence indirectly, by protecting men while they labour, and by making them sure of the fruits of their

labour. Security for the labourer, security for the fruits of labour; such is the benefit of laws; and it is an inestimable benefit."

Like Locke, it is the security of property that Bentham is concerned. The argument becomes appealing when invoked to defend the interests of those who work, to ensure that those who work earn their keep against illegitimate expropriation. But his supposed concern for the laborer is revealed to be disingenuous when in the same breath he equates the wealth of society with that of the sum of its individual members, adding that the "greatest happiness for the greatest number" will automatically flow from this. Bentham's error lies in his conceiving of society's wealth as being equal to the aggregate of its members' wealth, as if it were simply the case that a society's well-being can be measured as such without addressing the question of *distribution*. Perhaps Bentham was alluding to some early variant of 'trickle-down' theory?[7] Such problems of reasoning notwithstanding, it is certainly a materialist logic that associates human happiness with property accumulation, a logic that by the time of Bentham's writing was evidently commonplace.

VI. Re-visiting the Question of Eurocentric History

We may now return to the question with which we began: what indeed is Eurocentrism? Among my responses at the start of this chapter, I had said that such a question is tantamount to asking about the extent and nature of Western achievement to warrant a sense of self-absorbed chauvinism. Indeed, what is there about Western accomplishment to warrant Eurocentrism? The question is seldom posed, much less is its alleged Eurocentrism examined, for I suspect that to many the answer is self-evident, so obvious as to render the question rhetorical/redundant/superfluous.

For instance, in a recent work, Lal (2006) asks what distinguishes the West from the Rest to result in the Great Divergence. Meanwhile, McCloskey's recent writings, *Bourgeois Dignity* (2010) and *The Bourgeois Virtues* (2006), are self-conscious paeans to the current global capitalist order. Ferguson's latest book, *Civilization: The West and the Rest* (2011) deals with concerns that are identical to mine here by

[7] The theory consists of the belief that a concentration of wealth in the upper stratum of society is desirable since it posits that it is the rich who create jobs and spend prodigally, ensuring a natural wealth re-distribution. The late economist John Kenneth Galbraith compared the proposed process of 'trickle-down' with feeding a horse more oats: it will pass more out onto the road for the sparrows to feed on.

seeking to explain the origins of Western dominance; he differs, however, by continuing the long tradition of Eurocentric history-writing even if he asserts that it is not another "self-satisfied version of 'The Triumph of the West'." (13). Yet despite what is explicitly or otherwise declared, there is with all three authors the characteristic underlying premise that the West is the vanguard of human history. Once again, I stress: what actually makes for Western achievement is seldom evaluated and its virtue is merely taken for granted. Such is what I mean when I describe the problem of Eurocentrism as a *weltanschauung*. It precedes the conceptual and the meticulous workings of reason, and so it passes with ease into the normality of everyday.

But what is taken to be – and is indeed – obvious is the fact that the West has been economically, technologically, and politically superior for much of the past five hundred years. And what is to be inferred is that supremacy in such areas should by default confer the West its status of being the paragon of human development; it is why, in Ferguson's highly-influential view, 'Civilization' (understood in the positive sense, of course) originated in the West. It is why Western Civilization stands singularly apart from the Rest.

The equation of economic, technological, and political dominance with human progress is not explicit or explicated since it is thought to be unnecessary. It is apparent nevertheless that in the abovementioned works, it is the material accomplishments of the West that is being exalted. Consensus seems, therefore, to have been reached on what decisively marks the Great Divergence; it is plain what has separated the West from the Rest in the last half-millenium: it is raw economic, technological, and political power, all of which are thought virtuous, the basis by which we judge human development. For Lal, they would undeniably constitute the factors that allowed the West to pull away. No doubts then about what lies ahead, particularly for the non-West: like many, Lal believes it is to 'catch up' with the West, and to best do so by restoring classical liberalism; hence the title of his work, *Reviving the Invisible Hand* (2006).

McCloskey (2010), on the other hand, attributes Western emergence and subsequent global dominance to a change in 'rhetoric' in the West, to a revaluation in which bourgeois ethics became dignified. "A big change in the common opinion about markets and innovation caused the Industrial Revolution, and then the modern world," she writes. (xi). Readers may recognize some similarity here with the

argument I offer in this chapter, but it is perhaps more important to pay attention to the differences. Clearly, like Lal, McCloskey's assessment of the modern Western experience resulting from this 'ethical revaluation' is effusively positive. Why? Notwithstanding McCloskey's self-identification as a committed postmodern feminist rhetorician, the reason remains crassly materialistic: because bourgeois rhetoric has not only benefitted Euro-America but has been "alleviating poverty worldwide, and enlarging the spiritual scope of human life." (2010: xi). Because "the last two centuries worldwide favored the ordinary person, especially a person who lived in a bourgeois country;" because over such a period, the "average income in the world moved from $3 to $30 a day." (*op. cit.*: 4; 5). McCloskey, it seems, conceives of value only in monetary terms. Despite her rhetorical commitments to feminism and her rejection of the economics discipline, the masculinist productivist logic of McCloskey's early economic training remains palpable. Significantly she appears oblivious to the patriarchal biases underpinning the conceptions and practices of the formal, monetary economy. Monetization is instead regarded to be the benchmark for human improvement, with the insinuation that bourgeois ethics, which first gained respectability in the West, is a virtue that will uplift all from the depths of privation. The implications for McCloskey are thus straightforward. As with Lal, it is for Resterners to become like Westerners in a process best thought accomplished with a liberal formula: for McCloskey, bourgeois rhetoric, particularly in the form of a commitment to dignity and liberty, needs to be propagated around the world, not least to save the poor from impoverishment.

Ferguson is quite surely the most influential of the trio, if not for his prolificacy, then for the fact that he is afforded substantial institutional backing: all of his five most recent works have been accompanied by television documentary series. I would contend that Ferguson's special prominence stems as much from his tremendous professional productivity as from the ideological function his writings serve in the West. His projects do not therefore simply reflect the disinterested ruminations of an ivory-tower intellectual but are well-calculated and self-conscious, the result of a convergence of personal intellectual interests with powerful ruling-class concerns. Quite simply, Ferguson's writings endear him to the ruling establishment because they give succor to the establishment; hence, the institutional largesse. The sociology of knowledge production at work is best understood by paying attention to the motive for, timing, and content of his writing.

To begin with, the decision to title his most recent work, *Civilization*, is not innocent of ideological purpose. The nature and intent of the term – being historically deployed by ruling elites to consolidate their status while simultaneously creating an inferior, oppositional Other - has been highlighted by Federici (1995) and Patterson (1997) to be problematic, but such critique is here ignored because Ferguson's purpose is verily to reproduce what is considered problematic. 'Civilization' needs to be defended when threatened, affirmed all the more vigorously in times of crisis. And Ferguson is aware of the severity of the crisis confronting the West, acknowledging that we are "living at the end of 500 years of Western ascendency." (2011: xv). His is therefore a *cri de coeur* sounded from inside the palace gates, stemming from the recognition that the West is in terminal decline. He hopes, as such, to stop the downward spiral. Attempting to capture the interest of a population with a rapidly diminishing attention span, Ferguson employs the language of today's techno-culture to explain the rise of the West. The 'six killer applications' – competition, science, democracy, medicine, consumer society, and a work ethic – constitute the 'software' that gave the West its edge over the Rest. According to Ferguson it is what allowed the West to dominate the Rest for the past 500 years. And as emerging countries like China are successfully 'downloading' these same 'applications', his hope is that the West will awaken from its complacency, realize the origins of its success, and change course. The political and ideological nature of Ferguson's project is here laid bare. With his interventions to reform the teaching of history in the British school curriculum, especially his calls to re-introduce the teaching of Western Civilization, the political and ideological intent of his project are not in doubt[8]. Indeed, it is apparent that political organizational interests trump truth interests here. The need to reshape popular perceptions in the West overrides any commitment to objective scholarship, even as the latter is claimed in an attempt to pass ideology off for impartial inquiry.

I shall leave it to others to assess the validity of Ferguson's claims about the Western provenance of his six 'killer applications'. What is important to note here is that Ferguson, like McCloskey and Lal, begin with the unquestioned premise of Western supremacy: the West is superior because of its material, economic,

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[8] See http://www.theguardian.com/education/2010/jul/09/television-war-games-niall-ferguson. Accessed September 2011.

industrial, techno-culture and its ability to harness it for political dominance. There is no assessment of whether such a civilization, such a mode of existence is beneficial for humanity as a whole. It is never asked what sort of economic - much less environmental - costs are inflicted in the name of civilization. Nor is there mention of the cultural or moral depredations such a mode of existence implies. There is no such assessment because so-called Western Civilization is *self-referentially* believed to derive from qualities internal to the West; it is an accomplishment of its own making. And an accomplishment that can be – ought to be – replicated, for it incurs no costs, only benefits. Dussel (cited in Mignolo, 2007: 453-54) explains the basis of this one-sidedness:

> "Modernity is, for many an essentially or exclusively European phenomenon…Modernity appears when Europe affirms itself as the 'center' of a World History that it inaugurates: the 'periphery' that surrounds this center is consequently part of its self-definition. The occlusion of this periphery (and of the role of Spain and Portugal in the formation of the modern world system from the late fifteenth to the mid-seventeenth centuries) leads the major contemporary thinkers of the 'center' into a Eurocentric fallacy in their understanding of modernity. If their understanding of the genealogy of modernity is thus partial and provincial, their attempts at a critique or defense of it are likewise unilateral and, in part, false."

Consequently, the belief that Western civilization - the apotheosis of which is Modernity - is a boon to all humanity is accepted without question. Unsurprisingly, the illusion that it is a feat accomplished internally without incurring costs, much less upon Others, spawns the desirability for its unlimited expansion. Western civilization and its Modernist conjugates are consequently taken for granted, since they are consonant with the state of the world as is. Yet it must be said that it is a world in which the likes of Lal, McCloskey, and Ferguson are its foremost benefactors and custodians. Evidently their pronouncements are vindication of Mannheim's (1936) claim that it is society's elites and their adjuncts who, in the interest of re-producing the status quo, spout ideology.

Niall Ferguson contends that it is not Eurocentric to claim the emergence of Western civilisation as the most significant event of the last five hundred years. He is *not* wrong. The rise of Europe was striking, *but* perhaps even more significant, the timing of European ascendency coincided via colonialism with the destruction of the self-sufficient, autonomous developmental trajectories of the non-West. This process essentially prevented the non-West from experiencing its normal course of development, for it was by dint of force that turned the non-West into a subordinate

serving the needs of Western capitalist development. The subjugation of the non-West to the imperatives of Western Modern development was undoubtedly significant for both. As Marx has pointed out, "the treasures captured outside Europe by undisguised looting, enslavement and murder flowed back to the mother-country and transformed themselves into capital" (cited in Baran, 1976 (1957): 274); to which Baran (op. cit.: 275) adds, "The intensity of the boost to Western Europe's development resulting from this 'exogenous' contribution to its capital accumulation can hardly be exaggerated." On the other side, the non-West was violently jolted out of its indigenous developmental trajectory, which irredeemably changed its course of history. Conveniently blind to all this, Ferguson dismisses the contribution of colonialism to the rise of the West - as does McCloskey - while maintaining that he is not Eurocentric.

VII. CODA

The issue appears, then, to rest with their understanding of what Eurocentrism is. The banal recognition that European ascendency and domination was the most historically significant event of the past five hundred years is *not* Eurocentric. But to claim that European ascendency was accomplished through qualities internal to itself certainly is. And Ferguson's exposition, by reducing such qualities to a formula of just six ingredients that can be replicated by the Rest, is reminiscent of Rostovian Stage Theory (Rostow, 1960) that characteristically marked Western, especially US, ideology during the Cold War. Indeed, Ferguson's 'six killer applications' of *Civilization* is standard Eurocentrism *a la* the diffusionist model previously discussed by Blaut (see Chapter One), entailing the belief that all virtues originate from the West in the centre, before they are disseminated to the Rest in the periphery. (So much for intellectual progress![9]). More seriously, I have been arguing that what is verily Eurocentric, and which is discerned neither by those with the ideological sympathies of a Ferguson nor a Blaut, is the manner by which the entire European experience is *evaluated*. To be sure, the gravity of Eurocentrism does not inhere so much in the ethno-chauvinistic and academic practice of crediting Euro-America for achievements that are in fact collectively human and trans-cultural. Rather, Eurocentrism is most serious when Europe's experience of the past 400+ years is

[9] And so much for ideological production disguising as intellectual scholarship.

glorified to the extent it is unquestioningly regarded as a virtue worthy to be the destiny of all humanity. The danger that Eurocentrism poses is most ominous when we act in accord with this valuation, eradicate our time-honoured, local traditional practices to transplant and construct in their place, the much-idealized and idolized institutions that characterise the socio-political and economic landscapes of the West.

I have in the foregoing highlighted the constellation of values that undergird the ascendancy and global domination of the West; these same values constitute its most cherished institutions. I have shown that the Modern cries of freedom in their various guises - of the Individual to life, liberty, and property based on Natural Right; of religion involving the separation of Church from State - while emancipatory in word and seductively appealing at the outset (on the surface), is Janus-faced. As Dussel (1993: 66) has pointed out, "Modernity includes a rational 'concept' of emancipation that we affirm and subsume. But, at the same time, it develops an irrational myth, a justification for genocidal violence." Modern freedoms, in other words, have an underside that is amoral and asocial, even antisocial and misanthropic. Individual freedom taken to its limits amounts to none other than Locke's unlimited right to private property, Bentham's utility-maximizing rational economic man, and Hobbes' war of all against all. Given the foregoing discussion about the social, cultural and particularly ethical evisceration required for Europe's take-off, it should be apparent that there is much at stake in the reproduction everywhere of a social order in the image of the West. The danger can be inferred, since it follows - despite Adam Smith's wishful speculations to the contrary - that a world constructed upon the political arithmetic of Bentham's self-interested individuals can only lead to Hobbes' war of all against all. It goes without saying, naturally, that this would bring into question the prospect of humanity surviving itself.

Such speculations may not, however, be necessary. The severe economic crisis that is reported to engulf the West today, which began in the USA in 2008 but that has since spread and is continuing to escalate in Europe in 2012, is revealing of the serious risks involved in replicating Euro-American ideas and institutions wholesale around the world. It is a crisis that displays all the signs of the ignominious end of Western economic power. The youth unemployment rate in the Eurozone hit a record high of 24.4% in October 2013, with the distribution being 57.4% in Spain, 58% in Greece, 41.2% in Italy, 36.5% in Portugal, 7.8% in Germany and 11.8% in the

Netherlands.[10] The national governments of Greece, Portugal, Spain, Italy are projected in 2014 to be indebted to the tune of 200%, 134.6% , 105% and 131.4% as a percentage of their GDP respectively.[11] In the United States, unemployment stood at 6.7% in March 2014 but real wages have not increased since the early 1970s.[12] [13] Meanwhile, inequality of income and even more, of wealth, has increased dramatically on both sides of the Atlantic. To be sure, it is a fiscal-economic crisis in which the financiers are at the centre both in bringing it about and in resolving, even as they are intent upon placing the blame for its cause on the supposed profligacy of national governments. As the Euro-American economies are woefully mired in stagnation, the same cannot be said about the position of their financial oligarchies, whose social and political ascendancy is now secure and effectively complete.

The situation of contemporary Euro-American society vis-à-vis the Europe of the mediaeval past cannot be more paradoxical: the financiers, the class once unanimously condemned in the early mediaeval period has in the ensuing centuries not only gained social acceptance, it has now seized control of society and holds it hostage. The Biblical teachings that one's bread should be earned in sweat, that one should not reap where one has not sown, that one should work in order to eat, have been so thoroughly disabused by the parasitic high-living of latter-day financiers that such exhortations have been rendered anachronistic, if not wholly meaningless for our times. To get a sense of the moral atrophy that has taken place in the West over roughly the past 350 years, one only has to contrast the reckless and self-indulgent conduct of Wall Street financiers in 2008 with Richard Baxter's 1673 exhortation that, "The public welfare, or the good of many is to be valued above our own. Regard the public good above your own commodity. It is not lawful to take or keep up any oppressing monopoly or trade; which tendeth to enrich you by the loss of the Common-wealth…" (quoted in Robertson 1973 [1933]: 17). To be sure, it is a degeneration that has resulted from a cosmology that - because it is foremost

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[10] http://www.theguardian.com/business/2013/nov/29/eurozone-youth-unemployment-record-high-under-25s. Accessed May 2014.

[11] http://www.gfmag.com/global-data/economic-data/public-debt-percentage-gdp. Accessed May.

[12] http://www.tradingeconomics.com/united-states/unemployment-rate. Accessed May 2014.

[13] http://www.businessinsider.com/real-wages-decline-literally-no-one-notices-2013-6. Accessed May 2014.

materialist - considers material accumulation and growth to be the *sin qua non* of a good life. It is a cosmology that views humans as having unlimited wants but limited means of meeting them; hence, the modern economic axiom that 'more is better' in the face of unending scarcity. Scarcity looms like a never-receding shadow and material concerns are life's central preoccupation, for they undoubtedly constitute the serious affairs of life. The conviction that man exists for the pursuit of riches is ubiquitous.

Indeed, one must remember that it is on the basis of economic concerns that Europe's religious revolution was waged. That is to say, it was in the process of European society confronting the ethical challenges posed by commercial practice that the moral revolution in the West began and was carried to its completion. And it was during this process, in the fierce struggle between the revolutionary bourgeois class and the elements of the old social order wishing to stem the tide of change that the cries for the liberation of the individual from the traditional system of ethics were loudest.

The result was the emergence of ideas associated with the Modern conception of the Individual as the rational historical subject alongside its derivative legal, social, economic and political forms. These various rights and freedoms gained legitimacy under the rubric of Natural Law, and remain cherished institutions in our day. But if we bear in mind that this securalised version of Natural Law was foremost asserted to relieve the conscience in the pursuit of economic opportunity, then the crass amorality of Wall Street bankers today would be unsurprising, for such behaviour would seem to be the natural outcome of a loosening of the rules of conscience. The process of moral degeneration, the milieu of which I have described in the foregoing, therefore produced an ethical deficit that served as catalyst for the economic and political rise of the West. In other words, Western dominance is predicated upon a secular and materialist cosmology that sees in material growth and accumulation the essence and meaning of a good life. Accordingly it is based on a mode of being that privileges economic life as the *raison d'etre* of human existence, and that insists on the liberty of the individual to its pursuit – as a natural right - free from the intrusion of any ethical, moral, or collective restraints. This mode of being, now fast becoming the preponderant mode of global existence, *is* the ontology of Eurocentrism, the foundation of Modernism. If one should insist that there are alternative modernities

that are both feature and result of globalization, then surely they are the bastard offspring of an indefeasible Western (Eurocentric) paternity.

3 *TI-YONG* AND THE ORIGINS AND NATURE OF CHINESE EUROCENTRISM

In opening up to the outside world, we must actively make use of things from developed Western countries… but we must be careful not to take the decadent things for miracles, or ulcers for treasures.

- Jiang Zemin, President of the PRC, 1997

I. The Story Until Here…

The previous chapter described the metamorphosis that the West underwent between the 16th and 18th centuries. It sought especially to demonstrate the radical nature of the transformations that took place in Western Europe during this period, which involved perceptions about what constituted the good, the true, and the beautiful. I have shown that these changes constituted a moral revolution in the West that was precipitated by changing economic conditions and that, in turn, loosened the erstwhile religious strictures governing social life. In particular, I have sought to demonstrate that religious/Christian strictures were most radically eased in the realm of the economy, in the concerns of material life. This relaxation of the rules of

conscience not only permitted the intensive exploitation of peasant, and later, wage labour at home; it also enabled such exploitation to be generalized beyond the West.

Indeed, despite their differences, the common thesis running through the writings of Marx, Baran (1976 [1957]), Frank (1978), Wallerstein (1980), Amin (1974), Wen (2005), Blaut (1993), Galeano (1997), Dussel and Mendieta (1996), Grosfoguel (2008), Quijano (2000), and Mignolo (2011) is this: that developments putatively internal to the Western did not, could not, and still do not occur in the absence of synchronous developments in its perennial Other, the non-West. Indeed, whereas I have in the previous chapter stressed the 'internal' cultural transformation of the West between 1500 and 1700 as the catalyst for Western Modernity, the group of Latin American scholars comprising Dussel, Grosfoguel, Quijano and Mignolo would likely chastise me for failing to note that it was an *external* event, the Columbian 'discovery' of the New World in 1492, which was its *sine qua non*. There is no contradiction here, but a clarification is in place: indeed, the opening up of the Atlantic trade route was made possible by the Columbian 'discovery' and pillage of Latin America; yet the sudden expansion of trading and commercial activity presented novel and uncompromising cultural challenges to the erstwhile European social order, challenges that found their resolution in the wholesale moral-religious-and-cultural revolution I speak about.

My emphasis on the 'internal' religious revolution that contributed to Modern Europe is not an attempt to downplay the external relations/depredations on which it was dependent. Instead, it is important to note that my focus on this 'internal' transformation of European life emerged in the process of *conceptualizing* - or providing a working ontological definition of - Eurocentrism, an important component of which was to clarify what there was to be Eurocentered about. Of course, the accomplishment of modernity – its actual physical realization – was a phenomenon relying on resources internal and external to Europe. Yet while loot and labour from the colonies served as the raw materials for European modernity, the latter had also to be sustained by an appropriate ideological vision, a modernist cosmology. It is the emergence of this cosmology that I have attempted to trace in the previous chapter.

All of this suggests that what has come to be known as Western Modernity is - and was never - monolithic. It was not accomplished at once in a single act of conception, but involved an ongoing process that was many-sided and multi-layered;

it involved material as well as ideational changes, ideas as well as practices, and it drew upon resources internal to Europe as well as beyond it. Our re-presentations of it at any time can accordingly only be grasped partially: political-economic in one instance, cultural in another, and psychological still in another. As Western Modernity appears in a blend of presence and absence, in parts and wholes, and in a manifold of appearance, so my account of it can accentuate only certain moments and profiles of it.

The following suggests that although Western Modernity was centred on a preoccupation with economic life, the religious revolution that had catalysed its initiation had implications that were not confined to the economy but engendered sweeping and profound implications for the totality of European social life, which was ideational as well as material. In effect, it gave rise to a new civilization, the Modernist civilization of the contemporary world. All realms of Western European culture were revolutionized, the domains of thought, religion, economy, law, family, community etc., spawning its famed technological-industrial and economic revolution that in turn gave rise to Western political and economic supremacy across the globe. The corollary of such techno-political and economic domination was Eurocentrism - the conviction of Western superiority - which over time morphed into a tendency to reference the West as the archetypal future to be had by all humanity.

The aim of this Chapter is to link these Modern transformations in the West to subsequent developments in China that have persisted until the present. Put another way, the goal of this chapter is to trace China's encounter with the West to its beginning so that we may understand the impact the latter had – and continues to have - on the former and vice versa. Note that I believe this relation was and is symbiotic: it runs both ways. Yet because I do think it evident that the cultural influence of the West on China has been and remains stronger than is the case vice versa – hence, my reference to Eurocentrism in China - this study will focus on Europe's influence on the latter to the neglect of tendencies in the opposite direction. In view of this, one can alternatively cast the aim of present chapter as *an historical attempt to account for how Modernity/Eurocentrism /Westernisation took root in China*.

II. 'Traditional' China and Chineseness: History, Identity, Re-presentation

In writing about cultural miscegenation in China, it is perhaps most appropriate to begin with a cursory 'sketch' of the social structure of 'traditional' China. This is hardly straightforward. As discussed in Chapter One, ours is an age in which postcolonial, post-structuralist, and feminist scholars, among others, have repeatedly asserted that accounts of the past-as-History are inherently problematic, for any such account is shaped by the biographical – class, gender, race, and cultural – locations of its author(s) in time. This insight problematises History, for it reveals that there are no objective historical accounts as such, no Archimedean vantage point from which to interpret the past.

This critique also implicates History in its entanglements with power. In History's unfolding it is the nation-state that is chief protagonist, the central institution around which historical accounts have been organized. And so it is that History is always written as an implicit endorsement of the modern nation-state. As a Modern concern, History is a self-conscious *paean* sung by moderns about the virtues of Modernity: the past inevitably unfolds towards a better future. And this self-referentiality is Janus-faced: while it celebrates Modernity as an inimitable accomplishment of the West, it condemns the Rest of humanity to a dreary 'traditional' past that then justifies interventions for their modernization. And this is to say nothing yet about nonhuman life.

Unsurprisingly, History's regard for nonhuman nature is no more commendable. In Paul Shepherd's (1996: xix) words, "History denies the earth as our true home and regards nonhuman life as incidental to human destiny." These attitudes of racist and anthropocentric contempt are found not only among zealots of Western civilization, for it infected even the great Marx in his youth. In commenting on the effects of 'English steam and English free trade' on the 'semi-barbarian, semi-civilized communities' of village India, Marx reminded his readers that these villagers "subjugated man to external circumstances instead of elevating man to be the sovereign of circumstances, that they transformed a self-developing social state into never-changing natural destiny, and thus brought about a brutalizing worship of nature… England, it is true, in causing a social revolution in Hindustan, was actuated only by the vilest interests, and was stupid in her manner of enforcing them. But that

is not the question. The question is, can mankind fulfill its destiny without a fundamental revolution in the social state of Asia." (cited in Fitzgerald, 1996: 44).

One suspects that it is because of this legacy of Orientalist and anthropocentric scorn that much sensitivity revolves around discussions about 'tradition'. Because 'tradition' is conceived in opposition to the 'modern' in a Western temporal schema, it is tainted by association and, like the concept of the 'modern,' elicits the charge of Eurocentrism. Discussions about 'tradition' are indeed problematic if accounts of non-Western pasts are invariably subsumed and structured by a Euro-American teleology. But what if they are not? That is to say, can we talk about history, the past, and tradition, without recourse to History and Eurocentrism? Given the legacy of Eurocentrism in historiography, can we discuss Chinese tradition or Chineseness without succumbing to problematic Orientalist representations? Or have the cultural sensitivities stirred up by the post-structural ambivalences of our age rendered history simply out of bounds?

Post-structuralist critique is on the mark when it points to the often unreflexive nature of grand narratives, which in this instance refers primarily to the lack of awareness about the intersections of researcher, text, and the world. This problem is amplified when attempting to understand historical events; in this case, the researcher is separated by the gulf of time and direct encounters between author and the world-of-the-past are no longer possible. No doubt, this poses a challenge for the enterprise of representing the past. One of the issues it raises entails how we should best be giving an account of past events. But even more fundamentally, owing to the complexities in the construction of such accounts and because of doubts about their ultimate credibility, should such an undertaking be even attempted in the first place?

I submit that an acknowledgment of complexity in the representational enterprise, particularly as it pertains to historical matters, cannot and should not hamper our efforts to understand it. Intellectual inquiry cannot simply be stymied because the discussion has moved onto difficult terrain. The accounts we have may be distorted but they are the only ones we have linking us to the past. I thus propose that historical accounts be read with a cautious skepticism grounded on an epistemic orientation that is sensitive to factors that are likely to have been implicated in their construction. If epistemological nihilism is not to take hold, this may well be the only way forward.

Appearing to have considered some of the concerns raised here, Wang Gungwu

(Wang, 1991:1) discusses the Chineseness of China as follows: "China today is radically different from China in 1900, and almost every aspect of Chineseness underwent considerable change during the past 3,000 years. From the outside, the characteristics attributed to China are more elusive and any effort to outline them without reference to time and the processes of change before the modern era must be inadequate. Even then the task is not straightforward."

"We could, for example, say that China is a place and everything that had happened within its present boundaries was Chinese. But as a place it has had very unstable boundaries, expanding and contracting rapidly from time to time. There was even a brief period, during the Mongol conquest, when it could be said that China ceased to exist. Nor is it easier to say that China is the country of the Chinese. It begs the question, who were the Chinese? No one has ever been sure how many people did, in fact, qualify as Chinese."

Wang concludes: "In short, no simple description is enough… I suggest that our understanding of Chineseness must recognize the following: it is living and changeable; it is also the product of a shared historical experience whose record has continually influenced its growth; it has become increasingly a self-conscious matter for China; and it should be related to what appears to be, or to have been, Chinese in the eyes of non-Chinese." (op. cit.: 2).

Wang Gungwu has been quoted at length here to illustrate more concretely the difficulties of discussing China, the Chinese, and Chineseness. At another level, his comments get at the more general problem of historical representation, especially the representation of identities, which are innately fluid and hence always in flux. Yet, the fact that national, ethnic, racial, and cultural identities are constantly being negotiated, constituted, and re-constituted merely attests to their ever-changing and transient nature; it does not rule out their existence, nor should it rule out discussions about their distinguishing features. Identities present themselves in identification, which is a process of categorization and classification that momentarily stabilize meanings so that we may make sense of the world around us. Furthermore, these meanings are given to us evocatively and by allusion, and while they may change, their existence cannot be denied. It is this understanding that serves as my interpretive strategy of texts about China and its past.

Presumably, this is also the same spirit in which Wang Gungwu speaks about the Chineseness of China. Hence, he (op. cit.: 2) notes that the earliest awareness of

China that is known came with the rise of the Chou dynasty at the end of the second millennium BC. He proceeds to add that (ibid), "Objectively, the foundations of China had already been laid by the Shang: the idea of the single ruler receiving tribute from all directions, an ideographic language, a religion of ancestor worship, capital cities of religious and political importance and an agricultural economy that could support a small aristocratic elite. This first China was not initially all that different from the states that had developed earlier in the Nile and Tigris-Euphrates valleys."

Teng Ssu-yu and John King Fairbank (Têng & Fairbank, 1979: 3-4) are also careful to qualify what they mean by 'premodern' or 'traditional' China, insisting that it would be "quite unrealistic" to be thinking of it as "archaic and static, backward and unchanging." They assert that, "Chinese society has always been in a process of change, older values and institutions giving way gradually to newer ideals and forms."

James Liu (1970) similarly highlights continuous change in Chinese society throughout history and notes that it is a change that involves both continuity (i.e. conservatism) and reform. Hence, 'tradition' is not static, but through "selectivity in transmission and reinterpretation in transmutation" (op. cit.: 11-12), it evolves. Liu alternatively proposes that Chinese history be viewed as evolving through a process of *integration*, where change and tradition are constantly being integrated in the ongoing process of cultural modification. It may very well be because of this integrative process, the successful integration of newer cultural elements, that Chinese culture has appeared continuous and changeless.

Nonetheless, the apparent consensus among these scholars is that Chinese tradition is alive and always changing; it is not stagnant. Yet consensus seems also to have been reached on the following: that despite ongoing change, there has been remarkable cultural continuity and stability, a condition that affords the description of China as a 'continuous civilization'. Indeed, it is owing to the stability of certain features of the Chinese culture, supposedly over millennia, that James Liu and Tu Weiming (Liu & Tu, 1970:1) feel compelled to speak of 'national characteristics' and 'cultural roots'; Wang Gungwu (op. cit.), of 'Chineseness'; and Teng Ssu-yu and John Fairbank (op. cit.), of 'premodern or traditional China.' Time - and by implication, history – thus appear to be the criterion by which we judge the validity of our claims about culture and identity. 'Culture' becomes 'tradition' under

sustained practice. And, hence, it is the durability of certain elements of Chinese cultural life that warrants our conceptualization of them as 'defining' characteristics: as 'Chineseness,' 'tradition,' and the like. It is the continuity and stubbornness of Chinese culture that qualifies – nay, necessitates - a discussion about 'China's traditional past,' if only so that we may know how to make sense of the present.

But what do these features of traditional Chinese culture consist? The description below is a synthesis of the contributions of the many scholars in the field. Since there appears considerable agreement among them about the distinguishing features of the Chinese social system and culture, I have included individual citations only when I have felt them necessary.

As observed by Wang Gungwu (op. cit.), traditional China was thought to resemble other ancient empires in that the sense that it consisted essentially of a rural, family-based agrarian system organized under a monolithic centralized government. Government was dominated by a bureaucratic scholar-official class which made decisions with regards to most aspects of daily life: administrative, political, economic, religious and military. Meanwhile, the agrarian bureaucratic state derived its revenues from the agricultural production of a largely illiterate peasantry – the overwhelming majority of the population - that served as manpower for the army, as well as corvee labour in large public-works projects.

The official class was selected from the small literate element of the Chinese population, the classically-trained literati who could carry out public business using the intricate Chinese writing system. As a classical education required years of study, it was afforded only to the well-to-do, with the scholar-officials tending to derive from the landed gentry rather than the peasant masses. Given this, the elite stratum in society was one in which a cozy and interdependent relationship between the landed classes, scholars, and officials prevailed. Consequently, the men of distinction, those who occupied the social positions of power and privilege, tended generally to be landlord-scholar-officials, not generals or merchants.

It is perhaps unsurprising given its longstanding status as a cornerstone of traditional Chinese culture that Confucian ideas have constantly been modified throughout China's history. This can be exemplified by the contrast between Han Confucianism in the first century BC, and the Neo-Confucianism of state orthodoxy in the fourteenth century. Yet despite the differences between various Confucian traditions and the ongoing modification of their ideas, it is widely agreed that a

Confucian rhetoric – and by extension, some form of practice - have been sustained in Chinese culture. In accordance with this heritage, the individual was generally subsumed within the larger social group, be it family, village community, or imperial-bureaucratic state. On the other hand, the scholars and bureaucrats, like the emperor, were allegedly bound by a customary ethical - not a legal - code of conduct. Teng and Fairbank (op. cit.) note that Western-style individualism never gained a foothold in traditional China, nor did personal freedom under law, civil liberties, or the institution of private property. Instead, China, the Middle Kingdom (*zhongguo*), was a politically centralized but economically decentralized 'empire' (*tienxia*). It was historically a family-based agrarian society bound by an obdurate system of customary ethical sanctions that were so entrenched they had sustained a system of patriarchal dynastic rule for a few millennia. The reader would not be amiss to observe that insofar as custom had an important role to play in the maintenance of the social order, old China bore a striking resemblance to the *gemeinschaft* of pre-modern Europe discussed earlier. Arguably, these were the characteristic features of the social-political system in China prior to its encounter with the West.

As regards governance, ancient China had historically been ruled by an Emperor, the Son of Heaven (*tianzi*), whose legitimacy was 'derived' from the Mandate of Heaven (*tianming*). According to Wang (op. cit.: 3), this sense of cosmic destiny was given by the fact that "it was the only literate polity for thousands of kilometers around and the most powerful state." Even then, the "dynastic state did not become the standard political form until after the Han dynasty (206BC-220AD) and similarly the cyclical view of history was confirmed after that." (ibid). As the Son of Heaven in the Middle Kingdom was believed to be a moral and ceremonial intermediary between human society and the unseen forces of Heaven representing all of humankind, all nearby tribes and peoples were assumed to come under its reign. Ancient Chinese political theory thus conceived of the Middle Kingdom as nothing less than a universal empire, and it was in this conceit that one witnessed the features of Sinocentrism and all that it entailed. Nonetheless, judging from its self-justificatory overtones, it is probable that this conception of Chinese political theory was a confection of the ruling establishment.

Despite appearing to be ideological in nature, it may be said that such Chinese political theory remained effective in actual practice. Traditional China's external political relations were structured by a set of tributary relations that subsumed all

lesser powers – 'barbarians' - with which it had ties. All foreign rulers wishing contact or trade with the empire were required to observe the established conventions for tributary relations; to enroll as tributaries, then to send envoys to perform the kowtow – involving three kneelings and nine prostrations - before the Emperor etc.

III. Sino-British Contact, Western Imperialism, Chinese Nationalism

Knowing little about the larger world beyond its borders, this same protocol was demanded when the British first approached China to establish trade relations. The encounter is most memorably captured by the Chinese response, Emperor Qianlong's condescending edict to King George III in 1793, the following of which is an excerpt (cited in Teng and Fairbank op. cit.: 19):

"You, O King, are so inclined toward our civilization that you have sent a special envoy across the seas to bring to our Court your memorial of congratulations on the occasion of my birthday and to present your native products as an expression of your thoughtfulness. On perusing your memorial, so simply worded and sincerely conceived, I am impressed by your genuine respectfulness and friendliness and greatly pleased."

"As to the request made in our memorial, O King, to send one of your nationals to stay at the Celestial Court to take care of your country's trade with China, this is not in harmony with the state system of our dynasty and will definitely not be permitted. Traditionally people of the European nations who wished to render some service under the Celestial Court have been permitted to come to the capital. But after their arrival they are obliged to wear Chinese court costumes, are placed in a certain residence, and are never allowed to return to their own countries. … Now you, O King, wish to send one of your nationals to live in the capital, but he is not like the Europeans, who come to Peking as Chinese employees, live there and never return home again, nor can he be allowed to go and come and maintain any correspondence. This is indeed a useless undertaking… The Celestial Court has pacified and possessed the territory within the four seas. Its sole aim is to do its utmost to achieve good governance and to manage political affairs, attaching no value to strange jewels and precious objects. The various articles presented by you, O King, this time are accepted by my special order to the office in charge of such functions in consideration of the offerings having come from a distance with sincere good wishes. As a matter of fact, the virtue and prestige of the Celestial Dynasty having spread far and wide, the kings of the myriad nations come by land and sea with all sorts of precious things. Consequently there is nothing we lack, as your principal envoy and others have themselves observed. We have never set much store on strange or

ingenious objects, nor do we need any more of your country's manufactures…"

Although spurned by the Manchu Emperor, the English were unfazed. They would soon beat down all Chinese walls obstructing their commercial aspirations. Hence, apart from Jesuit missionary contact in the late sixteenth century and King George III's advances in the late eighteenth century above, China's encounter with the West would be marked by the violence of a series of colonial annexations and conquests, death, plunder and wholesale pillaging and looting. Given that the impetus for religious and moral revolution in Western Europe emerged out of newly-expanded trading and commercial activities on the North Atlantic, it is not surprising that these annexations also occurred with the intent to advance trade and commerce. Hence, in 1840 when the Chinese Emperor's attempt to shut down British opium-smuggling in Guangzhou did not go down well, they were mercilessly subjected to the first-hand experience of 'stone-age' barbarism unleased with the ferocity and efficiency of modern industrial technology. The Opium War was initiated, and over the next two years, in the name of free-trade and the belief in the propriety of its self-conferred right to pay for Chinese tea with opium appropriated from Bengal, Britain would turn its warships and rocket launchers upon the forces of the Chinese Empire. Unsurprisingly, the vast technological mismatch brought the end of the Opium War in 1842, within two years of its beginning, and in favour of the British but after inflicting some 20,000 to 25,000 Chinese and 69 British deaths. Additionally, as losers of the war, the Chinese were forced to commit to a series of concessions and reparations, which were formalized with the signing of the Treaty of Nanjing in August 1842. These included the cessation of Hong Kong to Britain to serve as a hub for the opium trade thenceforth, the opening of five further Chinese ports [Shanghai, Guangdong, Fuzhou, Ningbo and Xiamen (Amoy)] to foreign trade, compensation to Britain for loss earnings from the opium trade during the war, and for the cost of the war itself. By the beginning of twentieth century, China had become a semi-completely colonized and was partitioned into territorial concessions under the control of the British, Russian, French, German, Japanese, the United States, Belgium, Portugal, Italy and Austro-Hungary. Having seen and perhaps felt the power of industrial techniques first-hand, the importance of industrialization for mere national survival would likely have been unforgettable for the Chinese. Victors may write history but the vanquished never forget the oppressions that accompany its making.

Hence, Ci Jiwei (1994: 26) observes that "the Opium War marked, both materially and symbolically, the birth of 'modern China'. It was a birth however, that was to be recognized as such only when the effects of that violent encounter with the West, followed by more such encounters that ended in China's defeat, became clear and irreversible."

In this context, the question of how best to grapple with foreign aggression was forcefully thrust upon the Confucian officials of the Qing regime, prompting the stirrings of, if not the urgent cries for, reform. On this score, Schwarcz (1986: 5) noted that Confucian officials tried from the mid-nineteenth century onwards "to find the best way to increase the power and prestige of the state," whereas Levenson (1968) has written of this experience as one in which the concerns of the Chinese nation began superceding its culture. What should be underscored, in any case, is the fact that the immediate and unrelenting threat of foreign domination forced upon the Chinese the question of how to become a modern nation. This is instructive, for it was in response to this problem that one finds the origins of what is today called modern Chinese nationalism. That is, insofar as China was made to be inadequate as a national political entity by dint of Western subjugation, Chinese nationalism is everywhere a modern phenomenon; it was a response to the depredations of Western imperialism, prompted by the fundamental existential question: "How do we contain the Machiavellian onslaughts of the West?"

IV. *Ti* and *Yong*: Spirit and Function, or 'Chineseness as Ends, Westernization as Means'

An inquiry into the origins and development of Eurocentrism in China therefore amounts to a study of how the Chinese responded to the externally-imposed demands of colonialism. Without question, the Reform instigated by Qing bureaucrats constituted an early response unequivocally acknowledging the *need for change*. Yet a directive of *how* change was to be accomplished was not readily at hand, and the lack of a clear recipe meant that the future was up for grabs, which gave rise to a spirited contest for it. This pitted two reciprocal but oppositional tendencies: the exaltation of traditional culture by traditionalists/nativists on the one hand and its abandonment by iconoclasts on the other.

Adequate Chinese responses to the Western assault were consequently believed

to involve either a re-affirmation (or reification) of the traditional culture, or its wholesale disavowal, with the latter requiring a reconstruction and transformation of Chinese culture via an appropriation and improvisation of 'foreign' elements. The pressing questions for the Chinese as a result of Western aggression may be summed up thus: Should the future be built with distinctively Chinese or Western elements? Should the strategy be constituted by internal reform or outright revolution? In short, what should the form of resistance take?

Representing the matter as an issue of colonial resistance is, of course, not without its problems. One complication rests with the fact that *resistance* can manifest in a variety of forms, and depending on its nature, may be considered to amount to anything *but* that. For reasons that should be apparent, the Chinese cultural iconoclasts with tendencies toward Westernisation are especially vulnerable to this charge. Given that their project involves the explicit renunciation of tradition in favour of things Western, it could quite rightly be regarded as little more than a case of craven capitulation. Similar concerns are also inflected by the notions of reform and revolution, with the former corresponding to traditionalism whereas the latter, to iconoclasm. From this discussion, hence, traditionalism is the analogue of reform and resistance in the same way that iconoclasm is analogous to revolution and capitulation. It is apparent that the crux of the matter lies in the meanings conveyed by these words, not in the words themselves. Since our purpose of understanding and critiquing Chinese Eurocentrism is to bring into consciousness that which is not necessarily self-conscious or acknowledged on the part of those involved, this is not mere academic pedantry. If Eurocentrism were basically a near total dependence - or at least an excessive reliance - on European ways of life, thinking, and representation, such conceptual subtleties are important to distinguish.

Of course, such a conundrum was not simply an issue about the cultural sources of ideas, about where and who they came from. Underlying these questions, inevitably, was another that was closely related: which choice is in fact *correct*? Of consideration in the Chinese cultural transformation, consequently, was not just whether the resources deployed were 'Chinese' or 'Western', but which had the greater purchase of truth. In other words, there may have been a sense of inevitability about the need to reform Chinese traditional culture, but just what was asked of it, and what would have been an acceptable answer? As in the observations of Joseph Levenson (op. cit.: xxxii), "Values depend, in the last analysis, on their natural

sources in particular places and times. A man may be ready to reject the institutions, science, morality, or aesthetics which his history offers him, but he knows that whatever he does accept has its place in someone's history. And no one is so ethereal, so cleanly delivered from native soil and the limited culture which formed him, that he can see its relative disqualification with perfect equanimity."

In other words, how much Westernization could the Chinese permit without having their sense of Chineseness violated, even if the said Westernization were ostensibly pursued in the interest of defending the latter? Questions of identity are complex in that they are neither rational nor conceptual: if a foreign solution were chosen to solve a local problem on account of being 'better' or 'more correct', how are native emotions reconciled? More seriously, if a way of life alien to a native culture were deemed 'better' in its entirety, what is one supposed to make of the past? Does one consign the past - *one's past*, *culture*, and *identity* - to the waste bin of history? More careful analysis may have to wait, but it would be normal to suspect the emergence of at least a fledgling sense of alienation, where the need for self-affirmation would be matched by a simultaneous feeling of self-contempt.

I will propose that these questions concerning the Chinese response to the West be analysed in the context of Qing bureaucrat, Zhang Zhidong's (1837-1909), *ti-yong* formulation. Zhang had borrowed the terminology from Sung dynasty (907-1279) neo-Confucian, Chu Hsi, in order to resolve the conundrums of the Sino-Western encounter. That is, to ensure that China's efforts to Westernize were reconciled with the psychological demand that these undertakings remain apparently Chinese, Zhang advocated in the 1880s, Western learning as *yong* (utility) and Chinese learning as *ti* (substance), which was a formulation of means and ends suggesting the compatibility of Chinese and Western knowledge. With this, the contradictions arising from inter-cultural *difference* - between the internal and external, Chinese and Western, reform and revolution, 'capitulation' and 'resistance' – and their admixture were rendered more amenable to reconciliation.

Importantly, the *ti-yong* formula suggests that 'resistance' can derive from the *revolutionary* transformation of Chinese culture by embracing a compromise between Western modernization and Chinese tradition. Instead of conceiving of them as mutually exclusive, the idea behind Zhang's formula was to blend both forms of knowledge in order to capitalize on the best that each could offer. Significantly, what was considered epistemically '*correct*' - Western knowledge – was also thought to

be ontologically appropriate; that is, formulated in this way, Western knowledge could be appropriated without inciting the corresponding anxieties within the Chinese mind. As a matter of fact, by positing Western knowledge as *means* and Chinese knowledge as *ends*, Chinese culture could retain its *superiority* vis-a-vis the West. The integrity of Chinese knowledge and culture could at least appear to be maintained despite Westernization, and Chinese culture could on the whole remain Chinese even if some of its components could be built out of appropriations from the West.

Hence, while it had been the general consensus that China needed to become a strong and independent modern-nation in the face of Western imperialism, the basis of contention had all along rested on *how* this was to be achieved. In this light, it follows that the concern about China becoming a modern nation-state antedated the concern with Enlightenment. As a practical matter, insofar as differences existed around this concern, they fractured along a divide pitting Chinese conservatives against an iconoclasm that repudiated the Chinese past. The former sought to reform the Qing regime from within, while the iconoclasts advocated the urgency of revolution in the form of an external, Western-inspired Enlightenment.

Evidently, in this contest between reformism and iconoclasm, Zhang Zhidong's genius can be seen to rest with his articulation of *ti-yong*, which brought a reassuring sense of equanimity to the Chinese mind. Yet, Zhang's formula was more easily stated in theory than applied in practice, for there was obviously no way of separating means from ends in such a clear-cut fashion. Indeed, a more critical appraisal would suggest that it is more likely that Zhang coined the term as a rhetorical device, more as a way to hide China's utter hopelessness in the face of imperialism than as a serious proposal to solve its problems.

One factor that lends support to such an argument is the fact that the Qing regime was heavily dependent on the imperialist powers for its survival. Hu Sheng (1991) has noted, for instance, that the bureaucrats of the Qing regime realized that it was only through foreign 'protection' that the regime could maintain itself as one ruling China. This would have been obvious to the foreign powers, since the Qing regime was capitulating to one foreign demand after another as Russia, England, France, Japan, Germany, Belgium and the United States all vied to partition China. They also jostled to take control of its Maritime Customs with the aim of controlling Chinese trade, and sought to become China's creditor. In the latter case, China took

on foreign loans not just to help pay off its debts from the Sino-Japanese War, they were also used to service new debt undertaken for railroad construction, an enterprise over which the imperialist powers also competed. A vicious cycle was thus produced: more debt was undertaken to service earlier debt as Chinese sovereignty whittled away in a spiral of deepening dependence.

The *ti-yong* formulation was, therefore, likely a form of ideological 'self-deception' perpetuated by Qing bureaucrats who had become *de facto* Western lackeys. In the face of the Qing's woeful subjugation by the Western imperialist powers, the invocation of Chinese learning in the same breath attempts to give it an equal – if not more - important status than Western learning. But it is a sorry, face-saving attempt spawned only in the fantasies of the vanquished verily because no other redemptive options exist. It is redemption strictly of and in the imagination/mind only. And herein is the self-deception: it was propagated by the Qing regime as a form of deference to the Western imperialists upon whom their existence depended, without giving away the fact of their inaptitude to govern China. Hence, 'Chinese learning' was uttered as if to 'convince' themselves of their role as fitting and able custodians of China. It was psychological self-appeasement on the part of the Qing government, to reconcile its emasculation by foreign imperialists with the illusion of its power as the de jure rulers of China. This deception, of course, was not merely manufactured for themselves but, simultaneously, also for the consumption of the masses under their rule. Thus, the mention of Chinese and Western learning in the same breath evokes at least the impression of a symbiosis between equals. Even though (because?) this message would have successfully met the demands of a subjugated and exploited Chinese population in need of its own psychological edification, its ideological function in the interest of the nationalist cause should not be overlooked.

Ideology notwithstanding, Zhang's formula inspired Chinese reformers who sought to modernize China without undermining what was believed to be the fundamental values of Chinese civilization. In other words, the formula may have been touted for ideological ends, but it was pursued with the seriousness of fact/truth all the same. It continues as a source of inspiration even today, as there remain many – ruling elites, policymakers, and large swathes of the population - who maintain practices undergirded by the belief that Chinese civilization can be shored up/strengthened by Westernization without being compromised. It is a contentious

belief, of course, one whose tenability I am questioning in the present project.

In any case, Zhang Zhidong's *ti-yong* formulation was not simply agreed upon and accepted, even if it had been practicable. Cultural conservatives and radical iconoclasts alike had doubts about the *ti-yong* formula, but for opposing reasons. While conservatives stressed that the technoculture that constituted Western 'means' was inimical to Chinese civilization, a growing number of cultural radicals and critical intellectuals stressed the necessity and urgency of Western-style enlightenment. Similarly, whereas cultural conservatives sought to place the blame for China's backwardness on foreign aggression, critical intellectuals looked inwards and laid the blame on its feudal traditions, taking to task what was believed to be the Confucian-inculcated ethic of subservience to authority, especially patriarchal domination. Zhang's *ti-yong* formula was therefore seen to be too Western by China's traditionalists, but insufficiently Western – indeed, too traditional - by its critical intellectuals. It may be pertinent to note in light of this that Zhang Zhidong has been regarded by some to be little more than a traitorous 'Westernization' bureaucrat. (see Hu, op. cit.).

Ideas almost always derive their currency from the historical circumstances of their emergence where timing is of essence. In the tumult of the late 19th and early 20th C that saw China debilitated by the imperialist incursions/predations of the West, Russia, and Japan, the circumstances seemed anything but conducive to tradition. Tradition hung like a dead-weight as these imperialist powers fought - and at times compromised – with each other over the partitioning of China into various 'spheres of influence.' In the face of its helpless/woeful subjugation by these industrial nations, one can rightly expect to find the momentum of Chinese social opinion swinging against tradition in favour of modern progress.

China's predicament descended to a new low and became desperate particularly after its defeat in the Sino-Japanese War in 1895. As mentioned, this defeat not only meant that it had to pay indemnities to Japan, but that it had to borrow heavily from the Western imperialist powers to do so. The Qing regime's ability to balance its budgets, much less maintain surpluses, was severely jeopardized as a result. Hu Sheng (op. cit.: 47) notes, for instance, that the regime's average annual budget surplus of around 4 million taels of silver from 1885 to 1895 was immediately reversed after the Sino-Japanese war. From 1896, the Qing government's external indebtedness amounted to 20 million taels of silver in principal and interest. By 1898,

this had increased to 25 million taels while its revenues remained relatively constant, ranging from 80 to 90 million taels, which were used primarily to support the royal household, the bureaucracy, and the army. Shortfalls in the budget of the central government in Beijing resulted in demands that the various provincial governments make up for the difference, which quite invariably resulted in further impositions of taxes and forced labour upon the people. Colonial economic exploitation from abroad was thus accompanied by blatant political repression at home.

The Qing regime's dependence on foreign imperialism for the perpetuation of its rule was also evident, for it had continually to cede Chinese territories and sovereignty as 'gifts' to these foreign powers as a quid pro quo for the continuation of its *de jure* rule over the Chinese polity. Colonialism is almost always an exercise of collaboration between oligarchs; hence, it was through collusion between Chinese and foreign ruling elites - between the Qing regime and the foreign imperialists - which made the colonial project in late-nineteenth century China possible. Hu Sheng (op. cit.) has gone so far as to refer to Qing bureaucrats as the tax collectors of the imperialist powers.

Still, the Qing reformers (and perhaps others) were hopeful that their internally-inspired reforms would succeed, and that the Chinese future could peacefully consist of a blend of Western technique with the traditions of the Chinese past, exactly along the lines of Zhang's *ti-yong* formulation.

V. Means (*Yong*) Become Ends (*Ti*): The Cultural Iconoclasm of May Fourth

It should be highlighted that the efforts to implement *ti-yong* were wishful for a number of reasons. With the widespread and intensified suffering visited upon the Chinese people at the end of the nineteenth century, the Qing reforms came under vigorous criticism in the early twentieth century. The criticism took especially to questioning the superiority of Chinese learning, and reform along the lines of Zhang's compromised prescription was thought to be woefully inadequate. Such criticisms intensified especially after 1911, with the abdication of the Qing regime and the setting up of the Republic.

The group that began to seriously call into question the wisdom of Zhang's *ti-yong* formula comprised mainly of the literati, a group of critical-minded and

iconoclastic intellectuals who had become self-appointed agents of enlightenment. They had, in general, some foreign exposure, and it was from the vantage point of such experience that they viewed the inadequacies of their own culture. Perhaps owing to the perception that it was enlightenment that helped launched Europe onto the world-stage, Chinese critical intellectuals prescribed 'enlightenment' (*qimeng*) as the panacea for China's political ills, believing it to be capable of emancipating China the same way it had Europe some one hundred and fifty years before. China's subjugation by Europe via classical colonialism thus paved the way for the surreptitious infusion of European ideas, practices and institutions – Western civilization and culture, to be sure. At least, the physical violations of classical colonialism prepared the ground for the mental and cultural violations that were to follow. One may compellingly trace the origins of Chinese Eurocentrism to this, though it is apparent that 'Eurocentrism' would not have been considered by the iconoclastic intellectuals of the time to be regrettable. Indeed, European ways were by now seen to be the light at the end of the tunnel, the means by which China would be saved.

Vera Schwarcz's (op. cit.) work has pointed out that an analogy may be drawn between China's and Europe's experiences of 'enlightenment'. After all, it was the European enlightenment that served as the inspiration for the Chinese variant. But, here, there are important distinctions that separate the two seemingly analogous experiences. She (ibid) notes, for instance, that there was a difference in the conditions from which each hoped to be emancipated. Europe's enlightenment sought the establishment of reason over divine revelation and involved disenchantment, emancipation from religion, and secularization. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, the European enlightenment was predicated on a religious and moral revolution: Europe sought emancipation from the dogma of a Church civilization to render its society amenable to the rapidly developing commercial opportunities at the time. It was only after the accomplishment of this were reason and the universality of human values exalted.

In contrast, China was from the beginning already secular. As far as its Chinese proponents were concerned, the goal of enlightenment was to regain its sovereignty and dignity within the comity of nations, with its sorry predicament verily being attributed to its secular but all-encompassing Confucian culture. The latter was thought to be the source of China's stagnation and weakness as its supposedly feudal

and repressive nature were believed to have led to the Chinese people's uncritical submission to patriarchal authority, of sons to fathers, wives to husbands, and of subjects to the imperial bureaucracy. These criticisms of the Confucian cultural legacy were conflated with the passions of China's first nationalist revolution - the anti-dynastic revolution of 1911 - and national salvation (*jiuguo*) was soon thought to be contingent on the salvation of humankind (*jiuren*). China's enlightenment thus sought not only emancipation from foreign aggression but, just as importantly, from the perceived obsolescence of its secular Confucian culture. That is to say, enlightenment was also to involve transformation at the level of the individual person embedded within a matrix of outworn cultural legacies.

John Fitzgerald (op. cit.) invokes the motif of 'awakening' to describe this process, observing that "the people of China were awakening to their nationhood," and that "these early awakenings were awakenings to selfhood and individuality in relation to a rational and material universe." (op. cit: 3; 6). Fitzgerald additionally makes a distinction between different understandings of 'awakening' since its intent was for nationalist as much as for personal ends. In speaking of national awakening, for instance, Sun Yat-sen celebrated the liberation of the individual and the national people from the absolutism of the imperial state, but at the same time reclaimed this awakening of the modern state. In other words, 'awakening' was symbolic not just of a nationalist movement, but of the cultural and intellectual enlightenment of the individuals as well. Fitzgerald (op. cit.: 6) has noted that, "The awakening of the universal self was followed by the awakening of a distinctly Chinese self that preferred to commune with its nation." The awakening of the people as self-conscious individuals was thus coherent with the awakening of people to citizenship and nationhood.

Yet it was exactly the goal of individual awakening that the perceived tendencies of Confucianism were thought to be inimical. Indeed, the impediment of the erstwhile culture prompted the critical intellectuals to take to task the sentimental defense of it as tradition. For the iconoclastic intellectuals, tradition was synonymous with 'outworn habits', especially of the mind (Schwarcz 1984: 456), and the way forward was believed to involve cultural transformation and transvaluation, not its defense. It is precisely because China's relative 'backwardness' was attributed to its traditional culture that Muarice Meisner (1972: 14) has described what ensued as a 'cultural revolution' that involved a 'transformation of consciousness.'

The emphasis placed on cultural awakening by the critical intellectuals of the day had in fact stemmed from the failure of the anti-dynastic political revolution of 1911. The dynasty had collapsed but China remained helpless in the throes of foreign imperialist pillaging that continued until and culminated with the transfer of German concessions to Japan in the 1919 Treaty of Versailles. When the passions of the anti-dynastic mobilization had died down, it became clear to these intellectuals that China's problems were more deep-seated, and lay with its outmoded cultural values. Consequently, the need to break with the past became an imperative and set into motion events that culminated with the May Fourth movement of 1919. Benjamin Schwartz (1972: 2) and others have argued that the most radical ideas of the May Fourth movement had appeared on the Chinese scene "well before 1919." Presumably, these authors are referring to the elements of Westernization found in the Qing's internal reforms of the late-19th C, the most succinct expression of which was given by Zhang's *ti-yong* formula.

But of what did these iconoclastic ideas of Westernization consist? Writing in 1915 in *New Youth* (Xin Qingnian), a periodical he initiated to foster cultural transformation, Chen Duxiu argued that modern society should be composed of independent individuals, with laws and customs protecting individual rights. Chinese society, he pointed out, emphasized the family and clan, with the individual acting only as a member of these primary units. He criticized the defenders of tradition, who in stressing filial piety to the family and to the ruler while denying individual rights, were felt to be preserving a suffocating, backward society. (quoted in Kenley, 2003: 121) Moreover, piety to family and ruler was merely a symptom of a more serious problem, which was that Chinese culture was debilitated by ingrained habits of mind. It was a problem whose eradication was believed to necessitate a turn toward scientific reason.

In line with the pro-Western sentiments of the day, it was upon the youth for whom such a responsibility was believed to rest. Hence, in the opening article of the very first issue of *New Youth*, Chen Duxiu (Sept. 1915: 1) pleads: "Youth is like early spring, like the rising sun, like trees and grass in bud, like a newly sharpened blade. It is the most valuable period of life. The function of youth in society is the same as that of a fresh and vital cell in a human body. In the processes of metabolism, the old and the rotten are incessantly eliminated to be replaced by the fresh and living… If metabolism functions properly in a human body, the person will be

healthy; if the old and rotten cells accumulate and fill the body, the person will die. If metabolism functions properly in a society, it will flourish; if old and rotten elements fill the society, then it will cease to exist… I merely, with tears, place my plea before the fresh and vital youth, in the hope that they will achieve self-awareness, and begin to struggle. What is this self-awareness? It is to be conscious of the value and responsibility of one's young life and vitality, to maintain one's self-respect, which should not be lowered. What is this struggle? It is to exert one's intellect, discard resolutely the old and the rotten, regard them as enemies and as a flood or savage beasts, keep away from their neighborhood and refuse to be contaminated by their poisonous germs…". (cited in Chow 1960: 45-6).

Chen's allusion to the obsolescence of China's traditional past are apparent. What China needed was for its youth to "use to the full the natural intellect of man, and judge and choose among all the thoughts of mankind, distinguishing which are fresh and vital and suitable for the present struggle for survival, and which are old and rotten and unworthy to be retained in the mind." (Chen Sept. 1915: 2). Chen continues (op. cit.: 3): "I would rather see the ruin of our traditional 'national quintessence' than have our race of the present and future extinguished because of its unfitness for survival. Alas, the Babylonians are gone; of what use is their civilization to them now? As the Chinese maxim says, 'if the skin does not exist, what can the hair adhere to?' The world continually progresses and will not stop. All those who cannot change themselves and keep pace with it are unfit for survival and will be eliminated by the processes of natural selection. Therefore, what is the good of conservatism?"

Chen's writings three years later reveal an even greater, more palpable sense of urgency. Comparing traditional beliefs with the Baconian idols of falsehood, Chen writes: "Destroy the idols! Destroy false idols! We believe that reason, scientific reason should be the standard in everything: in religion in politics and in morality. The unreasonable beliefs of vain men from ancient times all must be considered idols, all must be destroyed." (quoted in Schwarcz op. cit.: 464).

Chow Tse-tung (op. cit.: 361) has noted that the May Fourth movement "appears to have been a microcosmic repetition, with some varying emphases and sequences, of the intellectual evolution of the West over the last three or four centuries." It seems reasonable, accordingly, to say that there has been a recurrence of themes across the two experiences, and they involved an 'awakening', a growing faith in the

ideas of progress, enlightenment, reason, and universal values that had occurred previously in Europe. These developments prompted Fitzgerald (op. cit.) to refer to what was happening in China at the time as an "awakening" of the individual self to a new world order.

Much emphasis was placed on the individual, for it was widely believed among elites that it was the personal deficiencies inherent in the Chinese - exactly those entrenched habits of mind and body - that accounted for China's backwardness. Hence, Sun Yat-sen interrupted the final of his public lectures on the Three Principles of the People on 2 March 1924 to advise his audience against spitting and burping in public. He further urged the cultivation of a new kind of personal culture. According to Fitzgerald (op. cit.: 9), Sun was attempting to remake the 'Chinaman' in order to forge a new China, one that revolved around a new ethos of personal deportment. Sun had considered personal deportment - or the government of the self - as a precursor to competent self-government. It is in accord with this line of reasoning that the accomplishment of modernity in early 20th C China was tied to the realization of certain standards of hygiene. (see Rogaski 2004).

Unmistakably, the individual loomed large in attempts to break up the fetters of Chinese tradition. Lin Yu-sheng (1972) argues that the individual subject emerged as a concern because it was widely believed that individual independence in China was generally suppressed by the traditional culture. Yet, according to him, this concern with the individual was not of the same variety as that expressed by Western individualism, which was predicated upon the ethical belief in the self-worth of the individual as such and defended on the grounds of an indefeasible right. Instead, the individualism that emerged as part of the iconoclasm of May Fourth sought both to legitimize the iconoclastic movement on the one hand and to realize nationalist goals of liberating the individual from family and state loyalties on the other. This individualism, in other words, was entirely functionalist. Because its invocation was pragmatic, Lin (op. cit.) notes that individual values did not become deeply rooted among the May Fourth intellectuals, dwindling especially after 1919 when Chinese tradition was confronted by a nationalism of either a leftist or rightist ideological persuasion.

Be that as it may, the endurance of many aspects of Western culture - including the tendency toward individualism itself – was apparent. Apart from the acceptance of Western ideas of progress, reason, and enlightenment mentioned above, Chinese

cultural transformation also entailed practices spanning, among other things, dress, hygiene, and table manners. Hence, while Western individual values might not have been the explicit focus of the May Fourth iconoclasts, the ensuing Western-inspired changes brought about practices that inevitably underscored an individualist orientation. A central feature of modern Chinese nationalism, for instance, was "an awakening to the claims of mass communities for a place in the polity and the claims of the polity itself for unity and sovereign independence." (Fitzgerald op. cit.: 24). By the time of Sun Yat-sen's death in 1924 we witness that Confucian exegesis had given over to scientific discourse, and common people were believing that sovereignty rested in themselves as citizens in democratic states.

Yet, while Eurocentrism in China had its roots in the encounter between China and the West in the late-Qing era of the nineteenth century, its impact was limited by the belief that internal reform was possible. This was the belief that Westernization was merely technique, and could be attenuated according to Zhang Zhidong's *ti-yong* doctrine described above. By the end of the first quarter of the twentieth century, however, many were considering *ti-yong* a failure.

A rejection of Sino-Western syncretism can spawn a reaction with two tendencies: one, either a re-assertion of Chinese traditional culture or, two, a movement towards further Westernization. As some of the above citations have revealed, *ti-yong* syncretism was rejected not in the hope for more tradition, but less. The continuity and rich expanse of Chinese history and culture had become excessive. Tradition was now a cumbersome liability and had to be shaken off. Hence, Zhang's advocacy for a compromise of Sino-Western of learning failed quite simply because the times - along with Chinese social priorities - had changed; and the dominant social tendency was unmistakably gravitating toward further Westernization.

An account for the failure of Zhang's proposed *ti-yong* syncretism is beyond our scope, but the thesis proffered above about its ideological intent suggests that it was a doctrine doomed from the outset. Ideologies may serve the social function of psychological and emotional appeasement, but they do so only negatively, by way of obscurantism/mystification. In the meantime, as Western *yong* began to supplant Chinese *ti*, Chinese essence began to wear away. In fact, the means became ends and what was thought to be the essence of Chineseness surreptitiously sapped away. As Levenson (op. cit.: 61) has pointed out, Chinese learning was prized as substance

because of its function; when its function was subverted, the learning became irrelevant.

In its stead, Eurocentrism flourished to entail the belief in the imperative for China to Westernise completely. Especially between the anti-dynastic revolution of 1911, and the May Fourth movement of 1919, Chinese elites began increasingly to view their several millennia-year-old civilization to be beyond internal reform. The sense of inferiority felt about the Chinese culture was preponderant in intellectual circles, and it was believed that China could be saved only by way of iconoclasm, by the wholesale Westernization of Chinese culture, thinking, morality, and consciousness.

Given the relative stability and continuity of Chinese civilization over the past several thousand years, such a potential transformation would have had obvious implications. Yet - and perhaps in order to help bring such watershed implications to pass - members of the Chinese population were for the first time evaluating China and its culture from the perspective of the West. Hence, we see Chen Duxiu's unequivocal rejection of the 'false idols' of Chinese tradition in favour of scientific reason. Hu Shih shared similar sentiments, writing, "My own attitude is that we must unreservedly accept this modern civilization of the West because we need it to solve our most pressing problems, the problems of poverty, ignorance, disease, and corruption." (cited in Wang op. cit.: 246). Writing in May 1925, Lu Xun bemoaned the tenacity of the feudal and traditional mindset that he thought was a metaphorical analogue of the Great Wall:

"Our wonderful Great Wall! This engineering feat has left its mark on the map, and is probably known to everyone with any education the whole world over. Actually, all it has ever done is to work man conscripts to death – never kept out the Huns. Now it is merely an ancient relic, but its final ruin will not take place for a while, and it may even be preserved. I am always conscious of being surrounded by the Great Wall. The stone work consists of old bricks reinforced at a later date by new bricks. These have combined to make a wall that hems us in. When shall we stop reinforcing the Great Wall with new bricks? A curse on this wonderful Great Wall." (cited in Schwarcz 1984: 457).

Lu Xun compares the Great Wall to the traditional Chinese mindset. Just as the Wall is meant to keep out the foreign barbarians, tradition serves as a bulwark against innovative ideas from the outside. For Lu Xun, the source of China's problems unambiguously rests with this impermeability of its longstanding traditions,

which he considers debilitating. Moreover, the astute reader would note that when proffering a solution to China's woes, he does not take after Zhang Zhidong by raising the possibility of a compromise between Western and Chinese learning. This may well be due to his recognition of the impracticality and ill-conceived nature of the *ti-yong* doctrine. Whatever the case, Lu Xun does not consecrate the Chinese cultural heritage. Not only does he *not* regard Chineseness as *ti*, the prized ends; Lu Xun considers it to be the very source of the Chinese people's oppression, a relic that 'hems' them in and spells 'death.' It appears that for Lu Xun, the utility (*yong*) – much less, desirability (*ti*) - of traditional Chineseness was dubious; hence, his iconoclasm.

We thus see, especially after the dynastic revolution of 1911, a disavowal of Sino-Western *ti-yong* syncretism in favour of wholesale Westernization. In the spirit of the times, appeals to Chinese traditionalism waned considerably as iconoclastic intellectuals urged their fellow Chinese to awaken to their rights as autonomous individual-citizens in the interest of China's salvation. It was after all believed that the enterprise of national salvation (*jiuguo*) was contingent on personal salvation (*jiumin*).

Corresponding to the iconoclastic ideas of the period, we thus find widespread and far-reaching changes in lifestyle and cultural practices that demonstrated an unyielding commitment to reason, science, and progress. The revolutionary winds blew forcefully across the entire spectrum of Chinese society and brought change to the everyday activities of Chinese existence, such as language, literature, dress codes, hygiene (*weisheng*), etcetera. Given this, it should be apparent that attempts to separate *ti* and *yong* - ends and means - in piecemeal fashion as Zhang had proposed would have made no sense whatsoever, for either the classical Chinese language was retained, or it was not. Similarly, either one donned Western clothing, or one did not. The implication, in either case, was that Chinese culture was 'made' either in the image of the past, or in that of some hoped for, Modernist future. In the latter case, Westernization and Eurocentrism were implied as means and ends - *yong* and *ti* – simultaneously. There was never *ti* or *yong* piecemeal, but every deployment of technique (*yong*) contributed to an end (*ti*) that bore the features of the technique that shaped it; in other words, Western *technique* infected Chinese *spirit* and in the course, changed it.

It was in this manner that the iconoclasm of the Chinese Enlightenment and the

May Fourth Movement put paid to the *ti-yong* doctrine. Nonetheless, to speak about China's cultural revolution in this manner is to speak in abstractions. Such transformations were quite often tangible and visible, and since they were so extensive as to encompass the gamut of social phenomena, we can only be selective in our treatment of them. In the following case study, I will elaborate on the changes one witnessed in Chinese men's fashion - fashion not taken as an end in itself but, because it codifies and points to larger cultural concerns, as a way to capture the ethos of the times. The changing of men's dress codes is therefore to be regarded as a microcosm of larger social and cultural transformations underway in China at the time. It is an experience that can be interpreted through the trope of Zhang's *ti-yong* formulation - if not to underscore the implausibility of the doctrine, then to highlight the dialectical interaction of its elements, *ti* and *yong*, Chinese spirit on the one hand, Western technique on the other.

VI. A Case Study: Men's Fashion As Means and Ends, c.1890–1912

Clothes are not merely utilitarian forms of body-cover; that is, they do not merely represent a means/technique of protecting the body. What people wear convey information about their social, cultural, and economic status. As clothes are a form of self-expression, they also reflect/document the tastes, aspirations, and desires both of the individual as well as of the larger society. The documentary nature of clothes is inevitable. The term 'documentary' here refers to 'documentary meaning' as Mannheim (1952: 160) first invoked it, where "an identical homologous pattern underlies a vast variety of totally different realizations of meaning." Applied here, the 'documentary' nature of clothing refers to the constellation of social codes and meanings that clothing inevitably conveys. The conferment of 'documentary meaning' by clothing is inevitable in the sense that it applies even to the non-fashion conscious, for what one chooses to wear ultimately reveals something about the conventions/mores of the given society. Clothes confer upon the wearer a certain identity, which in turn belie a sense of the prevailing ethos of the day. Nowhere and at no time was this more apparent than during China's transition from monarchical rule to modern republic against the backdrop of its difficult relations with the West, when Western suits for men began increasingly to displace the traditional Chinese

long gown (*changpao*). In Harrist Jr.'s words (2005: 171), "In China, during the early decades of the twentieth century, a long-recognized sartorial code was rapidly reconfigured by the sight of Chinese people wearing Western clothes."

Because of the very explicit meanings of identity it conveyed, dress was from the beginning caught up in the ideological battle pitting things perceived to be Chinese and traditional against those foreign and modern. In line with the attempts to revolutionize the traditional culture, reformers and revolutionaries argued that Chinese clothing was inappropriate for the modern age. For them, Western clothes, especially the two- or three-piece men's suit, more appropriately revealed its wearer to be a participant of commercial and cosmopolitan life, even if their conservative counterparts considered Chinese men in Western suits to be cultural imposters imitating Western ways. Nonetheless, Harrist Jr. (op. cit.) has noted that the suit became associated with Western ideals of manly physical vigour, personal style and sexual allure, primarily because it revealed more of the body of the wearer and was, as such, more expressive of action, energy, and dynamism. Hence, while the suit transmitted ideas pertaining to the modern preoccupation with politics and commerce, it also alluded to and prescribed Western ideas about desirable gender – particularly, masculine - traits.

According to Anne Hollander (1994), this accentuation of certain parts of the male body had resulted from the evolution of men's dress in the West. Men and women of the elite classes had throughout history worn long robes enveloping the body, but beginning in the fifteenth century a transformation occurred that led to a bifurcation in men's and women's dress. While women continued dressing in gowns or robes, men began to reveal the shapes of their bodies, especially the legs and groin, through stockings and leggings. Apparently, this display of male virility was afforded only to the privileged elite classes, as exemplified by Edward IV's decree in 1463 that only high-ranking knights "could wear short gowns, jackets or cotes which exposed their privy members and buttocks."

Just like in ancient Europe, elite men and women throughout three millennia of documented Chinese history had been garbed in long gowns and robes that fell from the shoulders and shrouded the body and legs. Unlike in Europe, however, where the sartorial codes between the sexes began to differ in the 15th century, the long robe

remained the preponderant dress-code in China. In fact, Harrist Jr. (op. cit.) argues that it was not until the 20th C, when Chinese men took to Western suits that the differentiation of clothing along gender lines became apparent. And unlike their European counterparts, Chinese elites had always been averse to revealing their bodies. This was captured by Lin Yutang (1937: 262) as follows: "Now the philosophy behind Chinese and Western dress is that the latter tries to reveal the human form, while the former tries to conceal it. But as the human body is essentially like the monkey's, usually the less of it revealed the better."

Nonetheless, China's disastrous encounter with Western imperialism gave way to a strong and conspicuous foreign presence, especially at the treaty-ports, and it was inevitable that Western dress became a common sight. Harrist Jr. (op. cit.: 177) has pointed out that a recurring theme in written and visual representations of foreign clothing was the elongation of the limbs that Western trousers appeared to produce. But it was not only an appearance of length; the fact that trousers provided an outline of the limb meant that whenever the wearer was seen in motion he would inevitably give an impression of speed and vigour. In contrast, the bagginess of traditional Chinese clothing often obscured sight of the limbs, to say nothing about that of their movements.

In the context of the West's unrelenting subjugation of China, the impact of such visual impressions is not to be underestimated. With the climate already steeped in feelings of Chinese cultural inadequacy, the sense of vigour and speed that sleek Western outfits projected was sufficient to convince many Chinese of the suitability of none other than Western clothes for the modern age. On the other hand, because traditional Chinese clothes were thought to hamper motion, they were consigned to the past, a symbol of inappropriateness for those wishing to partake of a role in modern affairs.

Moreover, the debate over clothing during this period did not end there but was linked to the larger questions of the body, physical fitness, and masculinity. The dislike of the elite classes - the scholar-bureaucrats and gentry - for physical prowess and sport in traditional Chinese culture has a long history. For instance, although sport such as polo had enjoyed considerable popularity in court life during the Tang Dynasty (618-906 A.D.), James T.C. Liu (1985: 204) notes that by the Southern

Song (1127-1279), most scholar-bureaucrats paid no attention to ball games or players. He adds (op. cit.: 204): "The non-aristocratic scholar-official class, refined, urbane, and genteel, cared little for the vigorous sports they viewed as inappropriate, pointless, harmful and even risky." Richard L. Davis (1996) affirms this, arguing that masculinity during the late imperial period (1368-1912) of China tended to express itself more in character strength rather than muscular mass. This stereotype prompted Lin Yutang (1962: 23) to refer to the contrast between the physical constitution of European and Chinese school-age children as 'unmistakable.' He elaborates: "On the athletic field, it is invariably found that boys who have a European father or mother distinguish themselves by their greater swiftness, agility and general exuberance of energy, while they seldom excel in tests of endurance and never in scholastic attainments."

Not surprisingly, the traditional Chinese dislike for vigorous physical activity was subjected to harsh criticism by reformers and critical intellectuals during the late Qing and early Republican period. It was believed to have caused the physical weakness of the Chinese people, in turn enfeebling the Chinese nation. In the editorial of the second issue of *Youth Magazine* (*Qingnian zazhi*) in 1915, Chen Duxiu bemoaned the physical weakness of Chinese males as follows: "I always see young people of our country who have been educated: their hands do not have the power to choke a chicken, and their hearts do not have the courage worthy of a man. They have pale countenances and slight waists: they are coquettish like young virgins; they are afraid of the cold and the heat; they are weak like the sickly. How can people with hearts and bodies so powerless bear heavy responsibilities and endure for very long?"

In his essay on 'Physical Culture' in 1917, Mao Zedong attributed the tendency of Chinese men to dislike physical exercise to the culture's esteem for those in flowing gowns. According to Mao, the respect for the 'fine deportment' of the scholar resulted in an aversion to short clothes, physical exposure, and a sense of shame over physical exercise: "Flowing garments, a slow gait, a grave, calm gaze – these constitute fine deportment, respected by society. Why should one suddenly extend an arm, or expose a large, stretch and bend down?" It seems that Mao thought the link between the physical frailties of Chinese men and traditional clothing rather apparent.

If a discussion about Chinese men's clothing should turn to the issue of men's physical fitness, it is only natural that it would next be drawn to questions of Chinese masculinity. And the issue of masculinity was hardly abstract but confronted Chinese males in a very direct and real way, since their traditional clothes and queues often opened them to the charge of effeminacy (as defined by the newly emerging notions of Western masculinity), if not to actually being mistaken for women! According to Jerome Ch'en (1979), it was exactly because of his long gown and queue that the scholar Wang Tao (王韬), an assistant to James Legge in his translations of The Thirteen Chinese Classics, was mistaken for a woman during his trip to Scotland in the 1860s.

Questions about the manliness of traditional Chinese men's clothing would have become an acute source of embarrassment for Chinese men in the opening years (1871-2) of the Meiji era in Japan when the Emperor, an eager convert to Westernisation, pronounced Chinese dress to be "effeminate." The proclamation that his court would be adopting Western clothing went as follows: "The national polity is firm, but manners and customs should be adaptable. *We greatly regret that the uniform of our court has been established following the Chinese custom, and it has become exceedingly effeminate in style and character*… The Emperor Jimmu, who founded Japan, and the Empress Jingu, who conquered Korea, were not attired in the present style. We should no longer appear before the people in these effeminate styles. We have decided therefore to reform dress regulations entirely." (cited in (Ch'en, 1979).

As the controversy over traditional dress simmered not only over their suitability for modern life, but touched upon the intimately personal by questioning the sexuality of Chinese men, the fate of traditional clothing seemed like a foregone conclusion. The effect of the ongoing controversy, nonetheless, was to introduce – if only inadvertently - new, Eurocentered conceptions of *identity* through the gendering of clothing. Owing to circumstances already described, Chinese dress became perceived as feminine in opposition to Western dress, which was thought to be masculine.

It would not have been problematic if such gendered classifications of clothing ended on that score, but identities are complex precisely because they are fluid and inimical to being bound. Western clothing was masculine not because it was more revealing of moving body parts - which it was - but because it was associated with a

whole other complex of meanings thought to signify manliness; in this case, these meanings were furnished by the perception of the West as an unyielding colonizing force. Western clothing was believed to be masculine in early 20th C century China because quite simply, as the saying goes, *clothes maketh the man*: in being the attire in which the colonizer is dressed, these clothes inevitably evoked a sense of strength, energy, vigor, and relentless competitiveness. And it is not that these attributes were masculine per se that is important, but that contra traditional Chinese yin-yang cosmological symbolism which considered male (yin) and female (yang) essences to be non-fixed and complementary, these masculine qualities were suddenly exalted and seen as dichotomously opposed and distinctively superior to feminine qualities.[14]

Already staggering from Western colonial predations, the angst and anxiety of not being manly enough proved decisive in convincing many of the need to adopt a Western dress code. Harrist Jr. (op. cit.) notes that this took place only gradually and unevenly, and was confined mainly to the large cities along the coast even as it received attention at the highest levels of government. It was only upon the fall of the Qing dynasty and the founding of the Republic that Western clothing became the official policy. Indeed, attesting to its importance in the invention of the new Chinese nation, one of the first acts of the new regime in 1912 was to issue new dress regulations for the civil service and armed forces, reforms not different from those carried out by the Meiji Emperor in 1871. Sun Yat-sen and the members of the provisional government set an early example by donning Western suits. Thereafter, the new Western sartorial codes and the values associated with them were popularized not only in person by a fledgling class of Chinese cosmopolites on the street, but increasingly, through mass media such as film, magazines, and advertising.

It is beyond the scope of this work to describe in finer detail how the sartorial code in China was transformed, or the opposition that emerged in the process. One is unable to discuss, for instance, the Chinese improvisations of the Western suit that led to the 'Zhongshan suit' (*zhongshanzhuang* 中山装) and that, in turn, served as a prototype for the subsequent "Mao suit" of the Communist era. Neither is one able to

[14] The fact that yin-yang sex-linked symbolism in Chinese cosmology was relational, complementary, and non-static is underscored by the fact that whereas in Taoist cosmology, yin (identified with nature and female) was more highly valued than yang (associated with culture and male), in Confucian orthodoxy, yin and yang referred to complementary hierarchical relationships, such as a wife's/ subject's inferiority (yin) to her husband/ruler (yang). See Brownell (1995: 219-222) for elaboration.

deal adequately with the reactions that such a clothing revolution gave rise to; not the confusion and contempt the sight of Chinese men in Western clothes – "cultural mongrels" – routinely generated at the beginning, nor how such adverse responses were tempered.

Nonetheless, what needs to be underscored is that the official adoption of Western clothing unambiguously indicated to the world that the Chinese traditional past, especially its Confucian component, was passé. History, in the meantime, has proven that the tendency of the Chinese popular *masses* to convert to Western dress has surpassed any erstwhile or subsequent counteracting tendency. If scorn was reserved for Chinese cross-dressers initially, they certainly petered out over time. As Harrist Jr. (op. cit.) has observed, "By the 1990s, for men in many different professions in China, the dark blue or black Western business suit – the standard male uniform for business and diplomacy in most parts of the world – had become unexceptional formal attire." Indeed, from where we stand today, in the second decade of the 21st C, traditional Chinese clothing is believed to be worn by none but the most zealous of cultural chauvinists - eccentrics - while Chinese popular dress today *is* demonstrably and overwhelmingly Western. Whatever they may have comprised, it can be said that the measures undertaken to popularize Western clothing since 1912 have proven to be an unmitigated success.

VII. Ti-Yong: a Catalyst for Chinese Eurocentrism?

We may conclude the present chapter by way of an attempt to analyze the evolution of Chinese men's fashion in relation to the trope of *ti* and *yong*, spirit and technique. Indeed, is the deployment of Zhang's *ti-yong* doctrine even applicable here? Can we conceive of men's dress as a mere technique, and Western fashion as somehow a means of consolidating Chinese traditional culture? I have earlier suggested that dress, in general, cannot be conceived simply as a functionalist means of body-cover, for it is endowed with deeper meanings that revolve around the question of identity. In other words, certain dress codes are adopted less for their utilitarian function than for what they reveal about the identity of the wearer. Clothing may therefore serve a utilitarian function, but that is likely incidental; more significant is what it *documents* about the desirable identity attributes and social status of the wearer. This imbrication of *yong* and *ti*, means and ends, technique and spirit, clearly renders their separation into autonomous realms untenable. It becomes all the more untenable

when the issue of culture is brought in.

Can Western clothing be regarded as a means of strengthening Chinese essence? The question is rhetorical, for Western clothing was adopted precisely because Chinese dress had been seen to be effeminate. As the discussion above has revealed, Western clothing was believed to project a sense of masculinity, aggression, speed and efficiency that Chinese dress did not. These were attributes – indeed, *essences* – identified with the modern West; qualities that Western clothing were thought to evoke and which were sought after at around the birth of modern China. If Western clothing were the means, it is because Western essences were also the desired ontological ends. One can speak of pursuing Western technique for Chinese ends, as did Zhang Zhidong. President Jiang Zemin's quote at the beginning of the present chapter reveals that the Chinese ruling elites are still uttering much of the same over a century later. Indeed, one cannot help but wonder if such utterances are not merely rhetorical and ideological devices, words devoid of their stated meanings. The rhetoric of *ti-yong* may lay Chinese anxieties to rest, *but to what effect*? *To whose benefit, especially, if Chinese essence were nominally spiritual but ontologically a simulacrum of Euro-Modernity?* Are we not verily being confronted by the paradox that is Chinese Eurocentrism?

VIII. CODA: The Stratified Nature of Eurocentrism

There are two further insights about Eurocentrism that the discussion of the *ti-yong* trope in this chapter yields. The first is that because means and ends, technique and spirit, cannot be separated owing to the dialectical relation existing between them, that which might initially have been thought of as mere technique could become integral to the nature of the end itself. One could think about industrial technology such as the automobile, for instance: the car may be a means/mode of transportation, but in its dependence on roads to function, it gives rise to the specific social engineering of space, practices, and culture, in the process spawning an entire (industrial) civilisation that gives succour to the viability of cars. Far from means being separated from ends, we observe that the means might very well determine the nature of the ends. Hence, Western men's suits in the new Chinese republic did not merely give Chinese men Western profiles; rather, in outlining the movement of limbs to project speed, vigour and energy, they constructed a desirable Chinese masculinity that was predicated on exactly such qualities. In consequence, we see

Eurocentric techniques determining and constituting the form and content of Chineseness itself.

This discussion of means (*yong*) and ends (*ti*) *en general*e furnishes us with an additional insight into the nature of the phenomenon of Eurocentrism. Our attention should be drawn particularly to the multiplicity of forms it can take. Hence, just as what is said to constitute Westernisation can take many configurations across the gamut of life, so it is also the case with Eurocentrism: in ways of housing, diet, fashion, forms of leisure, nature of work, knowledge, etcetera. In Chapter One, I sought to distinguish Eurocentrism-as-epistemology, a 'way of seeing', from Eurocentrism-as-ontology, a 'way of being'. Here, I wish to stress that even when considered ontologically, Eurocentrism is stratified into different phenomenal layers that plumb different depths of reality. Elsewhere, I have attempted to get at these varying depths and different layers by distinguishing between 'deep' and 'surface' forms of culture (see Kho 2009). I would extend this description between 'surface' and 'deep' forms of culture to the stratified nature of reality itself. In this dissertation, I have attempted to show that Eurocentrism is contingent on a specific cosmology given by an ontology of materialism and individualism. This is the 'deep' ontology upon which Eurocentrism is structured: it is constituent of its 'implicate order', to use Bohm's (2005) term. But it manifests in 'surface' appearances too - as per an 'explicate order' (ibid) - and in a multiplicity of forms. This is an important point and should not be missed, for it ultimately highlights the stratified and complex nature of reality. This conception of reality thus allows for the possibility of Eurocentrism to exist – and co-exist - at different levels, 'surface' as well as 'deep', without calling into question one at the expense of the other, or vice versa. Once again, this is an important point to note as we bring to a conclusion the dissertation's theoretical and historical sections, and move towards dealing with direct empirical and ethnographic 'real-world data' in all its messy, multifarious, and irrepressible complexity. I anticipate that this insight will help us deal with the very practical challenges of examining Eurocentrism in contemporary Chinese society.

4 ON THE METHODOLOGY OF FIELDWORK: SERENDIPITY, SYSTEMATIZATION AND DISCOVERY

I. Objective of Ethnographic Fieldwork

Having first defined Eurocentrism as a unique mode of thinking and being that privileges economic life as the *raison d'etre* of human existence, I proceeded next to examine its beginnings in China. The previous chapter traced the origins of what I have called Chinese Eurocentrism to Chinese subordination by the imperialist West. It was shown that by utilizing/deploying the positivist and utilitarian trope of *ti-yong* (or spirit and function), Westernization was seen by ruling elites and intellectuals to be the only way for China to save itself. The momentous May Fourth movement of 1919 witnessed a robust consolidation of this view, and it was a watershed moment. Often considered to signify a cultural revolution, the May Fourth experience was

revolutionary because it marked the first time in China's history that its ruling elites and intellectuals would come to view the many-sidedness of Chinese life entirely from the vantage point of the West. Chinese politics, knowledge, culture, economy, language, hygiene, society – all were disparaged and deemed to be 'inadequate' from the pseudo-universalist perspective of the West. Chinese culture as a whole was believed to be in need of being re-made in the image of the West. It was in this experience of over a century ago that lay the beginnings of Chinese Eurocentrism.

The aim of my fieldwork research project is to examine empirically the degree to which Eurocentrism as a mode of life exists in contemporary China. If Eurocentrism has been perpetuated in the course of the past hundred or so years, how and to what extent has it been taken up by the Chinese? What is the nature of Chinese Eurocentrism, the hybridization of Western Modernity with native Chineseness? And what, in turn, remains of 'traditional' China or of 'Chineseness'?

The previous chapters were devoted to the articulation/conceptualization of Eurocentrism and its development in China. I have provided an account focusing on the historical development of Eurocentrism as a cosmological configuration of complementary civilisational (i.e. modernist) values around which our lives today are structured. Because I have attempted to deal with Eurocentrism's genealogy in the West as well as in China, the accounts I have furnished are necessarily historical. Their purpose is to consolidate and clarify our understanding of an existing global cultural phenomenon by tracing its roots to the past. Yet historical accounts tend at times to be sweeping, for they are often the artificial synthesis of disparate components; they are sometimes pejoratively referred to as 'grand narratives' since their coherence is believed to be imposed, forced upon an otherwise unruly and heterogeneous ontological reality. It should be added that such accounts are often held together by conceptual categories that are macro-structural, taxonomies so wide they impose a certain orderliness and uniformity even where none might exist. Indeed, insofar as our accounts rely on conceptual categories that convey the dynamics/movement of larger forces, they tend to be very approximate representations of what is in fact happening. The shortcomings of such an approach should be apparent: the finer-grained details of the life-world are lost in the process of epistemic conceptualization, with all its detrimental consequences for knowledge. Even worse, the narrative accounted could be a grave distortion of what is in fact happening. Where our sources are not immediate but mediate /secondary, our

understanding could well be relying on representations *of* representations of reality. The resulting account rendered could be conceptually comprehensive, yet owing to the multiple layers of mediation, be unavoidably subject to innumerable distortions spawned by approximations and guesstimates. The conceptual clarity is thus an illusion, an imposition foisted to bring an otherwise difficult/complex reality into line. Conceptual tidiness may bring relief in an ocean of fluctuating uncertainties, but the mythologies it potentially perpetrates in the process raises for us an epistemological and methodological challenge we can hardly ignore.

II. Confronting Complexity: The Multiple Dimensions of Eurocentrism and China

In contrast to my approach until this point, this fieldwork section shifts gears to examine the micrological and local affairs of everyday Chinese cultural life. Hence, whereas I have so far grappled with cultural phenomena qua Eurocentrism in theoretical and historical terms, my purpose here is to deal with it empirically as a contemporary Chinese phenomenon, as praxis rather than as concept or theory.[15] As signaled at the beginning, my intent is to ask about the degree to which Westernisation or Eurocentrism has penetrated into, influenced and transformed Chinese socio-cultural life. I believe this attempt to deal with Eurocentrism as an empirical phenomenon in China will allow us to ascertain the degree of Westernisation in China today, in turn giving us an appreciation of the state of Chinese culture.

But given the enormous cultural and geographical terrain implied by the term 'China', such a task would first need to clarify how the aspects of Chinese life I will be examining adequately represent China. A similar conundrum emerges with my proposed aim to investigate Eurocentrism or Westernisation, for in light of our goal to ascertain the extent of their influence in China, there is the practical issue of determining what to examine. How, in other words, does one render seemingly the phenomenon of Eurocentrism or Westernisation into a practical object of study? This inevitably broaches the issue of research methods that in turn requires, for instance, a justification for why I have chosen to examine certain phenomena and not others. In other words, before one is able to undertake such an investigation, there is the need

[15] My approach here takes its cue from Husserl's admonition to 'return to the things themselves.'

to discuss some of the complexities involved. The expansiveness of the two topics, Eurocentrism and China, especially, calls for a need to clarify the objects and foci of my research.

Let me first take issue with Eurocentrism or Westernisation. Eurocentrism or Westernisation manifest in many configurations across the gamut of social life, giving it the appearance of being somewhat of a totalizing phenomenon. As discussed in Chapter One, this is a function of Western colonial dominance in the making of the Modern world and a feature that is not shared by other ethno-centrisms. But that aside, and as noted at the end of Chapter Three, the manifold and multi-layered – 'surface' as well as 'deep'- expressions of Eurocentrism are partly also intrinsic to the stratified nature or multi-dimensionality of reality. As a consequence, we see everyday instances of Eurocentrism take on different phenomenal forms that are sometimes tangible and at other times, not: in physical objects such as fashion items and automobiles, as well as in the intangible acts of speech, thought, desire, feeling and the like[16]. The presence of such a myriad of things and non-things does not annul claims about the existence of Eurocentrism. Rather, I argued that Eurocentrism, which was predicated on an ontology of materialism and individualism, gave rise to derivative and cognate social forms. And so it is to be expected that Eurocentrism be seen and expressed in a multiplicity of ways across the gamut of social reality. Hence, we see an instance of and the impact of Westernisation in the 'surface' appearances of Western clothes, in built-environment, modes of transport, etcetera, even if their underlying ontologies might be concealed. While it may not be readily apparent, these modes of social behaviour and organisation are the realisation of a very specific vision of human being, manifestations of the cultural ontology I argue underpins Eurocentrism. Indeed, Chapter Three's case study on the changing sartorial codes for men in China in the first quarter of the 20th century affirms this: far from being value-free, Western men's clothing were thought to be able to visually evoke the dynamism of the rational modern man in action, in turn alluding to notions of the autonomous individual and his (materialist) *raison d'etre*. Equally, we witness Eurocentrism implicated in arguments being made for human rights in legal discourse, property

[16] It might be an idea to refer to the more 'superficial' and symbolic manifestations of the phenomenon as instances of 'Westernisation', and its 'deeper', less visible and perceptible manifestations as 'Eurocentrism'.

rights in economics, and democracy in political theory; whereby in these instances, the links to the abovementioned ontology are more explicit.

How then can we investigate the presence and the degree of influence exerted by Eurocentrism in China? The practical implications for our research methods should be apparent. Our methods should take into account the multiplicity of ways and forms that Eurocentrism or Westernisation manifest. Hence, the fact that the objects of my research interests range across the gamut of social life and plumb different depths of reality would recommend that my field of research be sufficiently broad in scope to allow a sufficiently wide-angle perspective of Chinese life. Since the thesis is one concerning Eurocentrism in everyday Chinese life, the goal is to capture 'the everyday' in its many dimensions and fullness so that we may see how Westernisation in the multiplicity of it configurations, and in its 'surface' and 'deep' variants, are made manifest. I expect that it would be through such phenomenology of the everyday that one might be able to see the overall effects of Eurocentrism on sociality. The task at hand appears to be that of the classical goal of ethnography. It is to produce a *thick* account of contemporary everyday life and to understand the values that give it meaning. In this case, however, it is to see the extent to which Eurocentrism is implicated in the furnishing of such meanings.

Now on to the issue of China. Because of its sheer size and diversity, China is often said to be more of a continent comprising a multiplicity of cultures than a country that is culturally homogenous and unified. This has given rise to the very apt appreciation/recognition of China as a highly complex entity, one that is as diverse, rich, and variegated in texture and temperament as the many cultures and ethnicities that compose it. But this acknowledgment of China's forbidding complexity has at times, especially in our skeptical age, spawned an aversion to talk about seemingly stable identity-formations; that is to say, the complexity of Chinese realities has meant that questions such as, 'What is China?' and, 'What is Chinese?' have been a source of considerable foreboding. Undoubtedly, the ethnic and cultural variety to be found within the geographic boundaries of modern China is dizzying enough to render silence attractive. Yet, while remaining quiet might seem desirable in the face of ontological complexities, doing so is surely an abdication of intellectual responsibility. Similarly, Ames (2011:23) argues that, "the only thing more dangerous than striving to make responsible cultural generalizations is failing to make them. Generalisations do not have to preclude appreciating the richness and

complexity of always evolving cultural traiditons; in fact, it is generalizations that locate and inform specific cultural details and provide otherwise sketchy historical developments with the thickness of their content."

My wish to examine the extent of Eurocentric influences in China is predicated on the belief that despite all its complex and diverse richness, China can be described as being identifyingly 'Chinese' by virtue of certain cultural practices. Such a description, I believe, would involve an attempt to offer a statement or two about what modern China consists vis-à-vis its past. That is to say, I would contend that for all its inherent complexities, a description of China and Chineseness is not only possible but necessary. Modern China needs to be understood so that we may reflect on Chinese as well as other-human possibilities for the future.

It should be clear that I am here invoking China not just in a geographical but also a *cultural* sense, and with a greater emphasis on the latter. Crucially, this should not suggest that I am conceiving of culture to be timeless and unchanging. A belief in the role of culture in shaping human destinies is not to be confused with a *culturalism* that reifies culture to render it static and unchanging. Instead, a belief in the crucial role of culture maintains the possibility of studying its evolution and change over time, which underscore a conception of culture that is *dynamic* rather than static. And despite the ethereal, intangible, and nebulous quality of cultural phenomena, I maintain that such qualities remain amenable to empirical verification. In other words, cultural phenomena are no less *real* than the tangible and solid objects of the physical world.

Accordingly, the complexity that has resulted from diversity in geography, ethnicity, or culture, does not render unrealistic an investigation of the emergent features that are being identified as 'Chinese'. The realization that China is - or has always been - a percolating cocktail of ethnic or cultural varieties does not rule out claims about what the characteristics of Chinese life entail. In contrast, the complex admixture of cultures that constitute China renders just such an inquiry more necessary, for the ideas and practices of any existing culture result from the *stabilization* of certain meanings and habits out of a gamut of possibilities, even if they are only fleeting: they are but just one cultural permutation of several possibilities at any given moment. Apropos, it is my contention that when one discovers a body of ideas, customs, and practices that is being adhered to by the population-at-large, in country and city, by peasants and workers alike across the

boundaries of ethnic difference, one can conceivably claim to have discovered/observed a common thread that binds otherwise disparate experiences that constitute contemporary Chinese life. This thread holding together the fabric of life in China can be said to be an element of the common culture, something that can be identified as being 'Chinese' regardless of the heterogeneous and idiosyncratic differences of local cultural particularities.

The aim of the ethnographic component of my project is to examine whether and to what degree a specific permutation of cultural meanings and praxis – a certain Eurocentric ontology - has stabilized and gained currency over others. It is therefore a project that aims to capture change within a culture over time.

Cultures are constituted by a constellation of values and practices, knowledge of which is requisite for an understanding of the culture in question. Conceived as such, culture is not nebulous but a phenomenon that is both real and concrete enough to be subjected to careful and rigorous study. It follows that any attempt to understand cultural change such as this project about Eurocentrism in China, would require a comparative study of these values, habits, and practices across different epochs. It is to the subject of my research principles and methods, of *how* this can be accomplished that I now turn.

III. Research Principles and Methods

The foregoing would suggest that this study would require the researcher to be exposed to cultural settings and contexts as diverse and various as can be found in China today. This would enable her to experience and have a feel of Chinese life and be able to discern the vagaries of mood, pace, and orientation that necessarily occur in the course of its evolution. Since Chinese society today is in a state of tremendous flux that is characterized by a non-mutually exclusive rural-urban, village-city, peasant-worker divide - to say nothing about the ethnic diversity therein - any study of contemporary China would have to be exposed to these contexts, for it is only then that one may legitimately claim to have some measure of a topic as broad and all-encompassing as 'Chinese culture.' In other words, given that China today is constituted by different modes of life arising largely from socio-economic, ethnic, and rural-urban divisions, a comprehensive evaluation of contemporary Chinese culture would require that one traverses these diverse terrains to discover their common elements.

A prerequisite for my research, then, is to be physically located in China, which would facilitate one's encounter with the complex polysemy of Chinese culture. And even though this should be obvious enough not to have to warrant mention, the popularity and proliferation of research findings relying on secondary sources of information suggests that it is a clarification that is quite apposite. It is not that research based on secondary sources is not worthy or useful: it is, and there is always need and occasion for it. Rather, reservations about secondarily-sourced research are based on the recognition that they are inevitably representations of representations, involving multiple layers of mediation, of interpretation and re-interpretation. The problematic nature of this should be obvious: the potential for distortion with every layer of mediation is significant, ultimately attenuating the reliability and validity of the information/knowledge produced.

Against such a challenge, the recommendation that a researcher literally come face-to-face with the phenomena is considered necessary not only in this particular case, but as a general rule/principle of sound research practice. I contend that being amidst the phenomena of one's interest is imperative for the production of reliable knowledge. It is to allow oneself to be 'shaped' by the world, to open up the possibility for a 'dialogue' that takes in the 'sounds and looks of the world.' Such presence not only reduces the probability of one succumbing to the superficial abstractions and tropes of secondary representations, it effectively helps make clear what research topics one should and can practically pursue. In other words, the researcher's presence helps not only to clarify one's research intentions; it verily assists in the *discovery* of what they are to begin with.

This process of clarification and discovery, moreover, is necessarily dynamic and reflexive, dialectically moving between text, field, and the researcher in no particular order only to be reiterated. It is in effect a process where there are no boundaries between text and field, or the academy and the world beyond it, for each is implicated in the other. It is, therefore, a process that reveals the *intersubjective* and dialectical nature of knowledge and world-making. Knowledge is integral to the life-process and does not stand apart from it; it seeks to shed light on the life-world but it is simultaneously also transformed by it. Contrary to common/widespread understandings and practice, then, research projects can never be fully-specified, all paid-up formulations a priori: we cannot yet articulate fully what needs to be discovered, and we cannot discover without first immersing ourselves in the

phenomena. Research projects come into being, take shape and become specified only in the course of the researcher's encounter with the life-world he shares with his research objects. Pippin (2010:78) alludes to some of the indeterminacy and open-endedness of the research process as follows: "Intention formation and articulation are always temporally fluid, altering and transformable 'on the go,' as it were, as events in the project unfold. I may start out engaged in a project understanding my intention as X, and over time, come to understand that this first characterization was not really accurate or a full description of what I intended; it must have been Y, or later perhaps Z. And there is no way to confirm the certainty of one's 'real' purpose except in the deed actually performed."

Yet, it again bears remembering that the research process can be reflexive in the way described only on condition of the researcher's presence in the life-world. The 'method', tentatively, is therefore ethnographic (but a bit more about this later). And the 'deed' to be performed, for starters, begins by inhabiting the life-world of one's research. In my case, this life-world is China.

IV. Discovering 'China'

The researcher's presence is therefore foundational to all ethnographic work. It is to be 'there', present in the midst of the phenomena to watch, observe, record, inquire and to shed light in whatever way possible on the issues of one's interest. But in the true reflexive mode that is the *intersubjective* condition under which knowledge is produced, the purpose of being 'there' is also *to be* watched, observed, recorded, inquired about, and to be enlightened by the personages and phenomena of one's interest. With this in mind, I moved to China from the USA at the beginning of 2011. But as suggested earlier, even such an apparently straightforward act may not be interpreted so straightforwardly, particularly in our times of radical skepticism.

The situation is complicated particularly by what some consider as ambiguity invoked by the term 'China'. Indeed, what is China? Is it to be conceived of as a geographic entity, an impressive physical landmass that stretches approximately 5000 km across East Asia? Is it to be thought of in terms of culture, the ancient civilization with a continuous recorded history that extends back 3000 years? Is it the modern political entity that is widely perceived as a brutal, totalitarian state bent upon global domination? Is it the economic powerhouse, the world's workshop in the 21st century whose enviable(?) economic position has arguably been attained through

currency manipulations and lax labour laws? Or is it the China that is said to be voraciously consuming every natural resource the world has to offer, with the modernist aspirations of its sizeable 1.3 billion population posing a direct threat to the sustainability of the modern lifestyles of their counterparts in the West? These are but an incomplete sample of representations of China that are being circulated widely in journalistic accounts, academic treatises, popular film, and everyday discourse.

In the event that such questions can be settled, there is the further query of what can be considered to adequately represent China. Should Hong Kong, the ex-British colony that was 'returned' and re-unified with the PRC only after 1997, be considered a part of it? What about Shenzhen, the cultural backwater whose accomplishments as a special-economic zone since 1978 must surely render it a modern-day economic miracle? Or are the municipalities under the direct governance of the CCP – Beijing, Shanghai, Chongqiing, Tianjin – better representatives of the modern Chinese experience by the dubious virtue that they are somehow closer to the heart of Chinese power? Along similar lines, does Culture qualify as being more Chinese if it were found in Qufu, Shandong, the birthplace of Confucius, or in Beijing, with its long history as the political centre of Chinese Civilization? One could ask a further litany of questions that reflect the many dimensions of China and Chinese life, yet the fact that one can do so only affirms the main point here: that a multiplicity of meanings are conjured when the single term 'China' is invoked.

Evidently, meanings transcend the words used to carry them. And while it may or may not be a debt owed to postmodernism that we are sensitive to the multiple meanings a term can imply, it is nevertheless apparent that when such critical deconstruction is taken to an extreme and becomes an end in itself, one is led into an impossible intellectual cul-de-sac where the *discursive* constructions of reality become the end goal of analysis. That is to say, the focus of analysis turns towards problems thrown up by the philosophy of language, *not* the problems that the language is supposed to convey. The means become confused with the ends, the medium is thought to be the message, and the hapless researcher is all but quickly mired in the impossible quicksand of representational language games.

But on the other hand, one need not be stymied in such fashion. The contribution of any postmodern-like critique remains valuable in warning us about the dangers of totalizing accounts. They unsettle the ground on which our claims stand by

questioning their very foundations. And insofar as this is the case, the postmodern contribution is largely remedial and negative, seeking to undermine the unjustified conceits of Modernist discourse. It is negative in the sense that its value as critique is dependent on an error for its own value. Furthermore, postmodernism remains a Eurocentric discourse in the classical sense, originating largely as the intellectual response of European theorists to shortcomings of earlier European theorists. But even if we are to leave that criticism aside for now, it is clear that one still needs to move beyond deconstruction if it were not to outlive its usefulness. One also needs to move beyond deconstruction if we are to have any ground to stand on: and we all must stand somewhere. It is true that 'the meaning of a word is its use', *pace* Wittgenstein, and so it is that my invocation of 'China' can generate any number of conceivable meanings to the reader. But at any given moment for anyone of us, only certain aspects of China are present to us, while others are absent. Indeed, as per phenomenological understanding, all experience entails a blend of presence and absence. Furthermore, different *profiles* of China are present to each of us at different times, resulting in a 'China' that is given to us in a *manifold of profiles*. Hence, I appeal to the reader to accept that when I invoke 'China' in my account, it refers to that nation-state entity which I experienced for the fourteen months I lived in Shenzhen. Of course, one can object that I am uncritically capitulating to the grand-narratives and ideologies of statehood, and that, moreover, Shenzhen is not representative of China. But we are quibbling yet again. 'China' is foremost the name of a nation-state, and 'Shenzhen', the name of a city within it. I ask the reader to accept these superficial and perhaps simplistic understandings only as a basis to begin a conversation; they are, after all, popular understandings one finds in circulation. And conversation is possible only on the grounds of such common understanding, howsoever misguided. This is the essential nature of language: shared, common, social, intersubjective.

My appeal is based firstly on the phenomenological understanding that "we experience the meanings of words, not the words themselves." (Steeves 2006: 5). Hence, as these words are reaching you, their meanings are immediately being called up and becoming apparent. Yet the uniqueness of our individual experiences would mean the possibility of identical words evoking different meanings, as noted. It is such uniqueness that gives rise to the perception of 'many Chinas', and their association and correspondence with the single term, 'China'. But this diversity of

meanings notwithstanding, their calling up presents what was previously absent and opens up a horizon of understandings. The term 'China' may evoke some or even all of its historical meanings, but new meanings may be implied, too. As Steeves (op. cit.) has noted, that is the paradox of words: they carry with them all their historical meanings, yet mean something new with each fresh utterance. It is therefore only to be expected that a word such as 'China' can call up a variety of meanings. And my appeal rests on the recognition that such a diversity of perception and meaning is central and normal to the sociality of human existence. Since the term 'China' evokes the many perceptions it evokes by virtue of the existing diversity of human experience, there is certainly no reason to quibble over which meanings have larger purchase, for each of these meanings has been made present presumably through experience at some point. My notions of 'China' and 'Chinese' should consequently be understood as having as their reference the range of representations and identifications that are currently in circulation. Moreover, these notions would make sense only in relation to what is considered to be 'non-China' and 'non-Chinese'. My research will in the following clarify just what some of these notions of Chineseness might be.

Secondly, my appeal to the reader to accept my characterization of China is based on the awareness that the 'stabilization' of meanings, even if momentary, is necessary to enable us to enter into the shared domains of reason, evidence, and truth. Such stabilization is necessary in the interest of fostering common understandings, and is attained by what is known in phenomenology as 'intentionality'. Intentionality refers to the conscious relationship we have toward an object; it implies that consciousness is always the consciousness 'of' something. In the absence of intentionality, we do not have a world in common, and we turn to our own private worlds where each of us believes and does our own thing. A radical subjectivism reigns, and truth, which is necessarily social, public, and intersubjective, makes no demands upon us. (Sokolowski op. cit.). Hence, if truth and ethics were to matter, the momentary stabilization of what *is* China and Chinese becomes unavoidable. In fact it may well be the responsibility of humans as agents of truth to bring it about.

V. The China Experience: Shenzhen vis-à-vis Hong Kong and Eugene, Oregon

As a political, economic, and administrative unit, it may be said that Shenzhen Municipality was created *ex nihilo*. It was carved out of Baoan County in 1979 when the latter was elevated into a Municipality (*shi*) by the central government and renamed Shenzhen. In 1981, the Municipality was re-configured into an administrative urban-rural divide with the establishment of Shenzhen Special Economic Zone on the one hand and New Baoan County on the other. The process of administrative re-structuring ensued thereafter and continues up until the present: but it is a topic to which I will return. For now, I would like to refer to the Shenzhen of early 2011.

In particular, how should one account for Shenzhen experientially? Perhaps it is helpful to begin with a description of the sense one first gets of Hong Kong when arriving from the U.S. When one flies from the cold, refreshing evergreen environment of an Oregonian winter on the West Coast of the United States and arrives in the ostensibly cosmopolitan world-city that is Hong Kong in January, one is immediately struck by the sense of being in a different place. The difference is palpable and it is felt upon arrival at the airport. Bodies are squeezed for space as one gets swept along in a tide of human movement whose pace is rapid and relentless /unforgiving. One gets the feeling of having to shuffle along, to keep pace, or risk the possibility of being stomped on. The competitive spirit seems to come naturally as one discovers that an analogous situation prevails on the roads as well. Cars, cyclists, and pedestrians compete for space with an intensity not felt in many U.S. cities.

Alternatively, as there are different modalities of perception, one can simply inhale to sense the difference. The air does not have the crisp, fresh quality of the Oregonian atmosphere that allows one the indulgence of taking deep, long breaths. The dismal air quality in Hong Kong stops one mid-breath. It is not necessarily putrid but there is the sensation that one is also inhaling physical particles. As one draws in air, there is the sense that one's nostrils are being overwhelmed. The discomfort is physical. With the increased population density and the bustle generated by the unrelenting movement of people and machines over noticeably tighter spaces, pollution becomes an inescapable fact. Juxtaposed against the tremendous bustle and density of the archetypal Asian (and, one might say,

non-Western) city, one is compelled to ask if this is why the West is commonly celebrated for its supposedly well cared-for, if not pristine, natural environment. Moreover, is it the ecological and civic-mindedness of the average citizen in the West that accounts for it, against its lack in the non-West, as commonly portrayed?

One has a similar moment-of-truth experience when crossing the Hong Kong border northward into Shenzhen, only that the experience is perhaps more intense and memorable. It may seem strange from a political viewpoint to be speaking of a border between Hong Kong and Shenzhen, especially given the 1997 British 'handover' of Hong Kong to the People's Republic of China (PRC). Is Hong Kong not a part of China? What does 'reunification' mean if not the literal restoration of political unity to erstwhile disparate political entities? Why, then, the need for a border? Such territorial borders within state boundaries never fail to boggle the mind unaccustomed to the idiosyncrasies of Chinese political practice. A generous reading favouring the Chinese Communist Party could see it as a vindication of its claim that it would adhere to the principle of 'one country, two systems'. Indeed, it is a promise the CCP appears to have kept, at least on the surface of things. But as I describe below, 'one country, two systems' rings true not only in an abstract political sense; it is palpable, detectable by the senses, too.

There are several immigration checkpoints along the Hong Kong-Shenzhen border, but when one crosses into China via Shenzhen Bay, the checkpoint furthest to the West, for instance, the Hong Kong-China distinction immediately becomes apparent. (I used this checkpoint exclusively throughout my fourteen-month stay in China.) The difference is as much in the air as it is in physical objects such as buildings, roads, vehicles and their spatial organization. The difference is also apparent in the social habits, behaviour, and practices of the people.

To begin with, one is hit by a draft of warm-hot air as soon as one leaves the air-conditioned building that is home to the Shenzhen immigration checkpoint. Since an inter-city bus station is adjacent to the building, one catches a blend of motor exhaust fumes, cigarette smoke, and heat generated by the people lolling around waiting for their buses. As a toilet block runs right through the middle of the bus station, one sometimes also catches a pungent whiff, particularly during hot summer days. These smells invariably signal my arrival in China each time. They are certainly not scents/smells one experiences just moments before on the Hong Kong side of the border.

The olfactory experience of China bespeaks a more general social phenomenon that touches on issues of social order and cultural practice. Hence, although it is likely that Hong Kong is no less polluted on the whole, one is not assailed by cigarette smoke in the same way on the Hong Kong side presumably because of an effective enforcement of restrictions on smoking. Smokers are restricted to smokers' corners/zones whereas on the Chinese side, one finds them everywhere liberally puffing away. Evidently, enforcement appears to be a challenge for authorities even if restrictions on smoking exist.

All of this probably suggests that the difference between Shenzhen and Hong Kong can also be perceived visually. Indeed, the smells of a place that one experiences may be partly attributable to how its space is managed. And this, too, is revealing of how a society orders its priorities. Hence, whereas the toilet block is a central and conspicuous feature of the Shenzhen Bay border crossing, a building one cannot avoid by virtue of its location, the toilets on the Hong Kong side are obscurely placed by comparison, tucked away on the ground floor of the Immigration Complex/ building itself. They are located off the main walkway when one exits the building, and one has to make a conscious effort to get to them. There is apparently a deliberate and conscientious effort to mark out the realm of the personal from that of the public in Hong Kong. We are, accordingly, presented with an environment that is sterile, as matters concerning personal hygiene are to be kept private, out of visual as well as olfactory perception. Evidently, this is a distinction that is not so zealously maintained/observed on the China side of the border. I am often told by friends of a certain educational and socio-economic status/background that China is 'dirty', that the Chinese are lacking when it comes to matters of personal hygiene, and they commonly cite evidence pertaining to the state of its toilets to support their argument. While the friends who are Chinese nationals tend to acknowledge this with some embarrassment, those who are non-Chinese say it with a certain anti-China contempt, as if to note China's 'backwardness' and 'lack of civility' despite its growing economic and political importance on the world-stage. Nonetheless, perhaps there is some truth to what they claim. And if so, it is despite the fact that Chinese elites embraced *weisheng* - what Rogaski (2004: 2) calls 'hygienic modernity' - over a century ago, pursuing it as an all-important component in its struggle to achieve modernity.

One can also detect China's difference vis-à-vis Hong Kong according to their

comparatively varying attempts to monitor, supervise and regulate human traffic. This is all apparent within the Shenzhen Bay Immigration Checkpoint Building itself, the complex that houses the immigration and customs apparatus of both China and Hong Kong. On the Hong Kong side, one realizes very quickly after crossing the border and clearing immigration that waiting in and around the building is strongly discouraged, as security officers are deployed just to exhort/urge one to move along and leave the building. Furthermore, as one leaves the building, one notices being surrounded/hemmed in by steel barriers. These barriers begin immediately at the exit of the building and end when one gets to the bus and taxi stands that are adjacent to it. The barriers effectively regulate the direction of human traffic by dividing the walkway into two: one for Hong Kong arrivals, the other, for outgoing, China-bound pedestrians. Moreover, the flow of human traffic is also being regulated by the few electric travelators that have been installed to move pedestrians at an 'acceptable' pace between the Checkpoint and the bus and taxi stands. The concern with social order does not end when one gets to the public transportation stands either, for there is the further use of railings and barriers to facilitate the formation of waiting lines of public transport passengers/consumers. The management of space, always rational on the part of policymakers, seems invariably to demand an unthinking, a-rational acquiescence/obeisance on the part of the public. And, invariably, people fall in line where physical boundaries appear.

An observation of analogous phenomena on the Shenzhen side of the border provides a stark contrast. To begin with, there is not the presence of zealous guards ushering one out of the complex. And as mentioned, the Checkpoint on the Shenzhen side opens up to a bus station. Presumably, the toilet block running through the middle of it serves as the *de facto* partition dividing it respectively into an arrivals and a departures concourse. But that is as close as one can get to a sense of order, planned or otherwise. There is a police post at the end of the concourse some hundred and fifty meters north of the Checkpoint. It is elevated, presumably to get a bird's-eye view of goings-on around, but the appearance of such rigorous surveillance is likely all bluff. Apart from the one occasion where I saw several Chinese policemen drive away an Uighur illegally hawking walnuts, I have not seen so-called law-enforcement at work. What is apparently absent is not subtly present either. There are not the barriers one witnessed on the Hong Kong side. And even the travelators that exist do not work.

In the absence of either the conspicuous or subtle techniques of social regulation, one gets the sense that anything goes. It is how things appear on the Chinese side. I would contend that within hundred meters of leaving the Shenzhen Bay Checkpoint, one has witnessed and experienced a very typical sample of everyday life in China that is perhaps a microcosm of daily life in the country at large.

In contrast to the imposed orderliness of Hong Kong, one gets the sense that life in Shenzhen is less predictable, less orderly, less regulated. Meanwhile, the Shenzhen side of the Checkpoint is thronged with people seemingly oblivious to the need to adjust/modify their movements to any higher social imperative. The resulting flow of human traffic is chaotic and capricious. There are many/multiples lanes of travelers heading in the same general direction of the bus station. But the flow of traffic is neither unidirectional nor is the pace monotonous. Those moving towards the toilet block cut into one's path, and there are also those heading in the entirely opposite direction. Many are pulling a suitcase along; many others are straggling along with their substantial purchases from Hong Kong. Some are transporting significant quantities of baby milk powder and diapers, and the pace they keep tends to vary inversely with the quantity of stuff they are transporting. It is bedlam. Amidst the melee, another whiff of the toilet reminds me that I am at Shenzhen Bay Border Crossing. When it is busy – which it is for much of the day - the entire concourse/thoroughfare is brought to life by such unfettered spontaneity. It is a sight to behold.

Furthermore, when one gets to the bus-stand there is usually a crowd that has already formed, waiting. There are no barriers to elicit the desired 'queue' that one finds on the Hong Kong side, and one appears to have to rely on the instincts of survival to get a place on the bus. The reality, however, is usually less melodramatic: when it comes time to file into the bus, the passengers, after initially and vigorously jostling for spots to board, actually wait their turn. A line comes into being as soon as the bus pulls up. A local orderliness emerges despite the absence of external regulatory mechanisms.

As the bus departs the interchange, one heaves a sigh of relief to be leaving behind the pandemonium characteristic of border crossings. But one manages to catch a final glimpse of the immediate environment, and there are two further scenes that evoke another comparison. One sees yet another toilet; this one is small and is located at the end of a row of shophouses at the bus interchange. But it is not the

toilet per se that I wish to highlight but the brooms and mops that mark its entrance. These implements, presumably used for cleaning the toilet, have been left leaning against a wall at its entry. The casualness/nonchalance of this display is certainly striking. It is a sight hardly ever witness-able in Hong Kong, or in the West for that matter. What is more, there are three janitors/cleaners sitting around the entry of the toilet having lunch: they are oblivious to anything extraordinary about the setting of which they are a part.

VI. Finding the Field, Sketching the Fieldsite

The special economic zone (SEZ) of Shenzhen had originally comprised of four administrative districts (*qu*): Futian, Luohu, Nanshan, Yantian. However, as of July 2010 the SEZ of Shenzhen expanded to encompass all its outlying areas, vindicating the thesis that economic growth tends towards territorial expansion and increased urban consolidation. This is not arbitrary but a fundamental modern capitalist tendency rooted in historical experience: as the economy grows, it breeds an intensification as well as expansion of 'monetization', which is used here to denote a process whereby the pursuit of money increasingly becomes the end-goal of social intercourse. Its logic is seen as being analogous to 'commodification', the conversion of 'things', tangible and otherwise, into values expressed as monetary quantities. As a result of monetization, therefore, we witness not just the *intensification* of commoditization – that is, the commodification of an increasing variety of 'things' within a given space being - but also its *expansion* across greater spaces as well, eventuating in the subsumption of more areas of the rural periphery by the capitalist imperatives of the urban centres.

But to return to matters more immediate and pressing: my objective was to settle down in and discover Shenzhen, a southern city on the vast Chinese continent, yet upon crossing the Hong Kong-Shenzhen border, I was unsure where exactly to go to begin the process. Where, specifically, does one go to begin research? Are we to randomly pick a point on a map of Shenzhen in this case? Do we select a location based on hearsay or, better yet, based upon recommendations out of a tourist brochure? Who would have thought that compelling fieldwork-research proposals would have to find their practical fulfillment in such mundane and utterly uncertain beginnings? Yet, it is the most basic question a fieldwork researcher can ask: *where should be the field* of one's research?

As alluded to previously (see Section II here), our intellectual inquiries that are preoccupied with the discovery of what is unfamiliar and unknown begin their realization exactly in our encounters with the strange and unknown. It is by placing ourselves in the realm of such uncertainty that things begin to take shape and clarify themselves for us. The unknown and uncertain yield us knowledge and greater clarity when we encounter them. This is the very nature of discovery, the process of un-veiling a reality that we have not previously been privy to. It is a process that begins in the face of fundamental uncertainty, one in which we lose our way before we regain our bearings, only to find the process playing itself out again, recursively.

In the light of these comments, the notion of the 'field' evokes a delimited zone with neat temporal and geographical boundaries that contain the researcher's experiences. Such boundaries are drawn to 'limit' the project so that knowledge can be manageable/ managed /controlled. Furthermore, such a de-limiting, particularly the arbitrariness involved in defining the limits/boundaries of the 'fieldsite', quite inevitably exposes the artificiality of the enterprise. This could perhaps be unsurprising. After all, one could argue that ethnography in the anthropological tradition is steeped in a mythology about difference, for at the outset the conception of 'field' is designated as 'the real world' and is opposed to the controlled conditions of the laboratory or the library. The 'field' is the realm of the 'real' whereas the library and the laboratory, that of 'simulation' and 'representation'. In this fashion the field is systematically marked off from the other realms of the researcher's life. But where does the 'real' begin, and when does 'representation' take over? Similarly, when does 'fieldwork' begin, and when does 'life' resume? What distinguishes one dimension of existence from the other apart from the wish to declare it so? Moreover, despite the arbitrariness involved, the distinctions made between 'fieldwork' and 'life' are neat, as if they were self-contained and separable components of reality. This conception of reality as being constituted by tidy, autonomous components furnishes the impression that social research can be systematized by way of prescriptive methodologies. In this view, indeed, methodology provides a self-certain rationally-systematizing mechanism that sorts out legitimate knowledge from the clamorous din of an otherwise unruly universe. But the construction is an artifice, and the confidence is misplaced. Against this illusion of certitude, then, I would like to emphasize the role of serendipity in research. And I contend that serendipity plays a role from the beginning: even in the discovery of one's potential research sites.

It was, after all, by a fortuitous set of events involving the recommendations of acquaintances and friends that I discovered Xili *shi* (town) in Nanshan *qu* (district) and decided to rent an apartment there. While Nanshan *qu* is generally considered to be a relatively newer part of the city and so more attractive to foreigners, Xili looks and feels slightly worn. It is an established *shi* with an overwhelmingly ethnic Chinese population. Westerners are a rare sight. Since my research was focused on China and the related concerns of Chineseness, this demographic fact – the preponderance of a sufficiently 'local' Chinese population - weighed significantly in influencing my decision to settle there. Perhaps there needs to be an additional qualification here: while 'local' ethnic Chinese make up the overwhelming presence in Xili, one still finds within this group tremendous place, language, and custom-based diversity. For example, apart from Putonghua, I discover at a nearby wet market conversations being held in Cantonese, Teochew, Hakka, Szechuanese, and several other place-based *baihua* (dialect) I have no means to identify. I therefore mean by 'local' simply those appearing to be of Chinese nationality and ethnicity, those for whom difference along lines of ethnicity, language, custom, creed, and religion, would invariably collapse in their self-identification as Chinese nationals.

Whereas homogeneity in terms of Chinese ethnicity might have seemed apparent in Xili, class composition was a different matter. The differences between the various social classes in the Shenzhen social polity were nonetheless also apparent. I settled into a relatively modern middle-class residential *xiaoqu* (neighbourhood), which was equipped with the standard facilities found in modern apartment complexes in China today: common areas consisting of a landscaped garden, a children's playground, a swimming pool, fenced and gated boundaries, all watched over by a retinue of private security personnel. Gates, boundaries, and guards are often considered – they have come to be viewed as - indispensable since they supposedly relate to a community's well-being. They are mustered ostensibly to enhance the safety of the *xiaoqu*'s residents. But one cannot help believe that there are *not* other reasons too.

The establishment of boundaries and the deployment of guards to enforce them segregate those with rights from those without them. Moreover, these boundaries exclude in more ways than one. Aside from their declared purpose of 'providing security', these 'accoutrements' of middle-class living are intended also to reinforce notions of exclusiveness, privilege, and status in China today: exactly the

exclusiveness, privilege, and status of being a member of China's burgeoning middle-class. I had mentioned above that class was not as uniformly distributed as ethnicity in Xili. Indeed, in China one's social standing is revealed simply by residing in a modern condominium. The ability to partake of modern high-rise living in the cities – the more fashionable and expensive, the merrier - designates one a member of the aspiring Chinese middle-class; it reveals one to be socially upwardly mobile, making necessary and desirable 'progress'. This latter observation is based not only on impression but economic fact: the 105 square-metre apartment I rented costs 3,600 yuan, which should be considered vis-à-vis the 2,000 yuan in wages the average factory worker earns (which includes of subsidized dormitory housing), or the 7,500 yuan his manager brings home monthly (all nominal monetary values expressed in 2011 prices). Writing in February 2013, Shenzhen-based anthropologist, Mary O'Donnell reports that most service workers and manual labourers take home somewhere between 2 and 3,000 a month.[17] Our notion of class should accordingly be mediated by considerations of these income differentials and the various lifestyle options they enable.

All this serves as an affirmation of the fact that considerable class diversity exists in Xili even if there appears to be apparent ethnic homogeneity. Unsurprisingly, class differentiation based on earning and consumption ability is even more diverse than what I have been able to indicate here. To exemplify: in more affluent sections of Nanshan, the rental of a similar apartment in terms of size and quality would have been in excess of 4,000 yuan. This is to be expected since rents vary according to location; they would have been considerably higher if one ventured into the city's commercial districts such as Futian and Luohu. A friend's 90 square-metre apartment in Futian, for instance, costs over 10,000 yuan monthly, but it also came with the allure of a Parisian address: *The Champs Elysee*.

Given that life under capitalism is for the most part determined by the ability to earn and to consume, the idea of 'class' as an indicator of one's place within a necessarily stratified society is most meaningful when understood in economic terms; that is, according to one's earning and spending ability - or pecuniary strength. This is as I have alluded to above. Although 'class' tends often also to invoke the idea of deportment, style, or a set of mannerisms, it should be borne in mind that such

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[17] See: http://shenzhennoted.com/2013/02/05/double-bind-urbanization/. Accessed August 2013.

cultivated behaviour is most convincingly affected only when the economic/pecuniary means to achieve them exist. In other words, the display or performance of 'class' is mostly '*bought*', determined in large part by one's pecuniary capacity to consume the requisite class-symbolic paraphernalia: from housing to cars to fashion items, deportment classes, beauty treatments and what not.

The classification 'middle-class' can therefore be said to apply across a continuum that is somewhat amorphous. Nevertheless, the boundaries of this middle-class category and its meaningfulness are foremost given by one's pecuniary prowess, which in this case is the ability to consume the mass-commodities marketed at the rapidly-expanding Chinese urban population, many of whom have only recently acquired the monetary wherewithal to purchase personal computers, mobile phones, and white goods; to say nothing of automobiles, red wine, cosmetics, luxury items, and overseas holidays. So, while the residents in my *xiaoqu* would readily fit the description of a Chinese 'middle-class', I would consider them to be at the more modest end of the middle-class continuum – 'borderline' members of the middle-class, perhaps. This assessment is based on the expected understanding that the relatively lower cost of property in Xili entails concomitant demographic and class-and-income inflected consequences; it is also based on my observation of their relatively modest life-styles, which although aspirational and consumerist, lack the ostentation displayed by certain sections of the Chinese *nouveau riche*. In no way, for instance, do they resemble the 'leisure class' of late-nineteenth century American society that Veblen (2009 [1899]) wrote so scathingly about.

Despite the conscious and conspicuous urbanity of Shenzhen, I found the social milieu at my condo sufficiently conducive for neighbourly propinquity. Frequent exchange of salutations in the elevator and in the children's playground soon gave way to more substantive conversations, leading me to discover that my neighbours were engaged in an array of economic roles: small business owners, managers, employees of Chinese and foreign MNCs (multi-national corporations), nurses, teachers etc. On the whole, many households in my *xiaoqu* consisted of breadwinners placed in relatively well-remunerated economic positions, professional as well as non-professional; many were dual-income families with extended family (usually parents or in-laws) living with them to care for the children while they were at work.

Although lacking outward pretensions for the most part, there is little doubt that

the residents in my *xiaoqu* constitute an aspirational class that is in the main composed by dual-income nuclear families living out, howsoever precariously, Deng Xiaopeng's preachment that 'to get rich is glorious'. While it is apparent that they do not – or perhaps, do not conspicuously - live in the lap of luxury, many have unwittingly expressed such wishes in my conversations with them. This is hardly surprising: given that the ideology of developmentalism has been uncompromisingly imposed by the Chinese state since at least the 1970s, many Chinese have become enthusiastic proponents of the Western lifestyle that is widely considered as the apotheosis of "development." As a matter of fact, with the state-imposed ideology of developmentalism being as ubiquitous as it has been, it is perhaps more appropriate to ask if there is anyone in China who is *not* aspirational.

To further underscore the existence of class differences around my Xili neighbourhood, nonetheless, I should mention the urban villages nearby, the nearest of which was *Zhuguang* village (朱光村). With rents for a one-bedroom unit in the village complexes there going for around 1,500 yuan, one can assume that these urban villages provide viable housing alternatives that cater to those who find the costs of residing in private condominiums prohibitive.

O'Donnell (2008) has noted that historically - between 1984 and 1999 - there had been three types of housing options available in Shenzhen: (i) 'benefit housing' (*fuli fang*), which was a legacy of erstwhile socialist practices in which dormitories were provided by the work unit; (ii) 'at-cost housing' (*weili fang*), which was sold at no profit but for which the worker paid construction costs; and finally, (iii) 'commercial housing' (*shangye fang*), which was bought and sold for profit. After 1999, however, when Shenzhen saw the last of benefit and at-cost housing allocated and built by work units, all subsequent housing constructed has been commercial with one exception: new village housing. Consequently, new urban villages have emerged as an important social force in Shenzhen, for they have been and continue to be a source of the city's cheapest rentals (ibid).

Since most factory workers are accommodated in 'benefit housing', in dormitories within the vicinity of their workplace, one can assume that urban villages cater to the needs of those without such privileges. This demographic group would include people from different walks and engaged in different services and trades, but who, along with the said factory workers, comprise the class of the working poor that has been priced out of the private/commercial housing market. By and large, they

comprise of a group of individuals that I feel cannot be classified as 'middle-class' in the way I have discussed it above. That is to say, even more than the middle-class residents at my condo, the inhabitants of the urban village struggle to eke out a subsistence-living. With their average monthly wage approximately in the 1,500 to 3,000 yuan bracket, they are the city's proverbial battlers. One can think of the occupations implicated: hairdressers, clerical workers, freshly minted university students, salespeople, cleaners, masseuses, cooks, manual labourers, and tradespeople of all sorts. There is tremendous occupational diversity, just as there is a mélange of ethnic and linguistic differences. But there are singularities/identities too: almost all are Chinese nationals and virtually all, migrant workers. And in contrast to the demographic at my condo, many live as singles even despite being married: their spouses likely to be in a similar tenement in another part of the city, or worse yet, in another part of the country.

The historical dynamics of Shenzhen's urbanization and the ramifications it has had for social stratification in the city is a compelling topic about which we regrettably lack the space to elaborate.[18] My goal here has merely been to sketch impressionistically the class and demographic composition of my immediate neighbourhood. At the least, I hope to have succeeded giving a tentative impression of the social and demographic complexities that characterise it, for it is the social milieu in which at least fourteen months of my life will be spent. Of course, it is simultaneously also my 'fieldsite', the somewhat randomly demarcated territorial space from which my foray into understanding contemporary Chinese life and culture will begin.

VII. The Situatedness of the Ethnographer: Object, Subject and the Intersubjective

Contra the Enlightenment ideal that knowledge is superior when objective and universal, it bears reiterating that all thought implicates the thinker in its production. Better yet, as I stressed in II, the researcher *has to be* implicated in this process in order to produce knowledge that is credible and meaningful. Consequently, rather than being a source of contamination and distortion, I have argued that one's

[18] The interested reader is commended to consult the comprehensive writings of O'Donnell (2001, 2008) on this topic.

immersion in the phenomenon/life-world one wishes to understand is a criterion for sound/robust research practice. This observation is unremarkable and should be all too obvious, but it carries implications for the validity of the knowledge that is produced. Indeed, what are these implications: how does the researcher's situated-ness affect how and what s/he is to know? Can the tension existing between a potentially prejudicial subjectivity be reconciled with a detached and impartial objectivity so as to facilitate our quest for understanding?

It is typical in traditional discussions of subject-object relations that the researcher is conceived as the all-knowing subject; in contrast, the phenomenon under study - the object – constitutes what is to be known. According to this dichotomous scheme a distinctive difference exists between the knower and the known. Because the knower, operates from an epistemological space above that which is to-be-known, s/he is privileged. Meanwhile, the distinction/separation between them, subject and object, forms the basis for the production of uncontaminated, impartial, and in a word – 'objective' - knowledge. It is precisely because of this perceived difference separating the knower and the known that the claim of objectivity, a claim conferring superiority and legitimacy, can be made about the process of knowing and its outcomes.

However, it would seem that the practices of traditional anthropology would be amenable to challenging this epistemic tradition. With its predilection for long-term foreign cultural immersion and its willingness to understand native viewpoints etc., the potential for the attenuation of the object-subject difference stressed in traditional epistemology is certainly great. It is in fact precisely in these features of anthropological practice that the tremendous potential for the equalization of subject-object relations can be found. With the tendency for long-term cultural encounters with Others, which include the learning of their languages and customs, the potential for the eradication of perceived differences between Self and Other is necessarily amplified. The subjectivity of the anthropologist may consequently be reflexively opened up. Yet, potentials can exist without being realized.

As Mayfair Yang (1994: 28) has noted, "the professional and epistemological strictures of anthropology have usually ensured that the anthropologist was able to reassert the detached stance of 'objectivism' and maintain a clear border between the West and the Other." Woolgar (1988) maintains that it is in fact anthropology's foundational axiom, its conception of the cultural other as an exoticized, distinct

analytic object, which militates against any efforts to rectify subject-object power asymmetries. In his words (ibid: 27): "The tribesmen are assumed to be fundamentally different from us, and their actions are to be explained in terms of an alien and exotic culture. The distinctiveness of the cultural object is axiomatic to the ethnographer's work and her report must testify to the strangeness of the other." Against the inherent radicality of its practice, then, the fundamental axiom of institutional anthropology affirms difference as the starting point for its inquiries, and therefore maintains the longstanding subject-object distinction.

The comments above about anthropology may pertain equally to cultural studies, sociology, and other disciplines professing an interest in examining and understanding cultures. The declared interest in investigating culture undoubtedly leaves open the possibility for recognizing and celebrating differences and sameness between peoples, but the realization of this potential is contingent on the willingness to permit the *givenness* of 'reality' – and not *a priori* assumptions - to speak and serve as the criterion of knowledge claims. These *a prioris*, I believe, are the essentialisms that have been subjected to much critique in more recent scholarship. And as argued in Chapter One and affirmed by Yang and Woolgar here, Eurocentric epistemology is predicated on an essentialist conviction positing not just the *difference*, but also the *superiority* of the West vis-à-vis the non-West. Western forms of knowledge are conferred superior and privileged status, for they lay claim to a universalism that is sustained by the postulate distinguishing subject from object, the knower from the known.

Eurocentric epistemology, however, is not our predestined fate. It exists insofar as we continue to give it currency, even if unwitting. The scourge may be avoided in our work by simply refusing to accept the implicit prejudices of Western social science. This would entail rejecting Euro-chauvinism and a priori assumptions about essential Self-Other differences. Such a renunciation will de-center the analytical subject of the social and cultural sciences away from the Western rational subject toward more diverse and pluralistic subjectivities. This process has been underway for some time with increasing numbers of non-European peoples coming to participate in the intellectual spheres previously dominated by Europeans. With the present, ongoing economic and geo-political decline of Euro-America, this trend of de-centering from Eurocentric epistemologies – otherwise known as epistemic de-Westernization - can only be expected to continue. This will lead to the gradual

erosion of the distinction between the subject, the agent of representation, and its represented other.

Importantly, affirming the researcher's role in the production of knowledge poses a radical challenge to claims about the possibility of 'objective' knowledge. To recognise that thought and knowledge are sociologically - and therefore, subjectively - determined verily subverts the claim of objectivity. For the possibility of 'objectivity' as a 'view from nowhere' immediately becomes untenable. To say the least, if 'objectivity' were to exist, then it can hardly be in the form that more diehard positivist epistemologists claim for it. More strikingly, claiming knowledge to be subjectively determined upends the classical criterion: it is not 'objectivity' per se, but 'subjectivity' that now has its place in the sun. An alternative conception of objectivity consequently seems to be in order. To that end, I would propose that the task involved is not to deny the existence of objectivity, but to reformulate it as being constituent of a multiplicity of subjective viewpoints. As Steeves (op. cit.: 7) has noted, "Objectivity is not to be distinguished from subjectivity but is derived from it." That is to say, objectivity is intersubjective; based on a pluralisation of subjectivities.

VIII. An Afterword on Methodology

These insights into the knowledge enterprise have certain important methodological recommendations and ramifications for the current project. I have alluded to them throughout this essay, but reiterate them in detail as a way to conclude the foregoing discussion. I would like also to outline the underlying methodological approach of my research, whose key features are as follows:

First, recognizing that subjectivity is indispensable in the production of knowledge valorizes the role of the researcher rather than conceive of her (his) presence as a source of 'contamination' and liability, as in traditional positivism. The methodological recommendation that ensues thus involves the foregrounding of the researcher's place/role/intervention in the research.

So, to be sure, my biography as a post-colonial, ethnic-Chinese-male born in Singapore but who has been trans-nationalised - having lived 'away' since my early teens in Australia, Europe, the United States, China and now, Hong Kong - was significant in inspiring this project. But biography has also facilitated my ability to see it through. My Chinese ethnicity, in particular, permitted me to carry out my field

research under a minimum amount of scrutiny as it allowed me to blend quite seamlessly into my local community in Shenzhen. My physical appearance as a Chinese person gave me a remarkable ability to pass off as a member of the society I was examining. In addition, that I speak Mandarin sufficiently to get around and have a visceral understanding of the cultural customs and mannerisms of the Chinese people opened up further lifeworlds; namely, that of my neighbours, the local street-vendors, the local doctor, the nursing staff at the local government clinic, the proprietor and his employees at the local eatery, the hairdresser and so on. As these are important nodes in the network of daily existence, they are all relevant sites for understanding the priorities that govern existence in contemporary China, ideal locations for one to be 'getting at the things themselves.'

It was only when conversations moved onto more difficult terrain and my Chinese-speaking skills were stretched, when my speech was punctuated by long-drawn silences (of word-groping), that my status as an 'outsider' became apparent. Despite this, I never quite felt the milieu of my neighbourhood in Shenzhen to be foreign or strange, nor was I ever made to feel unwelcome by virtue of my status as a foreign-Chinese (*huaqiao*).

The unfamiliar cultural environments of fieldwork have a tendency to breed a sense of personal dislocation along with its accompanying responses. Keith Ridler (1996: 248) has observed, for instance, that the cultural dislocation brought about by the fieldwork process encourages one to cope by taking up "displacement activities which relieve the stress of existence in an unfamiliar culture by disengaging one from one's cultural surroundings." I was fortunate to have never experienced this need during my time in Shenzhen. Perhaps it was a testimony of my relatively successful assimilation into Chinese-Shenzhen life, which would be attributable partly to my deep familiarity with Chinese culture, partly to the warm hospitality of my community. But this sense of equanimity in the supposedly foreign environs of my fieldsite existed from very early on. In any case, the consequent conditions that prevailed entailed a seamless interweaving/imbrication of my life and field-work, lifeworld and fieldsite. This was fortuitous. It was effectively a methodological virtue/principle realized, leading to the collapse of the artificial and arbitrary distinction between the fieldsite and lifeworld as noted earlier. And the collapse of this boundary very naturally led to the collapse of another stressing difference between the subject and object, observer and observed, bringing into relief the issue

of intersubjectivity and its consequences for knowledge.

So, secondly, the phenomenological understanding that objectivity is intersubjective renders knowledge communal and commonly witnessable/verifiable. It is important that the commonly verifiable nature of knowledge dispenses with the conundrum raised at the beginning of this section: the tension between subjective bias and objective detachment is resolved, for with the understanding that objective knowledge is intersubjectively determined, neither subjectivity nor objectivity per se remains a concern. Value-free knowledge is illusory while the prejudices among a group's members, when adjudicated by the group as a whole, are no longer subjective, but intersubjective. The resulting body of knowledge is one that carries the weight of the community, emerging in an epistemic space that is open and shared by all its participants.

Third, the intersubjective nature of knowledge suggests that the researcher is merely one interlocutor among others in the knowledge enterprise. This offers up/suggests a novel methodological approach whereby the researcher, although bearing responsibility for the execution of the various research tasks, should wherever and in whatever means possible involve his interlocutors in the project. The researcher's findings should be subjected to the corrections, opinions, and viewpoints of his informants, and this should be done recursively. Such repeated interaction among interlocutors is a methodological commendment since it serves to insulate one's thought from getting caught up with itself. Moreover, it is in the social reflexiveness of this process - the going back and forth between the researcher and her informants - that knowledge as an intersubjective, dialogical, and dialectical *process* is brought to bear.

Finally, the approach underlined in the foregoing offers still another virtue: an open-endedness reflecting the ontological nature of reality. Unlike traditional ethnographies in which the researcher descends on a fieldsite within which his research is circumscribed, the 'fieldsite' of the current project remains open and to be determined by the unfolding events of the researcher's lifeworld. Unlike classical ethnography, this project is bound not so much by any particular field-location but by my concerns with Chinese Eurocentrism as a mode of being in its various modalities. Accordingly, my project may have its beginnings in my Xili neighbourhood in Nanshan district, Shenzhen, but the concerns of Chinese Eurocentrism makes no demand that it be thus confined. Rather, the incorporation of my interlocutors into

the research project and the commitment to 'return to the things themselves' requires one to muster the courage to go where 'the things' lead. As will be evident in the following chapter, my research that begins in Shenzhen unexpectedly takes me to Qinghai Province in Western China, the home-province of my key interlocutor. A phenomenologically-inspired approach thus remains open-ended insofar as it commits to following the course thrown up by the vicissitudes of the researcher's lifeworld. In this way, the process of inquiry is not artificially bound by prefabricated research agendas/strategies that are imposed *a priori*, but led by an intellectual proprioception that is attuned to the subtle movement of ever changing ontological realities.

5 INTIMATIONS OF CHINESE SOCIALITY: EUROCENTRISM AND EVERYDAY EXPERIENCE IN SHENZHEN

I. From Culture to Sociality

I have so far posited Eurocentrism as that mode of existence that is modeled or improvised – consciously or otherwise - after that which has prevailed in Euro-America since at least around the seventeenth century. This mode of life is what many commonly refer to as Modernity, a mode of existence whose defining cosmology is Materialism, or the belief that matter constitutes the basis of reality. I have argued previously with reference to mediaeval Europe that it is owing to a societal-wide paradigmatic shift to a cosmology of materialism that Modernity as constituted by the exploitation of Nature-as-Dead-Matter could be accomplished.

There are many corollaries that emerge from this materialist cosmological transformation. In the epistemic realm, materialist science came to be regarded as knowledge *par excellence*. Meanwhile, the material basis of life – economics – would take on exalted significance as human development *en generale* gradually came to be defined exclusively in terms of *economic* development *per se*; that is, as

material accumulation. It is for this reason that the original meaning of economics, which implied 'household reproduction', has been lost. It behooves us to recognize that the capitalist imperative of unceasing profit-based economic growth is in fact the result of a materialist cosmology carried to its logical end. To put it differently, human well-being - or the meaning of life itself – has come to be conceived strictly in terms of material progress and accumulation. This cannot be more clearly expressed than by the fundamental tenet of Eurocentered neo-classical economics, which asserts that 'more is better' when it comes to individual consumer preferences. The conception of the human being as merely a pleasure-seeking consumer is perhaps significant in itself.

But these dimensions of Modernism entailed other important consequences too. The entire fabric of community and social life – the sense of self vis-à-vis others - came to be transformed in a manner which gave support to a way of life that privileged material progress/development above all else. As discussed previously, the newfound purpose of life as material rather than spiritual progress was facilitated by an entire transformation in social mores and sociality, whereby the erstwhile reciprocity of organic community/gemeinschaft relations dissipated into a society held together by a mechanized system of individual political rights. The legacy of materialism is apparent even here: society was no longer conceived of as an organic totality but – thanks to materialist ideas – believed to be constituted simply by an adding up of its component parts, its individual members. Furthermore, since individual autonomy was so highly prized, the new system was inherently antagonistic and characterized by a Hobbesian war of each-against-all, which spelled the need for a social contract to secure the 'peace'. Indeed, for the functioning of the emerging money and commodity-based Modern economic system, rights have to be clearly specified; first, in order to delineate the boundaries of property ownership and, second, to address questions of distribution that flow from it. Accordingly, it seems almost inevitable that 'possessive individualism' should emerge as the defining ethos of the new era, the age of market society.[19]

The inquiry that motivates the current chapter thus seeks to examine what social life and sociality in China are like in the face of these modernist transformations. How have the traditional patterns of life held up against the transformations wrought

[19] http://understandingsociety.blogspot.hk/2011/08/possessive-individualism.html

by modernity? How do people relate to one another in the everyday of today's China? To be sure, if Eurocentrism is a mode of existence premised on the sovereignty of the rational 'individual' subject, what aspects of this existence are found in China today? How do Chinese notions of the 'individual', the 'personal' and the 'impersonal' express/manifest themselves? And, correspondingly, how do they affect traditional Chinese forms of sociation? How is Chinese society held together – is it by status, contract, or is there the preponderance of some other unifying social force?

This chapter attempts to provide an answer to the above questions by giving an account of the world I experienced in my Shenzhen neighbourhood and the world that it subsequently opened up. It is important to mention that my focus on sociality as a way to grapple with the problem of Eurocentrism is not arbitrary. Rather it underscores my thesis about Eurocentrism, which differs from many treatments of it hitherto. As noted, the latter tend generally to view Eurocentrism as a problem in seeing, as distortions in perception and interpretation that arise from a Western-centred view of the world. While Eurocentrism is certainly a form of Euro-American or North Atlantic chauvinism, its implications and consequences are far greater than being confined to ways of seeing and perceiving. Since I have posited Eurocentrism to be foremost a mode of existence that is fundamentally built upon a materialist and individualist ontology, I am also contending that it is an existential mode that implies certain social forms and, accordingly, certain forms of human sociation. Eurocentrism does not simply end as a way of viewing the world - that is merely its (ideational) beginning. Instead, it entails rather material consequences for social relations, consequences for how we relate and sociate with one another. Owing to the individualist ontology it prescribes, therefore, Eurocentrism is most culturally consequential in its ability to transform our modes of sociality.

If we can accept the proposition that a meaningful life is given by a life of meaning, and that 'meaning' is inherently a social and communal act/institution created collectively by those in the conversation, then what makes life meaningful depends on our ability to 'get along' with others. A meaningful life is therefore necessarily 'social'; it is contingent on us at least acknowledging the social basis of individual existence and, hence, attempting to accomplish some rudimentary state of social cohesiveness. That is indeed also the nature of culture in its most fundamental form. The reason that my critique of Eurocentrism focuses on sociality thus becomes

apparent: in being universally prescribed and propagated as the central archetype of our individual and collective existence, Eurocentrism affects our Being and Becoming, for better or worse. *Eurocentrism is most potent in its consequences for shaping our modes of sociality. As such, it affects us in the most profound and primordial of ways*.

II. Community and the Phenomenology of Sociality

Gaps necessarily exist between words and the things they conjure. Nonetheless, it is hoped that the following accounts are revealing of the nature of Chinese social life and sociality. It is hoped, furthermore, that this revelation presents itself not merely in the form of words/concepts striking the intellect but as sensations/sentiments that are empathised. This is not just a point made for effect, for sociation and sociality are above all given to us as pre-conceptual modes of unconscious experience rather than conceptual abstractions of consciousness. They are felt experiences, empathic and intuitive rather than intellectual.

What is the importance of these experiences? The experience of convivial relations between self and others - the experience of the We-in-the-I and the I-in-the-We – is the experience of community. It furnishes us with the capacity to realise it when it is absent. And absences are meaningful only in the context of some previously experienced presence. The converse is also true, for experience consists of a blend of undulating presences and absences. Consequently, the experience (presence) of community furnishes us with the capacity to bemoan its loss when it subsequently disappears and becomes absent. Indeed, loss impresses itself on those who have known better, and this loss, like the condition that preceded it, is felt. For others without such prior experience, there is no comparison on which to set the prevailing human circumstances off against. In this case, the absence of community is often not perceived and passes unnoticed; and expressions of loss are met by stares of incomprehension and confusion.

In the following I will attempt to convey my experience of Chinese social life and sociality by bringing to the fore aspects of it that stand out against what I contend to be the Eurocentric *modus de vivre* that structures much of global modern experience. My experience is unwittingly characterised by contrast. It begins in Shenzhen in the South but ends in Qinghai in the West. It starts out in an urban environment among a largely irreligious Han majority but ends in a rural and

somewhat remote mountainous landscape among the Muslim Hui. Perhaps more than anything this contrast is symbolic of the divisions that cut across contemporary China in the twenty-first century. By virtue of their social and economic histories, Shenzhen and Qinghai are fittingly representative of the polarities separating the urban and rural, modern and backward, future and past, prosperity and poverty, Han and non-Han that add to the complexities of understanding modern China. These two locations could also be considered to symbolise the conundrums expressed by the *ti/yong* formulation discussed in Chapter Three - of Chinese learning as ends, Western learning as means – but adapted to a uniquely Chinese context where Shenzhen represents an instance of Western progress and Qinghai, the legacy of Chinese 'backwardness'.

It is well-known that Shenzhen was China's first Special Economic Zone (SEZ), a territory designated specially to mark China's re-integration with the Western capitalist world in the 1970s. Accordingly, it has for the past thirty years been considered a place of promise and prosperity, an alluring symbol of China's future. It is perhaps just as widely known on the other hand that the main concentrations of poverty in China are to be found in the provinces of western China, Qinghai among them. Hence, insofar as Shenzhen and Qinghai are distinguished from each other by such utterly stark antinomies, real and perceived, they may rightly be thought to serve as alternative/contrasting scenarios for what the possible future of China can be. In other words, Shenzhen serves as the perfect foil for Qinghai and vice versa: prosperous and progressive in the one case, impoverished and backward in the other. The opportunity to contrast between two vastly different 'fieldsites' has emerged perchance; yet it is highly fortuitous since it provides an ideal context for examining the severity/pervasiveness of Eurocentrism in contemporary China. Indeed, such a context of difference potentially strengthens the findings of our study. The fact that two locations within China with such vastly different socio-economic and cultural constitutions in terms of ethnicity (Han/Hui), religion (secular/Islam) and cultural-economic function (urban/rural) can possibly be bound by the same vision of what makes a good life - a Western mode-of-being - is an affirmation of the singularly potent nature of Eurocentrism on the one hand and a forewarning about the precarious state of Chinese traditional culture on the other. But we are now getting ahead of ourselves. Since such exuberance is premature, I would like here to offer my account.

III. Ethnography and the 'Organization' of Experience

But, first, a caveat about its organizational aspects seems to be in place. Since I have proposed that Eurocentrism affects us most potently in terms of sociation and sociality, and is characterized foremost by a commitment to a *materialist* and *individualist* conception of society, my ethnographic account is organized around themes that reflect such tendencies. These themes have been singled out from my observations of everyday interpersonal relations during my time in China, and arise from activities that can be broadly classified according to whether they are economistic or not. By 'economistic', I am simply referring to the existence of a pecuniary motive behind a social act or interaction, regardless of whether or not the act is explicitly economic. My characterization of 'economism' therefore pertains to motive – the *intent* - behind any act. This demarcation of economistic from non-economistic activity is in itself significant since, following my argument, the surreptitious encroachment of *the economic motive* into ever greater realms of social activity is precisely an index of the growing preponderance of Eurocentrism at the expense of more traditional forms of sociality. What I am saying, in other words, is that Chinese – or any - sociality can theoretically be conceived of as being characterised by what, in the terminology of Tonnies, is a 'rational will' (corresponding with *gessellschaft*) at one extreme and a 'natural will' (corresponding with *gemeinschaft*) at another, along with the many possible permutations in between. I tabulate below the variety of homologies or metonyms that pertain to these two rather distinct modes of existence.

Gemeinschaft	Gessellschaft
Communitarian	Individualistic/Private
Rural/Village	Urban/City/Cosmopolis
Cultural-Social	Economistic
Need-based	Greed-based
Organic/Holistic	Synthetic/Reductionist/Atomistic
'Natural'/ Informal	'Rational'/ Professional
Status	Contract
Obligations	Rights
Relational	Proprietary

Customary	Transactionary/Legal
Community/kin-based	Market-oriented
Tradition	Modern
Consensus-rule	Majority-rule
Spiritualism/mysticism	Scientific materialism
Ethics (Community-based)	Amorality (Ego-driven)
Community member	Consumer

My ethnography below is consequently an account of everyday Chinese life that appears to be organized around forms/patterns of behaviour invoked by these descriptions. It is an account that has been drawn out of careful and sustained observation of different associative dimensions of Chinese existence, of which includes relations and interactions between neighbours, adults and children, patients and doctors, patrons and vendors at the market etc. Of course, these are not interactions in which I was only a passive observer/spectator. Often being wholly and directly involved in the thick of things, it will be apparent that I have relied extensively on my direct personal experience to put this account together. And as to be expected, these are just select examples, merely a sliver of what I experienced in my time in China.

I would additionally submit that the tremendous diversity and scope of these many social encounters gives a certain credence to my discoveries about Chinese sociality, for it is in their multiplicity and many sidedness that one is able to observe and then claim a certain constancy – the presence of patterns - of cultural practice and behaviour, even if there is contextual and circumstantial variation in each instance. In this way, my Shenzhen living environment took on the form of a de facto social laboratory, and my life, that of a thriving social experiment. It is the recurrence of these patterns of practice and behaviour on the one hand and their 'witnessability' on the other, that allows us to 'assert' whether the practice in question has become a norm, a convention, and, indeed, an important aspect of the culture. Ethnographic claims therefore derive their legitimacy from the repetitiveness of 'field' phenomena: the more frequent their recurrence, the more convincing/plausible that the ethnographer's assertions become. And, hence, it is because of the display of similar patterns of behaviour in different contexts that they take on the appearance of social patterns (or cultural elements), suggesting themselves as the central cultural features

around which my account of contemporary China should be organized. I append below 'exhibits' of the various social settings in which these features had been observed – or not. It is hoped that in their totality they weave together a rich tapestry that accounts for contemporaneous everyday Chinese sociality.

IV. Exhibits of Social Life

a. Exhibit A: Rental Negotiations

A memorable instance of Chinese sociality occurred in my efforts to negotiate a housing agreement prior to my re-location to Shenzhen. It was March 2011. Seemingly insulated from – or perhaps as a consequence of - the subprime mortgage crisis that began in the U.S. in 2008 and spread throughout much of the globe, the property market in China was overheated. The boom occurred in large part on the back of severe speculation in property in recent years. The newly-emerging Chinese middle class, abetted by freer legislation on property ownership, had discovered the buying and selling of property as a means of rapidly increasing their wealth, and a bubble had formed. But in early 2011 the frenzy was dying down. As property sale prices - which in Shenzhen were averaging 20 000 RMB per square metre - were now way beyond the reach of the average wage-earner, the central government had stepped in with various measures to cool the market. The Shenzhen city-scape was still pockmarked by high-rise residential construction, but with the central government now recognizing the need for intervention, there was just the sense that the market was due for a timely correction. Besides, the apartment I sought had been vacant for over a month. It was in this economic climate that I found myself in the cramped backroom of a real estate agency in Xili, optimistic that I could negotiate to lower the apartment's rental price.

Having doubts about my ability to conduct negotiations in Mandarin, I was grateful to be accompanied by a friend and his office colleague, Mr Ren, who was to serve as my chief negotiator. The latter had been helpful introducing me to the Xili neighbourhood and to the housing agent who eventually recommended the apartment. He was originally from Szechuan province but had been in Shenzhen for over ten years and had risen to a managerial position in the factory where he worked. Perhaps it was owing to his considerable experience that he appeared to me possessed of all the qualities of a wily business negotiator, appearing street-smart and exuding a certain air of confidence and toughness. I was pleased he was on my side.

The meeting was awkward as it turned out to be one between rank unequals. Apart from the fact that we outnumbered the opposite party by three to one, the landlord turned out to be a diminutive lady roughly my age, perhaps younger. We launched into customary salutations and introductions where my status as a husband and father of two young children was highlighted to increase my appeal as a prospective tenant. Maybe her showing up alone was intended to elicit the same effect; that is, to generate 'sympathy' by playing on the sheer numerical and gender asymmetry between the parties involved? Had she already disarmed us before we even began to speak? Was her solo appearance at the meeting a ploy hatched to undermine any potential assertion of hyper-masculinity on the part of her interlocutors: a case of trumping manliness with feminine meekness?

It is more likely that such meetings are by their nature awkward. In the world of commerce, getting acquainted is usually instrumental, only a means to an end. One's interest is not in getting to know the other per se, but to know the other mediately in order to access what she possesses, which is the true intent. I believe it was Marx who said that capitalism took on the deceptive appearance of relations between things. The problem with deception is that one is taken in by appearances, believing what is illusory to be real. When this happens, the signifier becomes the signified: the image is almost all that matters and what is 'reality' is in fact only a poor imitation of it. Under modern capitalism, *things* indeed become reified while others - especially *living non-things* – become somewhat incidental. The reification of things as ends in themselves thus becomes a fundamental dimension of modern capitalist existence, and the instrumentalism of social relations eventuates. Tonnies' *gessellschaft* is actualized in which its 'members' are members insofar as they are sovereign individuals connected by mutual economic need. When the conditions for competition are created - as would be expected under modernism, a system predicated on the idea that we have insatiable desires but only scarce means to fulfill them - the relationship inevitably becomes adversarial. In a milieu given to the belief that it is a dog-eat-dog world out there, Self and Other are caught in a perennial Hobbesian struggle. This would in turn suggest that if our Other should exist, s/he often does so as a competitor/rival. Little wonder about the awkwardness!

A heavy silence had fallen upon the room after the initial exchange of greetings. But it was then that Mr Ren, with an air of unflappability, declared: "We are interested in your apartment but wish to point out that it has not been well maintained.

On top of that, some of the furniture is particularly old. In light of these considerations, we would like you to consider our offer of 3,400 RMB."

It would seem fair to claim that this opening salvo was spoken to signal our intentions as well as to offer up an appearance of the strength of our bargaining position. The message was that I was hardly desperate and that I could wait out for better options should my terms not be met. Of course, anyone who has had the experience of being transient - as my family and I had been for the past couple of months - would instinctively know this to be untrue. As the experience of always being on the move is physically and emotionally sapping, particularly with young children in tow, transience tends to deepen the longing for home - any home - and urgently too. Whether the landlady was in fact percipient in discerning my situation is arguable. But that our posture was an attempt to feign strength seemed to be quickly apparent to her.

"I'm sorry," came the swift but firm response, "the price is 3,600 RMB." Casting a disappointed look at the housing agent, she added, "In fact, Mr Ye here revealed to you something he should not have. 3,600 RMB is the lowest I am willing to go: it is my reserve price. He should not have settled on it without first attempting to obtain my asking price – or my permission. And I had asked for 3,800 RMB." At this, the housing agent, Mr Ye, who demonstrated the enthusiasm and assiduousness of a young man on his first assignment out of school, lowered his head. I am sure he wished he were elsewhere.

If the property market were headed for a deflation, the nature of the landlady's response certainly did not reflect undue concern. Was she even aware of the situation? Did she not care about the prospect of her apartment staying vacant? These are some of the concerns renters desperately wish – and therefore project - upon property owners when entering into negotiations: if only the owners shared similar concerns! But there are times when one wonders if owners are aware of the 'dangers' that engulf them. Or, was this landlady like us, simply playing 'tough' to elicit an impression of strength and resilience? If we weren't desperate enough for a home to accede to her demands, she was similarly *not* desperate enough to let her apartment out to us by acquiescing to our terms. And it would hardly be surprising if she were in fact feigning toughness, for we had deployed the same strategy thinking it would serve our interests. It is evident after all that in *gessellschaft* one is compelled to strategically keep up appearances merely to avoid being subordinated by the Other.

Mr Ren: “There’s also an issue with the general cleanliness of the apartment, the state of some of its amenities, some of which need to be changed. Would you ensure that the apartment is properly cleaned before Mr Xu moves in, or bear the expenses if he should hire someone to do it? The apartment also needs a new coat of paint. Additionally, would you also be able to replace some of the amenities, the toilet seats for instance, which are worn out and dirty?”

“The apartment was cleaned after the previous tenant vacated. I inspected and approved it. Perhaps it needs to be swept once more. If there’s anything you’d like to change, you can but it is your responsibility - and at your own cost,” came the reply.

Although the negotiations had only begun, it was clear that our efforts had already been foiled. And while the landlady had effectively ended all negotiations about the price, she did so in a manner that downplayed her culpability in it. In other words, by highlighting the housing agent’s mistake, she was alluding to the fact that her unwillingness to compromise stemmed from her belief that she had already been forced to compromise. Mr Ye, her housing agent thus served as her alibi: her obdurateness was therefore not the result of unreasonableness on her part but from his fumbling incompetence, which she felt had cost her.

Having failed to persuade her so far, I raised my next concern. There was at my end considerable uncertainty and apprehension about my move to Shenzhen. To begin, since my family’s China visa applications were being processed, I was unsure if they would obtain visas of sufficient duration to permit their residence in China. What if they were given just three-month visas, or even worse, what if their visa applications were completely rejected? And this was to say nothing about their ability to adapt to life in China. Clearly, anything was possible and we were operating in the realm of the unknown. But since the contract specified a year’s lease with a costly/punitive forfeitable two-month deposit in case of its breach, I inquired if she would agree to a shorter or more flexible contract.

I harboured reasonably high hopes. After all, not only had I read Mayfair Yang’s (1994) book on *guanxi*, the networks of mutual dependence that govern inter-personal affairs in Chinese society, I had personal experience of such relations growing up. My observation of *guanxi* behaviour within kinship and pseudo-familial networks were sufficiently comprehensive for me to accept the thesis about *gaunxi*. And even though the landlady had no reason to regard me as *shouren*, someone even remotely familiar that considerations of *guanxi* would become relevant, I still

believed that she would be inclined toward the common Chinese trait of compromise and goodwill on which *guanxi* relations depended.

This belief was in part shaped by experience. To cite just one such instance, the landlady of another apartment I had seen had welcomed my renting her unit and expressed our meeting as *yuanfen* – fate. For whatever reason she might have had for invoking fate, her recognition that we were fellow travelers in this great journey of life affirmed what we shared in common. By saying that fate had played a hand in our meeting, she was discursively and ontologically breaking down the aloofness/coldness of *gessellschaft* relations and establishing the more convivial relations that typically bind kith and kin. I immediately felt a certain sense of empathy with her, the sort that exists between people who have known each other for years. In effect, she was stoking the conditions for *guanxi* to exist between strangers. And there was a sense that there was no compromise that could not be reached.

But perhaps this particular encounter was different. I reproduce below the dialogue that ensued:

Tyi (me): "As I'm currently faced with some uncertainty about the type of visas we'll receive as well as my family's ability to adapt to life in China, is it possible for me to sign a six month contract?"

L (landlady), looking uncertain: Shakes her head to disapprove.

Ren, representing me: "If Mr Xu should sign a year's contract but is unable to see it through, would it be alright if he found tenants to replace him? In which case, can his deposit be returned without forfeiture? Of course, this is only a worst-case scenario given the uncertainty about his family's visa applications. It's possible that there won't be a need for such a provision and they'd stay the entire year."

L, reticent: Again, shakes head.

Mr Ren in exasperation: "Are you prepared to negotiate? Are you willing to compromise on anything at all?"

At this point, Mr Ren turns to my friend and I to remark that we were likely wasting our time: we had hit a stone wall. Indeed, we had hardly even begun but our hopes of obtaining a more favourable agreement on our terms had been extinguished. After half-an-hour, the landlord had not conceded/yielded an inch.

L: "The apartment costs 3,600 yuan per month, and the terms of the contract are clear. What is the purpose of the three of you attempting to pressure me in this way? Are you men attempting to bully me, a woman?"

Whether intended or not, this remark was cutting. I believed it brought upon the three of us a definite sense of embarrassment. Had we tried to intimidate her? Somewhat shamed by the suggestion, I attempted to explain to her that our collective presence owed to my diffidence in negotiating in Chinese. Mr Ren echoed, "It is not what you think. His Chinese is not adequate to the task and we're merely here to assist him."

No matter. The damage had been done. The landlady's remark had taken the wind out of our sails and our efforts were dead in the water. There was no hope left for goodwill. As someone with a young family of her own, I had mistakenly believed that she would empathise with my domestic situation, but it was not to be. So much for my misplaced hopes about Chinese *guanxi* in this case: it seemed that the landlady had spurned the opportunity for goodwill by refusing/denying me any flexibility at all, even when it came at virtually no cost to her. My friend later remarked that she was simply adhering to the 'letter of the law' in order to benefit from it: I will return to this thought in a moment. We proceeded to sign the necessary papers and concluded the meeting.

I left the meeting chagrined; more disappointed about what I felt was the landlady's unduly uncompromising attitude and unwillingness to be helpful than about being unable to obtain what I had bargained for. I also wondered if such disappointment was justified. It became apparent that there was in principle nothing wrong with the landlady's attitude; she had the right to hold me to the contract as much as I had the right not to sign it in the first place. There was – I had - the 'freedom to choose'.

Perhaps my expectations were unreasonable, and I was holding her to a higher standard of social/moral conduct than was warranted. When the landlady and I met again the next day to inspect the apartment, I encountered a person who offered assistance in all manner of ways. She referred to my family and invoked friendship: "If there should be anything your wife needs, especially since she's new to Shenzhen, please feel welcome to call me. I hope I can be a friend." It was difficult to know what to make of her, for her entire posture seemed the antithesis of what it was just the day before. Was this now *guanxi* behaviour - *now* only because I had signed a contract with her? I thought again about my friend's observation the previous day: she had been unprepared to compromise because she was not legally bound to do so, plus there was the possibility that she stood to benefit from it. That was perhaps why

I felt so disappointed, and which made her latest overtures of help appear so incredible/unconvincing. Again, the 'objective' meaning of her statement conveyed kindness, but I had reason to believe that its 'expressive' meaning was something different altogether.

It is true that in principle I had no reason to be disappointed. There were no legal or formal strictures requiring my landlady to be helpful or kind: in essence, I had no right to expect either from her. If they had been demonstrated, it would have been entirely a matter of good fortune. This is not to suggest that kind acts need to be made mandatory either, for acts of kindness cannot be demanded without violating what it means to be kind. So, herein was perhaps the reason for my disappointment: when actions depend on formal, rational, or legal reasoning as the impetus for their being undertaken, virtues such as kindness, empathy, helpfulness, generosity, considerateness etc. cease being virtues in themselves but become instrumental acts that are subject to reasoned calculation and self-interest. Under such circumstances, kindness is not produced and displayed as an end in itself but because the person who engages in it seeks to profit/gain from it. In this case, the landlady was unrelenting despite the opportunity for compassion; she was not bound formally in any way to be kind, and so acted apathetically. What I had witnessed was the ethics of *gessellschaft* - *instrumental reasoning* - in its ordinary workings; it was not a system of ethics that operated by virtue of its innate goodness but an ethics conceived in rational self-interest against the competing claims of an alien and adversarial Other. So, to put it differently, the 'objective' meaning of my landlady's latest overtures may well have been 'kindness'; but placed within the larger context of her overall conduct that has been witnessable thus far, its 'expressive meaning' may reasonably be interpreted as a form of 'rational self-interest'. This seemed to render her latest overture nothing short of hypocritical.

It was this realization that yielded a personal sense of disappointment and loss. But, what exactly was this loss – and was it justified? Once again, it was not a material loss associated with not attaining what I had sought, but one that derives from perceiving a sudden sundering of the *sociality* that binds Self and Other through common-feeling and empathy. The loss was therefore emotional and psychological.

When fully realized, our sociality has the potential to take the form of a comm-unity or *gemeinshaft*; where I is part of the We, Self is inseparable from the Other, and where there exists the cognisance that one's well-being is inextricably

bound to that of others. In *gemeinschaft* sociality there is the recognition that what is at stake is a 'fate' that is shared – '*yuanfen*' - as the previous landlady I described had overtly declared. In contrast, one had through these negotiations been left with the feeling that the Other was conceived as a Hobbesian brute that was not only estranged but also antagonistic to one's interests. The logical outcome is a beggar-they-neighbour approach to social relations. What is more, because of our inherent human/anthropic capacity for socialization, such a premise for sociality is not confined to its perpetrator but is instead perpetuated. This mode of sociality becomes infectious, preponderant and mutually reinforcing. In short, it becomes established as the dominant form of social conduct. And one apprehends the other as one is apprehended: with wariness, fear, and suspicion. Consequently, as the traditional order of *gemeinschaft* has fallen away in China - particularly in the cities - and a milieu of uncertainty looms over the horizon of the future, one hears calls for greater 'order', 'rights' and 'rule of law.' While these demands may be understandable, if only in the hope that they may bring a semblance of stability to China's chaotic transition to full-fledged capitalism, one witnesses the emergent forms of Chinese sociality exhibiting some of the key features of *gessellschaft*: individualism, competition, social polarization, alienation and antagonism. While Chinese sociality under such circumstances may still be governed by apparent relations of reciprocity and, hence, be justified in terms of *guanxi*, I submit that it would be in a form that increasingly takes in considerations of rational, market transactions. So, whereas the objective meaning of certain acts of reciprocity may be explained in terms of *guanxi*, their expressive meanings are likely to have changed.

b. <u>Exhibit B: Nanshan's European City (*ouzhou cheng*) and the 'Chinese Dream'</u>

Some of these features of modern consumer individualism can also be witnessed at what is called the 'European City' nearby. The European City is approximately three kilometres from the Xili neighbourhood where I lived. The fact that it was named as such was a curiosity in itself. How was it 'European', and what made it a 'City'? Was the name an expression of Eurocentric desire/fantasy, or was the appellation simply functional, a reference to some of the features of the place?

One realizes upon getting there that it is perhaps both. It turns out that the European City is an area housing four large European retail-chain stores; namely, Swedish furniture giants, IKEA; French sporting-goods retailers, Decathlon; British

home-improvement supplies retailer, B&Q; and the German supermarket chain, Metro. There are a few large Chinese retailers, too: there is Sundan Electronics, and the homegrown, Shenzhen-based furniture company, Kinhom, to which is added the Taiwanese furniture company, HOLA. According to the Shenzhen government, the European City occupies an expanse of 105, 000 square metres and involved a total investment of 1billion RMB[20]. Construction on the area began in early 2007 and business operations commenced in 2008. Significantly, likely because of its size, the Shenzhen IKEA - the fifth Chinese store to open after Shanghai, Beijing, Guangzhou and Chengdu - became IKEA's Southern Chinese headquarters[21]. According to the Trade and Commerce Bureau for Nanshan District, the European City was planned as a 'household decoration business centre in the Pearl River Delta region gathering world-renowned brands.' Incidentally, the European City is located next to *Shahe Gongyuan* a newly constructed public park elaborately landscaped with a comprehensive variety of tropical plant and tree species. This juxtaposition of the European City next to a recreation park makes for consistent urban planning too, for they both allude/refer to 'leisure' and 'time-off' – notions that are pertinent to capitalist time – by offering themselves as places to 'relax' once the worker is 'freed' from the 'drudgery' of 'work'. These sites therefore present themselves collectively as 'escapes' for the working person, places where they can momentarily be relieved of 'work'. The visitors to the European City, meanwhile, inadvertently take on the role of 'consumer' as their 'leisure' decidedly takes the form of 'consumption'.

To say that the space was 'turned over' to or 'appropriated by the Chinese state on behalf of' the four major European transnational companies is not an exaggeration, but more like an allusion to the stakes involved. The conditions of the deal struck between the Shenzhen City government and these transnational corporations remain unclear to me: What conditions govern the use of the land on which these businesses sit? What were their contributions to the initial investment, if any? These questions riddle the mind about the nature of Chinese government and foreign-capital collusion. But what is not in doubt is the fact that the above European retailers are sought after by Chinese policy-makers and planners, as explicitly articulated by the Nanshan District Trade and Commerce Bureau above. The European corporate presence, in

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[20] http://www.shenzhenoffice.org/news/eng_news_content.asp?id=615. Accessed Feb. 2013.

[21] http://www.chinaretailnews.com/2008/04/16/1129-ikea-shenzhen-european-city-store-opens-today/. Accessed Feb. 2013.

other words, is much desired: so much so that an entire 'city' – involving land appropriation and all its attendant social conundrums - has been built to accommodate their presence. It would be reasonable to expect that these corporations were lured on highly attractive terms, plied with all manner of perks and concessions.

At another level, herein is a demonstration of the degree to which commercial activity now shapes the ruling, if not popular, Chinese imagination and consciousness: 'Europe' is now simply reduced and equated with the operations of European corporate capital. Accordingly, Shenzhen's European City is so named not to celebrate the more aesthetic/intangible elements of Europe's cultural heritage, but as an honorific in recognition of the economic accomplishments of its successful capitalist enterprises. It is consequently of little surprise that such crass economism has resulted in Shenzhen's European City being little more than a glorified shopping mall.

Meanwhile, social spaces are not simply open physical spaces that are innocent and devoid of social consequences. On the contrary, spaces – urban spaces, in particular - are engineered to encourage certain behavioural forms and practices. I submit that urban spatial configurations create/impose/engender subjectivities that are coherent with the modern capitalist system and its attendant institutional apparatus. Commodified urban spaces devoted to the sale and circulation of commodities, for example, promote subjectivities and behaviours that, at the very least, are different from those that emerge in more natural and less manipulated spatial settings. I argue and will attempt to show that the subjectivities produced also differ significantly from those that emerge from more communal or collectivist milieux. The following is an account based on impressions derived from the multiple visits I made to observe life in the European City.

(i) Lifestyle Consumption and Consumption as Lifestyle

IKEA is not just in the business of selling furniture. It sells an entire lifestyle by offering it as desideratum. That lifestyle is offered as an option for the future; at least, an imagination of the future. One only has to visit an IKEA store to get a sense of this. As mentioned, the store/branch at the European City in Shenzhen has been designated as IKEA's headquarters in southern China. And also as noted, this was probably not arbitrary. Spanning over 30, 000 square metres the space is genuinely impressive, as is the gigantic structure/building in which it is housed. The premises

are air-conditioned and clean. The lighting has been dimmed and softened, creating an ambience of warmth and comfort befitting an image of an idealised 'home'. As one enters the IKEA premises, particularly when one has come to the European City by public transport or on foot on a typically warm and sticky summer's day, one is soothed instantly. The relief is foremost physical. For many, the cool air, soft lighting, and visibly clean interiors are a contrast to their existing work and living environments. The calming ambience of IKEA provides as much of a contrast to the general outdoor Shenzhen and Chinese environment, which can be said to be teeming with unpredictable and unruly pedestrians, cyclists, and drivers, traversing its (often) litter-strewn streets. Indeed, there is order and predictability in the one case, chaos and uncertainty in the other. It is easy to see – nay, *sense* - why the conditions as experienced in IKEA suggest themselves as desirable, not just as temporary relief, but as a state enduring into the future. IKEA may be in the business of selling furniture but, clearly, it is doing more than that: it is selling a lifestyle. Here in its recently opened store in Shenzhen, it is prescribing to its Chinese clients/customers what a good life supposedly consists. Such a life may be unattainable for many at the moment, but no matter: there is little doubt that it constitutes the good life, and that it should be the object of one's aspirations.

It is a sweltering summer's day but on entering IKEA, I am instantly comforted by a whiff of cool air. I am relieved to be leaving the summer heat behind me, outside. I might have also been relieved to be experiencing once again the familiarity of the store's environs contrasted against the relative strangeness of the din, dust, and disorder of the Chinese urban landscape. Maybe. In any case, I make my way to the cafeteria on the second floor. It is crowded and the atmosphere is vibrant. Two thirds of the seats are occupied. It is seven o'clock in the evening, the time many Chinese have dinner. And tonight the restaurant is filled with many families who have decided to eat out. However, just as IKEA does more than sell furniture, its cafeteria does more than serve food. And so, it is more than just a meal out.

The small poster in front of me reads, 'Have A Taste of Swedish Cuisine.' (品尝瑞典美味), while the menu on the table advertises the day's specials, which are complemented by their standard menu items that include pancakes, spaghetti bolognese, mesh potatoes, Swedish meatballs, etcetera:

1. Cheese Baked Saithe with Meshed Potatoes - 22.5 RMB;
2. Chicken Breast with Coated Pasta - 19.5 RMB;
3. Stewed Veal with Red Wine – 19.5 RMB;

Indeed, it is more than a meal out; it is literally a 'taste' of Europe, a cultural experience. Perhaps the name, 'European City', is not so inappropriate after all. Importantly, the 'European culture' does not merely reside in the food/cuisine being served. The engineering of space in the cafeteria, the lighting, the experience of 'queuing up', the sight and smells of the smogarsboard of food choices, the trays, the forks and knives (as opposed to the usual chopsticks) and, finally, the supposedly chic/fashionable IKEA furnishings, all conspire to give one the novel and unmistakable 'feel' of Europe. [As I am momentarily lost in this reverie – corroborating my present experience with my memories/recollections of Europe, I see that the queue has increased twofold.]

For many Chinese the 'European' lifestyle that is associated with and promoted by IKEA entails an increased level/standard of personal comfort over that which they currently enjoy. With clean and cool interiors and attractive modern furnishings, the perceived difference is not merely psychological but physically discernible. When the obvious creature comforts of such a lifestyle are combined with the mental conviction that in living this way one has attained/reached the highpoint of human development, it becomes a way of life that is nearly sacrosanct. And the desirability of a modern Euro-American lifestyle becomes taken for granted.

The people at the cafeteria are visibly excited and thrilled by the experience but I have doubts that such elation has resulted from the food. Chinese cuisine is known for its exceptional standards, and the Chinese are fastidious eaters: I have reason to doubt that they are so easily excited by the mere sight and taste of Swedish codfish and meatballs. Rather, it seems that they are enjoying the experience of the different – European - temporality and spatiality furnished by the IKEA setting. I should note that we could have been at an IKEA store anywhere in the world – it might well have been Sydney, Singapore, or Shanghai – yet this distinct 'sense' of Europe would have prevailed all the same. As Ritzer (2011) has argued, such a process of rationalization and standardization is a unique feature of what he calls the 'McDonaldization' of society.

This seemingly trivial account of the goings-on in IKEA's cafeteria

demonstrates how such transnational corporations, unwittingly or otherwise, fire the Chinese imagination and stoke the flames of individual aspiration. In the process, they are recreating Chinese subjectivity, remaking Chinese personhood and, thus, transforming Chinese sociality and society. This is not, of course, simply the work of transnational corporations. Kleinman et. al. (2011: 18) note the scope and spread of such lifestyle ideas as follows: "The information about new lifestyles and new life aspirations is more or less universal, at least regarding surface values, and it reaches almost every individual thanks to new communication technologies and the marketing-savvy mass media." Corporations such as IKEA are therefore one of several important institutions/elements working in symbiosis with others to perpetuate and promote the ideology of Eurocentric modernization. The corporate presence, as exemplified by IKEA here, is widely desired because what they offer has come to symbolize the 'good life', which is an image carefully cultivated by marketing and popularised by the mass media and the new mobile communication technologies.

So, to be sure, IKEA represents an object of desire. But it has come to be as a result of the effects produced by the ideology of Eurocentric modernisation, the orientation of looking towards Euro-America for a guide to 'living better'. In the pursuit of this aim, IKEA is regarded as a symbolic or representative end. But we can through our ethnography also observe how IKEA operates practically – micro-economically - as a means to fulfilling that end. One can note that the meals being served at the cafeteria are all very reasonably priced. With dinner items costing roughly 20 RMB, which is comparable to or maybe only slightly dearer than eating at a local eatery, a one-off experience of Europe is within reach for many. The same can be said about the prices of IKEA furniture generally. These prices are consciously made 'affordable' to appeal to the middle-class population of the world, and especially in China where it is bourgeoning. This is an observation that takes after Ritzer (op. cit.) who has noted that it is in their plan to reach a mass consumer market that McDonaldized institutions have stressed/emphasized ('calculability') quantity over quality.

Such a micro-economic strategy puts a one-off IKEA experience within reach of most of the general population. In so doing, it affords one the opportunity to personally experience and evaluate that lifestyle. In other words, with the Chinese popular imagination already favourably predisposed towards it, the (economic)

accessibility of IKEA allows for those initial predilections to be personally tested and confirmed. As the Chinese visitor enters the IKEA premises in Shenzhen, desires are actualised and expectations are put to the test. When one moves in from the heat outside into the clean and air-conditioned IKEA building, the contrast between Chinese and Western ways of life is brought into stark relief. Not all of this is symbolic, for as we noted, the sensation of cool air on one's skin is real: it brings actual physical comfort, especially on a hot day. This Chinese-Western contrast is further accentuated as one proceeds through the store: the sight of IKEA's modern and supposedly stylish furniture, overwhelming in their number and styles, serves an 'educational' function as it exposes the customer to what it is that he lacks and informs him of current aesthetic trends. This way, a visit to the European City in general and to IKEA in particular, constitutes a process of socialization – a socialization of the Chinese subject in matters of Western tastes, preferences, social norms and psychology. Inadvertently, this exposure to the 'modern' would fuel comparisons with the 'crude' furnishings and accoutrements of the average Chinese household, reinforcing the sense of deprivation still further. Knowledge about what one lacks emerges in situations that allow for comparisons to be made. It is because visits to IKEA present opportunities to contrast between Chinese and Western lifestyles that they may be said to be highly personalized journeys of self-discovery and awareness.

When the experience of IKEA reveals the real and tangible differences described and these are regarded as an affirmation of the 'superiority' of the modern, Western way of life, Eurocentric perceptions are 'confirmed', causing these perceptions to be entrenched still further. The degree to which one's lifestyle has been Westernised then becomes a measure of superiority over others. Meanwhile, the desire for a more 'Western' way of life increases as a general societal phenomenon. As noted, this process is facilitated by the mass media and highly mobile digitized technologies, and the consequence is the establishment, circulation, and spread of a popular culture as well as a Chinese subjectivity that is inadvertently Eurocentric.

I have mentioned the relative 'affordability' of dining and shopping at IKEA. Yet such talk should not overlook the fact that these activities still remain economically beyond the reach of most, and can realistically only be sustained by the *nouveau riche*. This class dimension is visibly evident by observing the patrons at the store. Most of the customers are fashionably-dressed; their attire is urbane and they

would quite easily have looked at home in any major city in the world. If there were such a thing as a global middle-class whose criteria for membership were determined by lifestyle - dietary and fashion – consumption choices, the average Chinese patron at IKEA would safely count to be among its members. In any case, the patrons at IKEA appear to be better groomed, more sartorially conscious, and generally better-off than the residents in my neighbourhood. Their lifestyles do seem to be worlds apart even if the two sites are merely two to three kilometers from each other.

Since the IKEA experience is essentially accessible by consumption, it is an experience and lifestyle afforded by one's wherewithal to pay. The ability to live a Western lifestyle in China is widely perceived to be an index of superior social-economic standing and class, a sign not only that one is 'better-off' but simply 'better' than those not yet Westernised. It is therefore unsurprising that the shoppers at IKEA by and large appear to be affluent. Just as IKEA is symbolic of the good life, those who are able to consume its products and lead the lifestyle it promotes are widely perceived to be among society's winners, a stratum of the population that many in today's China would consider worthwhile emulating. Presumably, they are fulfilling at a personal level what the newly inaugurated President, Xi Jinping, has referred to as the 'Chinese dream'[22]. Here we observe how Eurocentrism as lived Chinese experience - as manifested literally in a Western way of life - inevitably implicates consumerism and the desire to be further integrated into the global monetary economy. In other words, to afford the things that putatively give meaning to life, increasing one's money income becomes an imperative. Naturally, these tendencies have their corollaries: the desire to distinguish oneself from others through consumption, especially of Western goods, breeds not only an individualism based on invidious comparison, it simultaneously promotes a crass materialism and acquisitiveness as principles that govern individual and social behaviour. One has heard, often as a forewarning, of the many stories of unbridled greed, corruption and blatant disregard for others in today's China. I would suggest that these are symptoms of a larger malaise. Nonetheless, in their turn, they carry implications for Chinese sociative forms and sociality that I have discussed and will continue to foreground below.

Having given an account of 'life' in the European City, I now examine

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[22] http://edition.cnn.com/2013/05/26/world/asia/chinese-dream-xi-jinping. Accessed June 2012.

experiences that were more 'local' to my Xili neighbourhood.

c. Exhibit C: Social Life in the Neighbourhood

(i) Children, Child-rearing, and Convivial Relations

There is plenty happening in the immediate everyday environment. But what tends to capture the attention are phenomena that one is unaccustomed to seeing. They are memorable because their 'extraordinariness' stands out from the mundanities that are called up from memory. These phenomena are like assaults on the mind. Rather than blend seamlessly into the consciousness, they call for its attention and awaken it. [There hardly ever appears to be a shortage of such events in the everyday life of China.]

An example of such a phenomenon, which has remained for me a source of fascination until now, is that involving neighbourly interactions within the grounds of my apartment complex. I refer specifically to the sizeable gatherings of children and their adult caregivers that congregate in the common areas of the compound every day. (Given that this is a phenomenon I've witnessed quite ubiquitously throughout urban China, there seems good reason to believe that it is a general rather than a particularistic event.) The seemingly spontaneous and organic manner in which such a large number of people would gather and then disperse, as if by some orderly call of nature, is an intriguing social phenomenon to behold: perhaps tantamount to witnessing sociality in its raw workings.

As the condominium consists of high-rise dwellings, these gatherings would take place on its grounds below, which comprise of a large landscaped garden and playground. And it should be noted that despite what I have said with regards to spontaneity, there seems to be some planning/premeditation involved, at least on the part of the condominium's management: cars are in normal circumstances shut out from using the road that runs through the compound; instead, they are diverted to an underground parking space immediately upon entry. That such a pedestrian-friendly policy has been implemented means that virtually all the common space in the condominium is car-free, giving residents unfettered use of it. Hence, while spontaneity might well have a role to play in bringing residents out of their apartments to socialize downstairs, the catalytic social effects of the condominum's car-free, pro-pedestrian policy should not be understated. With the danger of automobile traffic essentially eliminated, we see the play of little children spill

beyond the usual boundaries of garden and playground onto what is technically the road. With cars barred from its use for the most part, the road becomes 'public' in a more inclusive sense as it is reclaimed by the condominium's residents - adults, children, even pets - who are on foot. Indeed, the entire grounds of the condominium are turned into a gigantic play-area, a common-zone conducive for social intercourse.

The large gatherings I speak of can be observed at least twice every day throughout the year: in the mornings, as the adults are leaving for work, and again in the late afternoons as they return and when the older children have finished school. During these times, the condominium is filled with a tremendous buzz. Some of this vibe simply comes from the energies that children naturally emit when at play, but much of it is the result of the dynamic synergies that are forged when people come together. So lively is the atmosphere that the noise level of vivacious children – indeed, of life - as heard from my fourth floor apartment audibly picks up at these times, only to die down when the moment passes.

What does one see? Firstly, the street is bazaar-like and teeming with life. Pedestrians – grandparents, parents, children, even the occasional dog - stroll in one or the opposite direction; toddlers are being pushed in their strollers. There are break-away groups that disrupt the preponderant stream of traffic. Several children are on their bikes; some others, on skate-boards and roller-blades. Still, other children are engaged in different forms of play, with the nature and type of play often corresponding to age. Some have occupied a small stretch of the road for their game of badminton, while others look on, some demanding a turn. Their game takes up the entire width of the road, but it hardly brings the flow of pedestrian traffic to a standstill. The pedestrians seem accustomed to such temporary occupations of the public space and are unperturbed. They weave their way around the game that is unfolding, at times having to duck out of the path of an oncoming shuttle.

Depending on their age, the children may be accompanied by their adult minders – parents as well as grandparents - who take the opportunity to socialise with one another. It may thus be said that age is a factor around which these gatherings are 'organized'. Yet this should not suggest that much planning or organization actually goes into bringing such gatherings together. In most cases, the groups seem to emerge simply as a result of the tendency of people to cluster with those appearing to share similar backgrounds: we are social creatures, and such is the nature of our sociability.

This seems to account for the particular group that gathers next to the condominium's rear gate, the other of its two entrances. Perhaps because it is a pedestrian-only thoroughfare, it is considered 'safe' and so has been claimed as a de facto meeting point for newborns, toddlers and their adult minders. This demographic make-up renders it the babies' corner. The composition of this group is fascinating, since one can usually see three different generations being represented: newborns, parents and grandparents. Yet, like most of the gatherings in the compound, this unlikely inter-generational assembly is the inadvertent consequence of adult concerns that place the child at the centre of their priorities. In other words, the belief that the child's well-being is served by a walk, some outdoor exposure, and some socialisation prompts his (or her) minders to take him downstairs. This reasoning seems to apply even to newborns, as the babies' corner above demonstrates.

Whereas the child's well-being is ostensibly the primary reason for his minders to take him outdoors, the benefits of such an action are not merely limited to the child. They are also extended to his adult minders, who are almost always women. Indeed, it is apparent that such child-centered outings present their minders with abundant opportunities to interact and socialize with others in similar circumstances. It is in fact usually the case that children serve as catalysts and conduits for adult interaction, for their gregariousness frequently lightens the mood and dispenses with any awkwardness that exists between strangers. When a child of three or four, who is accompanied by an adult trailing close behind, runs into another of approximately the same age, it is one of the adult minders who usually initiates the conversation. Typically, one of them would draw the attention of the other child while speaking to her own: "Look at *xiao mei mei* (little sister)". Often, she would then turn to the other child to ask, "*Xiao mei mei*, where are you going?" This is as much an opportunity for pedagogy as it is for interaction. The purpose of such a way of talking, presumably, is to teach the child – perhaps both children - the mores of sociability. Such a greeting is an icebreaker and opens up the way for the adults to carry the conversation further. Typically, the second parent would respond on behalf of her child. She would say, quite rhetorically, "We've come out to play", before inquiring about the other child: "*Xiao gege* (little brother), what is your name?", "How old are you?", "Are you at kindergarten yet?", and so on. A conversation would usually then ensue between the two adults. This manner of social intercourse is a typical and daily

occurrence within the compound. It was through such means that I witnessed neighbours, especially those caring for children, become acquainted with one another.

It was just as likely for the encounter described above to occur in the closed-space of an elevator. In contrast to the cold, stony silences and blank stares that usually characterise elevator journeys in many parts of the world, it is not unusual to witness conversation between neighbours at my Shenzhen residence. The encounter would quite simply be initiated by a '*ni hao*' (How are you?), and its chances of success would be multiplied if there were a toddler or young child present. When at least two of the parties in the elevator have young children with them, success is virtually guaranteed.

Of course, it is possible that no exchanges occur between fellow passengers, and that silence prevails during the entire journey in the elevator. I have observed and personally experienced this, but it is hardly the norm. Aloofness seems to be the trait of middle-aged single men who appear harried and pressed for time, but they constitute only a small percentage of the neighbourhood's residents. And, at any rate, the positive norms of sociability in my neighbourhood are preponderant and infectious. The primary agents of these affirmative social norms - mothers, grandparents and children – appear to have a socializing effect on those who might otherwise harbour more anti-social tendencies: again, this speaks to our innate sociability.

One could also run into neighbours when using the stairs instead of the elevator. In this case, greater spatial openness and the fact that both parties are usually going in opposite directions presents many opportunities for avoidance. Indeed, the challenge to one's dexterity ascending or descending a flight of stairs demands concentration: enough to excuse one from the exchange of pleasantries. But from my experience, this has rarely happened. When it has, it has tended to involve the same personalities who would tend to avoid social encounters in the elevator. In most cases, and most especially when the other has become a familiar face, an exchange of greetings occurs. The protagonists of the passing encounter may not stop for an exchange of words, but their utterances of '*ni hao*', which trail their speakers as soon as they are uttered, serve as a signifying device indicating acknowledgement by one of the other. Sometimes, this could be followed by an inquiry about where the other has gone or is going. This could occur when both parties have passed each other, in

which case, the words spoken dissipate like trails of vapour in the stairwell: barely audible and often incoherent, a response to the question may not even emerge. But, again, that is not the matter. It is the speech-act per se and not its contents that is relevant. Here, the very act of speech accomplishes what eloquence or profound words often fail to attain: the empathic recognition of the existence and presence of the other.

The speech-acts I refer to may seem like small talk – it *is* small talk. Yet one should not underestimate the contribution that such seemingly trivial social practices makes, for they affirm the sense of self vis-à-vis others and vice versa. To put it differently, these social conventions may appear insignificant but one should not discount them, for they serve to consolidate the community ties that afford one a sense of belonging and, hence, a sense of self within the larger social organism. Moreover, the fact these interactions involve participants from across all age groups is important, since they spawn intra as well as inter-generational knowledge transmission and sharing that, in turn, establish mutual understanding, trust, co-operation and respect within and across generations.

Overall, then, the daily life activities in my neighbourhood demonstrate rather healthy signs of and for sociality. In other words, insofar as such activities appear to cut across age and generational boundaries, life in the neighbourhood in particular – and in China generally - appears socially inclusive of those wishing to partake of it. Accordingly, even though the daily social life of the neighbourhood seems to be centred around the child, the members of all age-cohorts are given an important participatory role in the production and reproduction of it. The result is a communal life in the most genuine sense of the word.

We notice, as such, that while the elderly may be 'retired' from wage-related employment, their supposed economic obsolescence does not translate into a complete deflation of their social worth in society. The economic redundancy of the aged does not imply their obsolescence; consequently, it does not lead to the corresponding effects of social disenfranchisement that one typically finds in modern capitalist societies. In contrast, perhaps because the Chinese family unit, which has historically been the bedrock of Chinese society, is now being subjected to the unprecedented pressures resulting from China's integration into the global capitalist system, grandparent-retirees are now more than ever seen to be indispensible, if only to serve as their grandchildren's caregivers. While this may be considered in some

quarters to amount to drudgery, constituting a life and life-cycle of unending servitude and caregiving, the inadvertent consequence of such a role is the elevation of their social standing. From the obscurity of retirement (read: economic invalidity), these grandparent caregivers re-emerge as functionally crucial members of society, even if such a fact is not institutionally or openly acknowledged. Nonetheless, their contributions to making possible the everyday operations of the Chinese economic system cannot be denied: in fact, the inherent productivity of child-rearing would be well-understood by those directly involved in its dispensation - by the many grandparent-caregivers themselves, which would inevitably restore to them a modicum of the dignity that they are deprived simply by being retired, or 'monetarily unproductive'. In this way, despite receiving little or no remuneration, many of the Chinese elderly, as immediate caregivers of their progeny, remain or are re-embedded within the productive and emotional networks that constitute social life, a process that re-affirms their place as complete and worthy members of their communities.[23]

Space constraints prevent us from further elaborating on the social opportunities for the elderly, so we shall, as a means of ending, merely cite a further example for consideration: just as children are given the space in the grounds of the neighbourhood to indulge in their everyday activities of play; in parallel fashion, we see the elderly organize among themselves activities that are as varied as dancing, card games, mahjong, etcetera. Like the activities of the children, these take place daily, perhaps even throughout the day on account of the fact that its participants are 'retirees' liberated from the constraints of capitalist time. These instances of sociality I have recounted here are expressions of a collective social need that, I contend, is unselfconscious. Indeed, I would argue that the sociality witnessed in my neighbourhood expresses a primal human need. That need, to state it simply, is that: We Need One Another. This is not a rational but a visceral plea stemming from an existential imperative. Furthermore, there is no *I* without the *We*, for the *I* derives its sense of what and who it is from its perception of what the *We* makes of it. *I* and *We* are therefore complementary entities enfolded and dialectically evolving within and

[23] Perhaps what this reveals is that, contra modernist prejudices/perceptions, care-giving is a life and identity affirming activity. While it may not pay, it is necessary for the perpetuation of healthy, emotionally balanced people, and sound community relations.

out of each other: we share a 'mutuality of being', in Sahlinsian terms (Sahlins 2013). While this truism tends to run counter to Eurocentric conceptions of individual freedom and liberty, the Chinese experience appears to suggest that the attainment of conviviality has at least to begin with an understanding and acceptance of this fundamental sociological insight.

d. *Intermezzo:* Contrasting Socialities at IKEA and Xili Apartments

The exhibits above have suggested that social settings that are conducive for the development of familiarity between Self and Other increase the likelihood for cultivating cordial relations among the members of those contexts. This was demonstrated in Exhibit C, where frequent and recurring encounters between neighbours and their mutual acknowledgment of one another, appear to be prerequisites for the sustenance of a lively community. This may be contrasted with Exhibit A, which documents the awkwardness and, at times, the palpable sense of competitive rivalry and mutual suspicion that exists between strangers coming together for the first time to negotiate the terms of a rental contract. Similarly, Exhibit B, which documents an experience of IKEA at Shenzhen's European City provides another contrast. Apart from giving us a glimpse of the pro-Western orientation of the Chinese imagination, it also furnishes a phenomenological account of the consumption of Western-lifestyle experience in Shenzhen. That this experience is available via consumption is instructive, for here lies the qualitative difference between the 'social life' in the European City, as depicted in Exhibit B, and that occurring on the grounds of my apartment complex as documented in Exhibit C.

Whereas both are scenes of crowds bustling with activity, the crowd at IKEA in the European City is one that has emerged distinctively as a result of consumerist preoccupations. It is, moreover, a form of lifestyle consumption that has the West as its referent and goal. Arguably, it is a consumerism instigated by the (Eurocentric) belief that a Western lifestyle constitutes the object of development and that, accordingly, one's present 'Chinese' way of life is somehow lacking. Put differently, the enthusiastic Chinese consumerism one witnesses at IKEA can be said to stem partly from some sense of inadequacy and dissatisfaction about the prevailing Chinese lifestyle. What this dimension of consumerism implies, of course, is that as observed, the crowd at IKEA belongs to a select demographic: it is made up

predominantly of middle-class urbanites with the desire, willingness, and ability to pay for the experience of a Westernised lifestyle.

There is therefore something to be said about the *nature* of the IKEA crowd: it is an expression of a certain individualism afforded only to those with a privileged socio-economic background. Quite evidently, in terms of motive and function, these features distinguish such a crowd from the one observed on the grounds of my apartment complex. Despite both appearing to be instances of a robust Chinese sociality, the customers at IKEA are in fact reduced to performing a rather limited social function: that of consumers. They visit IKEA with the expectation to pay for an experience different from what a traditional Chinese lifestyle offers. And since such acts of consumption are rendered possible by the wherewithal to pay, they effectively become highly personalized/individual affairs, involving only those with the means while disqualifying those without. People show up alone or with their group of friends, and in almost all observed cases, the social configurations are unmodified when they leave. From what I have observed, socialisation between different groups of patrons hardly ever occurs. [But why is this even noteworthy? Is this not the nature of society, of *gessellschaft*, a mass of unrelated and autonomous individuals 'forced' into 'imagining community', to use Anderson's (1983) memorable formulation?] Given that it is a site of personal consumption, not a community center where one can expect to make new acquaintances, this is perhaps unsurprising. Nonetheless, if the anti-social nature of commodified space and experience - as exemplified here - can be appreciated, one may understand why despite the IKEA dining hall being crowded, it can still be easy to feel alone. It does not appear too far-fetched to be saying the same about the nature of shopping malls in general.

The preponderance of socio-economic class in determining one's ability to patronize IKEA creates other interesting (adverse?) social effects too. Insofar as the ability to afford the lifestyle associated with IKEA is perceived as a symbol of one's superior class/socio-economic standing, it would lead to the tendency for one-upmanship. That is to say, if being seen to consume the accoutrements of a Western lifestyle should symbolize one's superiority, then considerable effort would go into performing the role of someone who has acquired the requisite accoutrements so as to procure the desired impressions. The 'demonstration' of class then becomes a performative task that acquires newfound importance. In this regard, attention to

dress and deportment become newly-acquired preoccupations, as does conspicuous consumption, for they serve as relatively accessible devices to 'make-believe', to create in others a favourable perception of one's class standing. What all this seems to suggest is that the places where one's socio-economic prestige can be affirmed happens also to be sites where these hierarchies of socio-economic distinction are most explicit, with fashion being one of the more accessible and visible ways of marking out the distinctions.

This is not to say that efforts to impress one's neighbours are not attempted at my condominium; I'm confident that they are. After all, it would seem that the desire and propensity to keep up with the Jones' exists not just in the U.S. but, rather, intensifies in a milieu where one's value is measured by one's economic productivity; where, in other words, the meaning of life is reduced to and given by economic value. Yet, it would seem safe to say that the reasons for the formation/emergence of the aforementioned groups in the grounds of my apartment complex are somewhat different; and that if any competitive tendencies between neighbours should exist, they are not preponderant in explaining the *raison d'etre* of those groups. To begin with, the groups gathered on the grounds of my apartment complex are primarily child-centered. They have emerged in a state of play, chiefly for the purpose of interaction and socialization, not transaction. The milieu is therefore defined by the sociality of a community – not the rationality of an economic system - where the concerns of a convivial life of play, sharing, caring, learning are prioritized and gifted freely. If invidious comparisons and competitive urges are existent, they are momentarily suspended. Communion with others appears to be the central concern of the moment, which is regarded as time set aside for 'recreation'. And, without question, this seems to be ensured by the overwhelming presence of children, women homemakers, and the elderly – groups that are generally classified as being 'unproductive'. I elaborate further in the following Exhibit.

e. Exhibit D: Associations and Relations in my Xili *xiaoqu* (Neighbourhood)

The priorities of the social groups at my apartment complex mean that a good degree of informality and casualness presides over the conduct of everyday life. This is evident by observing the clothing of popular choice. It is clothing of the utmost simplicity, which some would regard as a sign of uncouthness and 'backwardness'. Nevertheless, it tends to suggest that little effort is made in matters of dress and

appearance. At least, it is apparent that clothing is not used as a means to impress others: hence, the ubiquitous sight of one's neighbours in tank tops, T-shirts, shorts, and flip-flops (slippers). In the evenings, it is not uncommon to sometimes see one's neighbours in pajamas, strolling in the grounds just prior to retiring for the day.

This sense of casualness and informality – should we say, unpretentiousness? – can be seen to extend rather seamlessly beyond the condominium to the surrounding streets, and is often evoked in the very appearance of the store fronts. Before one has even the opportunity to interact or speak with anyone, one is taken in by the fact that the neighbourhood shops, consisting of a row of shophouses, evoke a vibe of informality not dissimilar to that one encounters in the condominium. With underwear and other personal items of clothing hanging out to dry at the first shopfront we pass, there is not the sense that it is a business. Indeed, it is part residence, part business; perhaps it is more the former than the latter, or it is truly both, depending on the circumstances. Many of the shophouses are of such a dual nature in terms of function: they are, literally, shop-houses. The shopfronts are generally decorated sparingly; a few lack even shop signs informing passers-by about the nature of their business. Several of the newer businesses – a beauty parlour, a store trading wine, a women's clothing store, and, another, selling imported processed foods – have shopfronts that are more elaborately decorated. Given that they provide services tailored to meet the recently-developed 'needs' of the middle-class Chinese consumer, the additional investments made to beautify their shopfronts is expected, for impressing the customer with the facade of modernist (pseudo) sophistication has become quite necessary in order to remain viable in an age where image has become all-important.

But, by and large, most of the more established shops along the row are sparsely decorated. One would expect that they derive much of their business simply from their long-standing presence in the neighbourhood. Presumably, it is word-of-mouth, not the alluring chicanery of modern advertising and interior design that brings in their customers. In these businesses, there appears to be no separation of home from work, the private from the public. Indeed, the private realm is lived out in the public eye: here, at the storefront, a pair of trousers is hung out to dry; there, a woman's undergarment. At meal times, the shopowner's family sets up a table spread with dishes and sits around it to eat. The fact is that the running of a business does not in any way hamper everyday life. Should a customer enter the store mid-meal, one of

them momentarily sets down her bowl and chopsticks to attend to him. She resumes her meal once he leaves. Not infrequently, one would see neighbours - either residents from the nearby apartments or, more likely, neighbouring shopowners – seated at the shopfront immersed in conversation. One notices that there are also times when a proprietor is asked to watch over his neighbour's shop; presumably, when the latter is out running an errand.

In these ('traditional'?) businesses, there appears to be a refreshing lack of concern about decorum; this is a contrast to the more modern and fashionable stores. If the shopowner has children, they tend to be free to play in and around the store with other kids from the neighbourhood. (Now imagine IKEA employees doing likewise with their children while at work.) In this regard, the conviviality I witnessed in my apartment complex was also observed here. The point, in any case, is that the presence of children is not hidden away. The shopowner appears to consider the nurturance of his children to at least be as much a priority as the growth of his business enterprise: they are thus raised/developed as going concerns alongside each other. In fact, it is often the case that when the children are in their mid-teens and are deemed old enough, they are made to help out in the daily operations of the business. Again, there is clearly no sign that any attempt is made to separate the life at work from that at home, the public from the personal.

Some may regard such work behavioural patterns to be 'unprofessional'. Indeed, in one of the shops along the row, there is a game of mahjong going on all the time. The shop is in the trade of procuring and selling an assortment of food items from various parts of China – fresh fruit, nuts, cured meat products – but I can hardly recall seeing anyone purchase anything from it. Instead, my enduring memory is of the invariable presence of a mahjong table laid out in the shop with a full ensemble of players and a couple of onlookers. I never found out who in the group was the proprietor but regardless of who it was, s/he did not appear willing to allow the business of work to get in the way of life. There seemed to be a general understanding that economic concerns were subordinate to some larger purpose in life. Hence, the place of work tended to be a site not only of economic but social reproduction. It was as much a site for establishing and consolidating/reaffirming community relations (*guanxi* again?) as for doing business.

Such a philosophy of work - which is simultaneously a philosophy of life - denies the separation of work and life into autonomous realms; this would seem to

explain my Chinese neighbours' apparent neglect of the typical norms of 'professional' business conduct that is found in more 'modern' settings. It would also appear to explain the remarkable casualness that I observed around the shops in the neighbourhood – the simplicity of attire, not to mention, the act of hanging one's undergarments out at the shopfront to dry, the care for children, sitting down for a family meal – all while their shop was opened for business. Such casualness was not only 'visible' in the conduct described above; it could be experienced directly when one had the chance to interact socially.

Hence, with the same unpretentiousness, the proprietors of many of the neighbourhood shops appeared amenable to conversation when I had the chance to engage them. Not long after I had moved in, for instance, the life-related questions – initially about children's schooling, the location of amenities such as markets, hospitals, banks – which I directed at the proprietor of the homeware store, led to more personal questions about her name, where she was from, etcetera. Needless to say, these questions were asked of me in return. "*Ni lao jia zai na*?" (Where is your ancestral home?) became a recurring question directed at me, especially when it was sensed or discovered that I had just come to Shenzhen. For someone who has led as peripatetic an existence as I had, the question was intriguing. The frequency with which I have uprooted and re-settled, only to repeat the migratory process again means that I can hardly claim to identify with the country of my birth, much less with the purported 'home' of my ancestors. It was therefore a query to which I initially groped for an answer: was it Singapore? It was only when it became clear that my interlocutors were seeking to reconcile my Chinese ethnicity with the Chinese province of my ancestors – how else could my Chineseness be explained? - that I began to tell them, Chaozhou. This response would prove mutually satisfactory: as far as they were concerned, I was now someone they could place in their understanding of the world. As for me, I felt a strange sense of belonging, perhaps for the first time. It was as if I had come 'home'.

The point, nevertheless, should not be lost. With the exchange of such personal information, the strangeness of the Other recedes and a sense of familiarity begins to develop where all was once strange. When such encounters are multiplied across space and time, between different members of the neighbourhood, and with regularity, the metaphorical walls separating one neighbour from another gradually crumble. The neighbourhood becomes a community thus.

At any rate, the question about one's ancestral home, is a stark reminder of how novel the notion of migratory globalization is in the popular Chinese imagination. What the question reflects, after all, is a certain Chinese sensibility about the idea of home: first, about its importance in determining a person's identity, and second, as a stable and enduring institution.[24] For those inured to the unsettling effects of globalisation, this sense of rootedness is somewhat refreshing, for it unsettles the much taken-for-granted sentiment (a popular contemporary view) that there are no certainties. The latter claim is based on the understanding that 'our' realities are social constructions and are therefore fluid. Yet, while such a statement is generally true, it is perhaps only partially correct: realities may well be socially constructed, but this in itself does not dispense with certainties. Rather, the certainty - or not - of our constructions is as much a matter of social determination. Here, my Shenzhen-based investigations appear to demonstrate that place-based identities – social constructions, no doubt – confer certainties that are closely adhered to; it is important to note, moreover, that intentional or otherwise, they seem capable of serving a positive sociative and social function.

So, in short, one could argue that the casualness that prevails on the streets and shops of my Xili neighbourhood facilitates a sociality whose overall effect is to affirm a greater sense of community. It is in such a cultural milieu in Shenzhen, at any rate, that I was able to develop an acquaintance, and subsequently, friendship with the Hui proprietor of my neighbourhood noodle shop, giving rise to the fortuitous circumstances that allowed me to extend my investigations into China's West. This is the Case Study toward which I now turn.

[24] This, despite the tremendous upheavals the Chinese had to experience throughout the twentieth century!

6 EUROCENTRISM AND CHINESE SOCIALITY: A CASE OF HUI MIGRANT EXPERIENCE IN SHENZHEN

I. Background and Methodological Principles

In the Case Study presented here, I continue to furnish an account of the sociality of Shenzhen Chinese life. The task remains to ascertain the degree to which Eurocentrism as a cosmology is implicated in the practices of daily social life in Shenzhen. It is useful to recall that I have conceived of Eurocentrism as a mode of life rooted in a cultural ontology of materialism where, because the economic moment is exalted as the raison d'etre of human existence, human progress is defined exclusively in terms of economic progress and regress. Unsurprisingly, the consequence of adhering to such a cosmology is a view of human development that is limited to the material realm, in the sphere of economic progress and development. One might also recall that individualism was a component of this ontology, with the consequence of the individual being regarded as the fundamental unit of society and, as such, the rational subject of history.

Eurocentrism thus implicates an entire mode of human existence centered upon the concerns of material economic production and accumulation. Additionally, this Eurocentric vision of human being is also predicated on a cultural ontology of individualism whereby the concerns of the individual tendentiously override those of group-life. Hence, it is unsurprising to expect along with this vision, the collective

‘We’ being subsumed by the solipsistic ‘I’: as Alexander Pope had it, ‘self-love and the social’ belonged to the same frame. From such a foundation are derived many cognate institutions that encroach into our lives, impacting us in a multitude of ways: from our dress codes to our forms of social organisation, from the way we evaluate legitimate forms of knowledge to the way we conceive of human being and becoming. Despite the multiple configurations in which Eurocentrism manifest, I submit that they are common insofar as they are predicated on this same cultural ontology of materialism and individualism.

It is Eurocentrism’s seemingly all-encompassing nature – in scope as well as depth – that it is often thought to be such a nebulous phenomenon, appearing in one guise, then another. Eurocentric phenomena thus appear to us in a manifold of ways, some more immediately discernible than others. Moreover, since it is material as well as ideational, as previously noted, any effort to ascertain the problem of Eurocentrism in China has to attempt to account for it in all its guises. The pervasive and multi-layered nature of Eurocentric phenomena has therefore much to recommend in terms of how we approach it as a phenomenon of study. As previously noted, the scope of the ‘field’ cannot be unduly narrow nor can its depth be delimited, for doing either or both would attenuate our attempts to evaluate the state of culture in China. Since Eurocentrism is given to us in the banal as well the profound, detecting Eurocentrism in everyday life involves examining the gamut of social existence, and then teasing out from the assortment of phenomena their cultural meanings and their origins. The repeated observability or witness-ability of phenomena is an important methodological criterion to consider throughout this process in helping us distinguish between particular events and more generalisable social patterns. This was indeed the procedure deployed in producing the Exhibits in Chapter Five.

The Case Study presented in the present Chapter continues with field research in Shenzhen. But by virtue of the biographies of its protagonists, it extends to Qinghai in Western China in the following chapter. While this can be considered to be a continuation of my investigations in the city, one should note that it contains inherent features that make it somewhat unique. To begin with, it involves a case of ‘internal’ - rural-urban - Chinese migration undertaken in pursuit of better economic opportunity. Furthermore, these migrants are Chinese citizens of Hui ethnicity, a minority ethnic group with religious commitments to Islam. This latter feature is of

utmost significance, for in testifying to the range and diversity of Chinese life, its difference/alterity from mainstream Han Chinese culture provides us with an ideal, real-life laboratory situation in which the thesis about the pervasiveness of Eurocentrism can be put to test – and maybe to rest. Since my Hui interlocutors straddle the dichotomies of the rural and urban, Han and non-Han, secular and religious (Islamic) divide, they constitute a naturally fascinating subject for our study of Eurocentrism in contemporary China. Specifically, it would be interesting to know whether their alterity in Chinese society – which is the simultaneous result of their social class (being from the countryside), ethnicity (being Hui), and religious belief (being Muslim) - offers insulation from mainstream, explicitly Eurocentered developments, or if that is itself being eroded and re-shaped along Eurocentered lines. The anticipation is that the crucial difference of Islamic religiosity would act as an impediment to the march of modernization. This is a common conception and, for better or worse, one that I put to the test here. In any event, the Case Study is potentially interesting, for it will demonstrate whether and how my interlocutors' 'otherness' - in terms of religion, ethnicity, and their status as rural residents – are implicated in their experience of Chinese modernity.

Since it was earlier (in Chapter Two) argued that the conditions that laid the basis for Eurocentrism were the inadvertent consequence of a revolution in Christianity, it is natural to wonder whether Islam – another of the Abrahamic faiths - could better withstand similar (economic) forces inciting change. The demographic and religio-cultural make-up of my interlocutors positions them at the fringes of mainstream Chinese life, thus situating them ideally to allow us to meaningfully explore and examine this question.

As per the advice in Chapter Four, the account below should be read as much for its ethnographic content as for its methodological practices, as a testament to the manner with which my relations with my interlocutors developed. The former is concerned about the 'facts' on the ground whereas the latter 'methodological practices', about *how* these 'facts' were gathered. Instead of a polished narrative constructed around my thematic concerns, I have written the account in a way that retains the *chronological sequence* in which events have unfolded. This mode of recording is a deliberate methodological choice, for it is believed to be able to better foreground the mundane yet very real practical difficulties encountered during the 'data-gathering' process – indeed, to describe *how the conditions for knowledge*

emerged or were made possible in the field. In this regard, the below may be regarded as an attempt to document the ethnographic method as an ongoing work-in-progress in the field, evolving according to the difficulties that one faces and is compelled to resolve during the research process.

This is not to say that the account is devoid of any organizational principle other than this temporal-methodological one; for it should be evident that inherently built into my sequencing of events is a *logos* already attendant to my central concern about the modes of sociality present in modern Chinese social life. Consequently, one will see below the same themes underscored in the previous two chapters: the various moments of modern Chinese life and the underlying sociality that they point to. The reader will recognize many of the concerns and themes highlighted in the Exhibits of the previous chapter re-appearing here in this Case Study, but in elaborated form: economism, child-rearing, economic well-being, life's purpose or meaning, consumerism, and one's social standing vis-à-vis others.

But as discussed, the account below also encompasses a revelation of methodology in practice. It uncovers how – metho-do-logically - my research of the Hui at my neighbourhood noodle shop proceeded: it began fortuitously by my first coming across the shop, trying the food there, observing the social relations of those who ran it, becoming acquainted with its proprietors, conversing with and then interviewing them and eventually taking up on their offer to visit Qinghai, the place of their origins in China's West. If there seems/appears to be a logic to the sequence above, it is not accidental. The conduct of field research is a logical process insofar as it involves general problem-solving: methods are chosen and deployed according to their appropriateness to the problem at hand. In this sense, my approach differs from the more positivist methods that are determined aprioristically. Since problems encountered in research are always circumstantial, methods cannot be ascertained in advance or applied universally; rather they should suggest themselves in the face of emerging problems. In the case here, for example, conversation succeeded observation when the mere act of watching was believed to no longer be able to yield further useful knowledge. Similarly, after I had interviewed my informants, a trip to Qinghai was deemed necessary for me to better understand their erstwhile ways of life. It would seem reasonable to assume that in this process, each successive method was built on the previous, and each elicited a different, perhaps deeper, layer of meaning than the previous. This is not to say that the sequence of events can

necessarily be reversed and that history can be read backwards: that, for example, an interview from the outset could have dispensed with all that time I previously spent observing. Rather, the sequence of my methods was unique to the circumstances encountered at the time and was therefore important. Since the world is 'revealed' to us in a manifold of appearance as well as in parts and wholes, what different methods reveal are the different layers and multi-sidedness of its meanings: hence, an interview would not have dispensed with observation since it is often the case that without first watching, one would not know what to ask.

From an ethnographer's perspective, the present Case may be thought of as reflecting my immersion and assimilation into the life of my *xiaoqu* (neighbourhood), an outcome that I felt was reached after some four to five months of having moved there. And unsurprisingly, this sense of 'feeling at home' carried methodological consequences. The sense of familiarity I had developed with my neighbourhood meant that I felt ready to make more in-depth investigations of the social phenomena around me, proceeding beyond the level of making impressionistic observational sketches, the feature of my Exhibits in Chapter Five. Nevertheless, I go through roughly the same methodological procedure of uncovering, layer by layer, the variegated and stratified social complexities around the neighbourhood, each day plumbing a little further into the depths of Shenzhen Chinese life.

II. The Lanzhou Handmade Noodle Shop in Xili, Shenzhen

(i) Impressions

From its appearance, the Lanzhou noodle restaurant is a model of austerity that fits my general description above of the Xili neighbourhood. The restaurant, perhaps more appropriately referred to as a shop or eatery to reflect its modesty, can hardly be considered a symbol of conspicuous consumption. For the status-conscious, it is low-end eating and certainly not in the league of an IKEA. The shophouse out of which it operates is approximately twelve feet long and nine feet wide. And there is none of the 'soft' lighting experienced at IKEA: all is bright with three fluorescent tubes lighting up the room. There is space only for six small rectangular tables, with three tables lined against the wall on each side. Unofficially, the eatery is larger than that. Another four or five foldable tables are put out onto the street, especially at lunch and dinner times to cater to the larger number of diners. Evidently, the eatery is basic and unpretentious even by the standards of other similar noodle shops I have

come across in South China. Besides the fact that seating was in the form of stools rather than chairs and that the tables sometimes wobble, the eatery was not air-conditioned. Cooling was provided by six electric fans mounted onto the walls, an arrangement that would barely suffice in the summer months. But such austerity is in line with the general description of the neighbourhood above. I notice, however, that business is brisk. The service is fast with a quick turnover of customers. It is not a place to sit and chat. Most customers come individually and they tend to drop by during lunch-time while at work or on their way home at the end of the workday. Nonetheless, it would seem reasonable to say that the scantiness of the eatery's furnishings belies the tastiness of its food, likely the reason why, as I later found out, it has been in business since 2004.

The eatery may be austere in appearance but the fact that it is sustained by the labours of seven to eight people including its owner(s) indicate that it is no simple enterprise. A tremendous amount of human effort obviously went into its operation, and it was in noting the manner in which these efforts were co-ordinated that I became intrigued, especially about the people who ran it. When the eatery was busy, it would constitute a scene pulsating with human activity, with the proprietor normally taking orders out at the front and transmitting them to the kitchen, the noodle chef trying to keep up with the barrage, and the waiting staff furiously working to serve and clear tables. During off-peak hours, on the other hand, the staff would be making preparations for lunch and dinner, chopping vegetables, slicing and skewering meat, or folding napkins. Whenever there was a lull, I would see them – predominantly young men in their early twenties – chatting or sending text messages on their phones. What was obvious was that all involved in the enterprise shared something in common beyond the formal employer-employee arrangements that characterize capitalist working life. The noodle chef, waiting staff and kitchen-hands did not relate to their bosses in the way that employees typically relate to their bosses/employers. This spawned for me a series of questions. For instance, while they appeared to share the same ethnicity, they did not look Han. Were they family? Had they come to Shenzhen together? Was this another case where work-life was inseparable from personal, family-life? Why did they come to Shenzhen, and what were the personal and social costs of having to leave 'home' to do so? Since I did not consider it timely to be asking these questions yet, I allowed them to percolate, thinking it best to continue observing.

It may not have been apparent initially but it dawned upon me very gradually (after multiple visits) that, possibly, my queries about the eatery and those involved in its running could help shed light on the nature of the problem of Eurocentrism in China. Since the noodles were really quite splendid, I began eating at the shop more frequently and was soon regarded as a regular, a *laoguke* (an old customer). This was a status that was conferred and one impossible not to know about: "*Nihao, huilaile!*" ("Hi, you're back!"), they would exuberantly greet me each time I returned. The proprietor became so familiar with my requests that he would anticipate them without my having to ask. After instructing the cooks in the kitchen to prepare my order, he would hasten to add: "Don't add oil or MSG (monosodium glutamate)!"

I would show up at various times during the day and typically, subject to availability, would find a seat at the back of the eatery. After my meal, I would observe and record the goings-on at the site, making notes on just about everything about the shop and its activities: the Islamic symbols on the walls, the noodle chef skillfully drawing fine strips of noodles out of lumps of dough, the number of people operating the shop, the division of labour between them, the number and socio-economic status of patrons, interactions between patrons and waiters, the items on the menu, etcetera.

This approach of attempting to record everything within the radar of one's senses was not for lack of better methodology. It was *the* methodology of choice, which adhered to the phenomenological principle of allowing for 'the world's gaze' so that one can first observe and reflect on 'what is there' before returning with more specific and focused queries. As discussed previously (see Chapter Four), I was predisposed to this (intellectual) approach in the field since it strives to minimize the natural tendency to impose one's assumptions, especially without first having understood the situation to be researched. I sought to avoid the latter, since it was a conduct of research tantamount to seeking in phenomena what one wants to find, making it is easy to confirm one's theoretical or ideological predilections rather than allowing events and phenomena to be discovered and evaluated on their own terms. The phenomenological approach I have adhered to is somewhat of a contrast, for it is cognizant of and explicitly seeks to counteract this tendency.

(ii) Observations: Roles, Responsibilities, and Relations as They Appear

After observing the operations in the noodle shop over a period of several weeks, I

learned enough to establish the following:

The two middle-aged men - the younger, who was cherubic and the older, who was physically taller and leaner – were evidently the shop's proprietors. I will refer to the older as Ali and the younger as Mahmud. Their role around the shop was primarily to take orders and to collect money from customers. They were also responsible for taking orders through the phone requesting home deliveries. They alternated in performing this task and accomplished it from the small table placed at the shop's entrance, which was equipped with a microphone that was connected to speakers in the kitchen at the back. The sound system was deployed especially during the evenings, the busiest time of the day. Like a captain steering a ship, the particular person-in-charge would take customer orders before transmitting them to the cooks in the kitchen through the public address (P.A.) system. One could not help seeing some humour in such an arrangement: given the size of the shop, the need for a P.A. system was questionable. Nonetheless, this arrangement did evoke a sense of urgency about the place; with the P.A. in operation and constant human movement in and out of the shop, a mood of festivity prevailed. Furthermore, with the flames of the outdoor barbeque grill in the evenings casting an incandescent glow on everything around it, the eatery did appear to be one of the more exciting places on the street. It was heaving with social life.

I observed that on occasion, it was a woman who would be taking on this managerial role. I later discovered that she was the wife of Mahmud. I noticed another woman working at the eatery. Of all the people working there, she looked most distinctly non-Han with an extremely fair complexion and green eyes. She donned a headscarf in keeping with her Islamic beliefs. Her tasks appeared to be reserved to work in the kitchen and to clearing the tables. I later discovered that she was the wife of Ali.

There were three to four other employees at the eatery, all of whom were male. One was the noodle chef or *shifu* (master), whose primary responsibility was to make noodles. The other two had specialized tasks too: one was assigned to preparing fried dishes whereas the third was responsible for the barbeque grill in the evenings. The fourth appeared to be a general assistant. Apart from attending to their respective tasks, it was evident that they were all required to contribute to the overall operation of the eatery, at different times having to clear tables, take orders, make a home-delivery, or to run whatever errands the circumstances dictated. The evidence

seemed to suggest that they were not bound by the traditional conventions that governed employer-employee relations. It was not that an authoritative presence could not be detected; it certainly could: it was, after all, not difficult to tell who was in charge. Rather, it seemed that everyone at work was quite at ease to be in the presence of everyone else, including the proprietors. I have seen the young men tease Mahmud playfully, who responded by chiding them. At other times, I have seen them joking and laughing. On one occasion, I saw one of the young men unhappy about having been told to run a certain errand, yet as if aware that he was bound by an immutable fate, proceeded to accomplish it. Still on another occasion, when there were no other customers at the restaurant, I saw the young men spill out to the shopfront in play, simulating a sword fight with kitchen utensils and barbeque skewers. All this took place in the presence of Ali. The young men were not inhibited about showing their 'bosses' they were having fun at work. Furthermore, while fatigue wore on their faces, it did not seem to hamper their enthusiasm for a good time. Perhaps they are not intimidated by their 'bosses' in their capacity as such and had no qualms about speaking their minds or being their natural selves; yet in the final analysis, they were duty-bound and obligated to carry out the tasks expected of them. Their relations certainly did not appear to be the sort that exists between 'worker' and 'boss'. Subordination occurred but it did not seem to manifest in the form of coercion of the economic kind; rather it was much like the sort that results from patriarchal deference between family members: troublesome at times but ultimately accepted with resignation. Such a demonstration of informal casualness in employee-boss relations in fact alludes to Marglin's (2008: 43) discussion of Amish attitudes towards work performed together, communally. Instead of being seen as drudgery, work was regarded as a social occasion.

Yet within the structure of such casual relations, one could witness, unsurprisingly, the noodle chef enjoy a special status. The eatery, being a handmade noodle shop was, after all, heavily dependent on his skills. I was told that it was a skill whose acquisition required between six months to a year of daily training. Both of the other two male workers at the shop knew how to hand-make noodles but perhaps not to the level of refinement as the *shifu*. Of the two co-proprietors, I knew that Ali had acquired the skills, for I had seen him fill in for the noodle chef. This did not seem to be the case for Mahmud, whose roles in the enterprise appeared confined to that of capitalist and business manager. Perhaps because the skill of hand-making

noodles was sufficiently novel, especially the ability to turn out fine noodle strips from lumps of dough, it was considered a performance worth watching and the process was made visible to customers through a large glass window. This performance was carried out in the mid-section of the eatery adjacent to the customers' seating area.

(iii) Conversations: The Beginnings of a Dialogue

Consistent with the conventions of sociation I described previously, the frequency of and the duration of my presence gave rise to a degree of mutual goodwill between the shop's staff and I. This facilitated my research such that when I eventually had questions to ask, there was hardly a modicum of suspicion or resistance on their part. This is an aspect that is often understated in published research but that is of paramount importance, - in fact indispensable - to the knowledge enterprise: what one is told, what one can know, is a direct function of the diligence with which one has worked the rounds of familiarizing oneself with one's interlocutors. That is, the possibilities of knowledge are laid out by the researcher's conscientiousness in assimilating to the social milieu of the field, which too often goes unreported. In this case, owing to the weeks that I had spent at the shop, the responses flowed rather freely. Mahmud, in particular, became quite a willing interlocutor. They had become curious about my constant note-taking from the back of the shop. Perhaps, my activities had become as much of a fascination for them as theirs had for me.

After several weeks of observing from a distance, I decided to seek some confirmation for my observations and assumptions. I had a serving of Fried Beef with Handmade Noodles (*Niurou Chao Lamian*) one evening, and waited for an opportunity to speak with the proprietors. As usual I had taken a seat at the back of the shop, appearing busy with pen and notebook, which had until now been indispensable in helping deflect the attention of onlookers. The ethnographer needs to find a way to be inconspicuous, for the act of watching others necessarily arouses suspicion. In this, the pen and paper serve as indispensable aids: how else to justify not leaving an eatery after finishing one's meal but by the pretence of being engrossed in one's writing?

When business began to die down and Mahmud walked by, I seized the opportunity, asking him, "*Laoban, qing wen ni men laojia zai na*?" (Excuse me, boss, where is your home?). Smiling at me, perhaps to deflect attention from his own

investigative attempts to work out what I was up to, he looked pleased that I had initiated conversation.

"We are from Qinghai." Seeing that I had been looking at the poster on the wall, he added, "That is our new mosque in Shenzhen, which is in the process of being built. We are of Hui ethnicity (*huizu*), and so are *Mu-si-lin* (Muslim)." I was pleased to discover that Mahmud had a gregarious personality. I was glad that we had begun our conversation and that he had introduced himself with such a ready and explicit identification with his ethnicity and religion.

I had guessed that they were Muslim but had yet to know of the association between Hui and Islam. It turned out that virtually all Huis are Muslim and that 'Hui' was as much an ethnic category as it was a religious one. After all, the term '*Hui jiao*' (回教) literally translates as 'Muslim religion'.

I was fascinated that as a Muslim he would choose to relocate to Shenzhen, where they are overwhelmingly in the minority and where the secular attractions of city-life would seem to entail the potential of undermining Islamic religiosity and practice. With this in mind, I asked what he thought of Shenzhen.

"I think it's a good place," came the reply. "The population of the city is big, so it is good for business."

This served only to stir my curiosity further. If Classical Christianity had been transformed to become conducive for capitalism, what about Islam, particularly the version to which he subscribed? What were the possibilities of Islam being transformed by capitalism the same way Christianity had been? Did he see any contradictions between Islam and the profit orientation of commercial life?

"But at the same time," he continued, "The problem with its large population is that Shenzhen has become very crowded and congested. All this makes the environment less pleasant. The air quality is no good." To provide a contrast, he proceeds to show me photos of Qinghai that he had on his phone. "You see, the sky is blue. The natural environment is beautiful. We have mountains, we have water, and the air is fresh."

In evaluating the pros and cons of Shenzhen vis-à-vis Qinghai, Mahmud seemed to have settled on the following compromise: because Shenzhen presented abundant economic opportunities unavailable at home, he was prepared to spend his working life in the city; on the other hand, because the natural environment in Qinghai was better, he had resolved to return in his old age, thus enjoying the best each had to

offer. Hence, perhaps a case of different life projects for different life phases. For now, Mahmud informs me that he returns to Qinghai every year. His son (who was eleven at the time) and daughter (who was nine) were still there and being cared for by his parents. I was aware of this somewhat regrettable but nonetheless common child-rearing arrangement in rural-urban labour-flows throughout China. As the economically productive members of households in the countryside sought to maximize their productivity in money terms, they were forced to seek wage work in the cities, leaving their families behind. Where there were children involved, they were often left in the care of their grandparents, thus giving rise to the situation whereby countryside villages were depleted of working-age adults and the predominant demographic consisted of the elderly and the very young. A 2006 survey revealed that there were 44 million children between the ages of 6 and 14 who had one parent working outside the county. Furthermore, a third of left-behind-children had both parents working outside the county. (Harris 2013). Economic necessity was almost always the ostensible reason for this sundering of parent-child relations, which although temporary, would understandably have been emotionally difficult for all parties concerned. Yet, because it implied economic viability and survival, it was an arrangement widely seen to be justified.

My conversation with Mahmud had thus proved rewarding. Since his was the story of an ethnic minority from the rural interior migrating to a coastal city in search for better economic opportunities, it seemed to address the problem of economism on everyday life in today's China. And insofar as economism reduced life to one given exclusively by material and subsistence concerns centred around the allocation of scarce resources between alternative ends, this was verily the problem of Eurocentrism.

As a more sustained discussion with Mahmud was needed, I introduced my job and project, and explained my particular interest in understanding the impact of China's modern development on its traditions, of which his erstwhile lifestyle was one. The field researcher is constantly faced with uncertainty finding willing interlocutors. The possibility of being denied never recedes. Instead, it is increased if one rouses suspicion, if one's research is little understood, or if there were little about it that one's interlocutors would deem to be of personal relevance. I have learned that one way of allaying these fears and increasing the likelihood for acquiescence or co-operation is to involve one's interlocutors directly and to

conceive the project such that they too can partake of and benefit from the research. That is, the chances for collaboration increase if they are made to feel involved in the knowledge enterprise; this would also be the case if they realise that its outcomes could be useful for their lives. Additionally, such an inclusion of one's interlocutors would enhance the integrity of the knowledge produced. Indeed, when one's interlocutors become actively involved, when they become a reference the researcher is forced to constantly consult for a verification and confirmation of the facts, we move closer to dispensing with the illusion of the object/subject dichotomy. It is then that we can speak about reflexivity meaningfully, for it is then a reflexivity of a substantive kind, involving not just the solipsistic self-awareness of the researcher but a co-respective dialogical interchange between researcher and interlocutor.

With these considerations in mind, I expressed to Mahmud my ignorance about Hui and Chinese Islam and explained my interest to learn more. Not having seen any signs of Islamic religious practice so far in Shenzhen, much less Xili, I inquired about the status and number of Muslims in the city. At this, he offered to take me to Shenzhen's largest mosque where he attends prayers on Fridays. "The area has a large Muslim population. You will see many who are from the Middle East. Of course, you'll also see many Muslims from Qinghai and Xinjiang." Sensing from his very generous offer that he was a willing interlocutor, I seized his invitation to visit the mosque. Indeed, the ethnographer has to avail himself of all opportunities to be a part of the world he is seeking to understand.

The journey to and from the mosque on the appointed day allowed us to deepen our conversation. And perhaps not unexpectedly, the conversation that ensued subsequently spawned a series of further conversations. They opened up what I felt was a very fruitful dialogue that helped to throw light not only on Mahmud's personal predicament but more generally, on the predicament facing Chinese people today. Our conversations had the tendency to multiply my questions, and so one meeting gave rise to two, and two to four and so on. I provide below a synthetic account of the dialogues that ensued, organising them around themes that emerged in our conversations. My organization of these topics in the following manner stems from the frequency with which they recurred as themes of our many conversations, a pattern that I believe signifies their importance in the lives of my interlocutors. In what follows, I quote my interlocutors verbatim where applicable; at other times, I merely paraphrase them.

III. Biographies of Modernisation

(i) Life and Lifestyles: The Contrast between City and Countryside

"I first came to Shenzhen in early 2004 and settled in Longang (龙岗) on the outskirts (*jiaoqu*) of Shenzhen proper and set up a noodle shop there. Business was not good, so I stayed four months, sold the shop, and then returned. In retrospect, I was very naïve and innocent: do you know that I did not even dare roam the city? I would catch the bus into the city and then cross the road to catch the bus back in the opposite direction. I was afraid of getting lost."

This confession reinforces the conventional tropes associated with the urban and the rural in the popular imagination. The urban symbolizes all that is modern, progressive and sophisticated, which is juxtaposed against the backwardness, innocence, and simplicities of rural life. The fact that a person from the countryside was so frankly admitting to being intimidated by the city is telling, for it is perhaps an acknowledgment of the differences between urban and rural social conditions. Alternatively, it could be that such were merely perceptions: the city may not in fact be chaotic vis-a-vis the interior, but simply perceived as being so. As Berger (1975[2010]: 44) has observed, for the migrant from the countryside, the city is generally "larger than he imagined, with more people. He is conscious of the will which is required to pass through it… Increasingly what he encounters will be unfamiliar. He sees many others like himself, who have come this far and then stopped."

But it was the perception of ostensible of rural-city disparities that generated an incentive for moving to the city. For it was perceived was that whatever the countryside lacked in terms of economic opportunity, the city possessed. And these were opportunities for which the perils and uncertainties associated with the city were worth confronting. They were the opportunities to earn a living; to have enough money to act. Hence, Mahmud tells me that he came back to Shenzhen again in September that year. A friend introduced him to Xili town, and he has been here since. It has been eight years and, apparently, business has been quite good. "At least the situation is much better than at home," Mahmud says. Economic considerations were central to his decision-making, so much so as to warrant being away from home for close to a decade.

Mahmud's decision to temporarily migrate to Shenzhen to improve his economic prospects was not based solely on perception but had a material basis that was the systematic outcome of state policy. The city has throughout much of the PRC's history been given priority in the state's development strategy while agriculture's share in state capital investment declined. Chan (1994: 61) notes that state capital investment in agriculture was 7.1 percent in 1953-57, 11.3 percent in 1958-60, 17.6 percent in 1963-65, 10.7 percent in 1966-70, 9.8 percent in 1971-75, and 10.5 percent in 1976-80. This figure declined to 5 percent in 1981-85 and further to 3.3 percent in 1985-90. Additionally, Yan Hairong (2008) reports that prices for fertilizers and pesticides increased by 43 percent and 82.3 percent respectively in 1985 over 83 percent because of their marketisation. The effect of this was exacerbated by the state lowering procurement prices in 1985 by 28 percent below 1984 prices. Unsurprisingly, the consequence of such trends - what were essentially subsidies paid out to the urban regions - was increasing rural-urban income inequality that resulted in the Gini coefficient exceeding the danger level of 0.4 to reach 0.59 in 2002. Meanwhile, the provision of social services such as medical care which had been furnished by the erstwhile production collectives, were gradually being dismantled as production became privatized with rural reforms.

But of course, while economics might have played a catalytic role in his decision to return to the city, there was also a lot more going on that was non-material and affective which was at stake. These played out in the psychosocial realm, particularly in ideas about being and becoming human in time. Yan (2008: 2) has observed that since the reform and opening-up (*gaige kaifang*), the time of the global capitalist market has come to dominate both city and countryside, commanding "through transnational organizations and national governments that peoples and areas advance (*jin*), catch up (*gan*), and get on track (*jiegui*)." Further, she notes that under this developmentalist regime, "the city has also been renewed as the privileged space of modern civilization or civility (*xiandai wenming*), gesturing toward elusive capital and development… Modernity and Progress… are given their permanent residence in the city." (Yan op. cit.: 40).

Unsurprisingly, these tendencies would inevitably have spawned new notions of subjectivity and personhood to which the Chinese people were made to adhere. Yan (op. cit: 26) reports that in conversations, her interlocutors unanimously held the view that the countryside was "a field of death for the modern subjectivity" they

desired. Hence, this ideological construction of the countryside served to correspond with the state policy of rural underinvestment described above, which had the effect of materially producing it as a wasteland. As Yan (op cit: 42) notes: "China's opening toward Western culture and overseas investment not only opened a new vision of modernity but also furnished a new frame of reference that has reorganized narratives and interpretations of history. The euphoric meaning of the present, previously derived from the present's juxtaposition with the pre-liberation past, vanishes and is now displaced by an urgent sense of crisis when the elite and educated youth refract the gaze of the West to see peasant China as 'backward and poor'." Yan continues (ibid): "The urban telos appropriates the rural into its system of representation by devalorizing the rural as its moribund other."

As per my thesis about the preponderance of Eurocentrism, this is a phenomenon that is unique neither to China nor to the contemporary period. John Berger and Jean Mohr's *A Seventh Man* (2010 [1975]) was produced some four decades ago to illuminate the dependence of the rich European economies on migratory labour from the poorer nations on the continent. Berger is not wrong to suggest that the book has grown 'younger' in the Preface of the 2010 edition of the book, since the themes underscored in it have only become more pertinent as the years have passed. It is interesting to note, for instance, how closely the association of the countryside with 'death' that Yan reports in the preceding passage resonates with Berger and Mohr's observations, which were from another place and time. Writing about the European context of the early 1970s, Berger and Mohr (op. cit.: 36) write: "To be underdeveloped is not merely to be robbed or exploited: it is to be held in the grip of an artificial stasis. Underdevelopment not only kills: its essential stagnation denies life and resembles death. The migrant wants to live. It is not poverty alone that forces him to emigrate. Through his own individual effort he tries to achieve the dynamism that is lacking in the situation into which he was born."

I wondered how much 'worse' things in Qinghai actually were materially to justify such a significant migration. Could he not make ends meet at home to have to come to Shenzhen? Was his predicament in the hinterland really dire? Knowing that accessibility to land was the precondition for subsistence/survival, I asked what land he or his family owned in Qinghai.

"There were six members in my family and we were given three plots of land of approximately 1.8 mu (1 mu [亩] = 0.016 acre) per plot in around 1979, when the

Central Government was beginning to distribute land to the production teams (*shengchandui*) [I believe this was part and parcel of rural reform to spur agricultural productivity via the privatization of production]. But we're left with very little of it now. Some of it has been reclaimed to build public roads, some to develop property. There's no choice but to come out to work or to start a small business."

Yan notes that the reconstruction of the countryside as the wasteland of tradition revives the semicolonial discourse of the early twentieth century that similarly cast the countryside as the antithesis of the Modern. Unsurprisingly, this has led to a massive labour outflow from the countryside to the cities and, subsequently, the abandonment of farmland. While farming is being abandoned because of the diminishment of state support on the one hand and because of the stigma of "backwardness" associated with the rural countryside on the other, it is unsurprising that Yan should find most of her interlocutors farming only for subsistence. In the meantime, wage work is drawing millions of able-bodied into the cities, while leaving behind in the countryside the unemployed and the unemployable - children, the aged, and the infirmed. It is for this reason that Yan (op. cit: 43) speaks of the countryside as "a reservoir releasing and absorbing labour according to the capricious needs of the market". She notes that beginning in the 1990s, land which had been assigned for agricultural production became welfare land, absorbing surplus labour shed by urban capitalist overproduction. In this way, the rural hinterland was subsidizing the modern expansion of the Chinese cities. Or to state it differently, it was in this fashion that the modernisation of China occurred: via an economic, cultural and ideological expropriation of the Chinese rural interior, rendering the countryside a 'field of death' that offered little of a future for rural youth. It is perhaps such circumstances that Mahmud refers when he speaks about having to leave home and come to Shenzhen. Hence, while there might have been an initial fear of the city's seemingly unlimited horizons, it is at the same time an openness that the city represents for the rural migrant. And within that openness were the city's perceived opportunities.

Still on the issue of land, I inquired about whether the Government gave compensation in the event of land appropriation.

"Yes, they give you a one-off payment for the land. In our case, it was 5,000 to 10, 000 yuan. Right now the compensation for 1 mu of land back home is around 30,000 to 40,000 yuan. Of course, it is not much at all. One is unable to buy an

apartment, which sells for around 3,000 yuan per square metre. With a government subsidy, it's still 1800 yuan per square metre. It would be fine if we could exchange our house and 1 mu of land for an apartment, but they're not prepared to let us do that. They insist on selling it to us."

Of course, while this might perhaps have seemed unfair to Mahmud, it was entirely consistent not only with the Chinese state's general commitment to the country's development but to its policy of drawing rural peasants into the money economy. A one-to-one exchange of land for an apartment would significantly dispense with peasants' having to offer up their labour for wages and to participate in the money economy; hence the state's policy in this regard is entirely understandable. More than anything, perhaps, this was revelatory of the state's complicity in ushering its subjects into the circuits of capital. It is owing to the multi-layered structural imposition of the objectives of state and transnational institutions upon the rural peasantry that Berger (op. cit.: 45) is correct to note that "the resolution to emigrate has to be seen within the context of the world economic system." It is undeniable that these structures render a sense of powerlessness.

"There's nothing we can do about it. We cannot report it or clarify it with anyone. It's the State (*guojia*). So we don't have a choice, and we have to come to the city. People like us belong to the lowest strata of society. We have no education or knowledge, so we're forever stuck." Once again, the countryside was associated with paucity, dead-ends, death. Even the great Marx was hopeful that the city would rescue people from the idiocy of rural life.

"The other difficulty we have is that our family burdens are great: the aged and the young need to be cared for (*shangyoulao xiayoushao*). They need to eat, drink and consume. Staying home is not economically viable. If we worked in the cities, our economic circumstances would be much better even if it means that we would not be with family. There is no question about how much better off we would be. Those at home would be able to live, eat and drink. In light of such an improvement, being separated from family – from one's parents and children – is a relatively small problem. We first need to earn some money before we can consider these other issues." Money was felt to be the means for action, and it was to be acquired in the city.

When actions are justified on the basis of economic need and the survival of significant others, it seems almost inhumane to question those actions even if there

were initially the urge to do so. The knowledge about a family's needs, after all, is highly personal since it is knowledge originating from circumstances that only the person concerned is most fully cognisant.

Mahmud continues, "If we were to stay at home, we would be with family but life would be difficult. It would be possible but difficult. Now, because we have a business, life is better. It's simply because we want to enjoy a better life that we're doing this." Now, who would want to challenge such reasoning, especially if such efforts were being undertaken to enable others to live better?

As one in the similar predicament of having to ensure the welfare and well-being of others, I could fully empathise with Mahmud. His actions could rightly have been understood as being beneficent. The supposedly temporary migration into the city, the separation from his beloved family in the countryside, his having to put up with the alienation and anomie of urban-life: these all could be explained in terms of his concern and love for his family. Cast in this light one could hardly help but feel compelled to suspend the detachedness of critical scholarly judgment and to empathise with him at the level of a fellow care-giver, son and parent. This change of perspective suggests that critiques are always contingent upon the vantage point one assumes when making them. In this case, one moves from viewing his actions as perhaps being instigated by self-interest (and possibly greed) to simply being benevolent. One could, after all, quite justifiably argue that he was making sacrifices for the sake of his family. And it was admirable, at least respectable.

(ii) Xiezi, Rou, Ren and Mianzi: Shoes, Meat, Personhood and Face

Nonetheless, I felt that I had been furnished with an account that seemed too 'tidy' around the edges. It sounded too much like the 'standard account', told in such a way to free the speaker from having to explain himself further; hence, the routine justifications about economic indigence and having lots of mouths to feed. Since it was the role of critical scholarship to probe at getting to the bottom of things, I persisted and asked if it was not possible going into business if he had stayed home in Qinghai. The response was revelatory: "We would still run a small business if we stayed in Qinghai, but business wouldn't be as good as it is in a city like SZ."

Mahmud continued, "Doing business in the rural areas in Qinghai is extremely challenging. It is possible but extremely difficult. While others wear leather shoes, you'll be wearing shoes made of cotton. While other can afford meat, you can't.

You'll notice that there'll be a disparity in standards in every aspect of life. If you stayed behind, you'll notice these disparities gradually increase."

Interestingly, his response suggested that survival was never the issue. Subsistence was always possible, but it was the attainment of a 'better' standard of living that was his expressed concern. But, perhaps unbeknownst to him, it was also much more than that: his invocation of leather vis-à-vis cotton shoes indicated that it was not even the attainment of ostensibly better lifestyle items per se, but what they signified about him. Indeed, a careful consideration of Mahmud's statements would reveal that he was very much driven by the need to dispel any notions about having 'lagged behind' other members of his community. He was worried not because the prospect of being without leather shoes and meat would diminish the quality of his life, but more so because others in his village would be consuming items which he could not. According to the logic of modernization, this was tantamount to being deprived of culture, which in turn tended to be associated with lacking personhood. Yan (2008: 25) observes that her interlocutors invoke a notion of *ren* [人] as an entity that possesses 'socially validated personhood'. One can easily relate/identify Mahmud's concern with his ability to consume meat and leather with a similar notion of human being and becoming.

Hence, while leather shoes and meat consumption in fact say nothing about the quality of life, the ability to afford such items invokes important meanings in a commodity-and-money-based symbolic order. Consumption is the means by which people become human (*zuoren*). That is, the means to pay serves as a relative index of one's socio-economic standing, underlining the fact that in a modernist and particularly capitalist world order given to economism, meanings are furnished by monetary values. Economism tends, in other words, to reduce qualities into quantities. And since there is no objective way to evaluate why leather or meat would constitute an improvement in the quality of life, the subjective evaluation of the latter is made simply on the basis of what these items cost relative to their substitutes – the more expensive, the 'better', so the logic runs - which in turn convey meanings about the social standing of those with the wherewithal to consume them. Perhaps, then, the following aptly captures the crux of Mahmud's concerns in his reference to the consumption of leather shoes and meat: since purchasing- power confers status and is the means in contemporary society by which one's socio-economic standing is recognized, its diminishment represents an unimaginable loss of face (*mianzi*) and

status vis-a-vis others. The compulsion to keep up with the neighbours and for invidious comparison was palpable. And so here lay a seemingly intractable conundrum which was perhaps the source of considerable angst and anxiety for those like Mahmud: there was a wish to see greater equality, but there was at the same time an awareness of an overarching system being imposed that was predisposed to institutionalising inequities.

As if to convince me (and perhaps himself) that he was not doing too poorly given the circumstances, he said, "My present situation is really not bad. The sacrifices I've made are still tolerable. The business here is quite alright compared with some other noodle shops. There are some who aren't able to make even 4,000 yuan a month, and their sacrifices are no less than ours. There are those who aren't able to make any money… and that cannot be helped. The hope is to make money, but if one is unable to, it can't be helped."

As if he thought his justifications for moving to the city had been inadequate, he stressed to me what he felt about his low socio-economic standing in contemporary China. Perhaps it was to remind me again that he had good reason for migrating to the city: "People like us who belong to the lowest strata of society have to endure an entire life of hardship. But there is the hope that our hardship will not last forever. So, it is our hope that the next generation will improve, that our children will study hard and will have a good education, unlike us. Then they will be able to support themselves." Once again, how could one argue against actions that would alleviate the hardship of the poor and improve the plight of young children? Being in Shenzhen apart from family might have been bad, but the alternative of being poor in the countryside without the opportunity to improve the lot of the future generation seemed worse. Again, the familiar trope: the countryside as a field of death.

(iii) Stress, Separation, Alienation

The conversation with Mahmud was occasionally fraught with tension. Perhaps this was because our discussion tended to broach highly personal subjects that appeared to be weighing heavily on his heart. It was as though he had been feeling conflicted and was now finally able to speak his mind, to vent that which he felt instinctively but was made to repress intellectually. The life of a Chinese internal migrant, after all, seems invariably to be one of immeasurable and unrelenting adversity: where despite considerable struggle, not to mention the modernist 'promise' that living in the city

makes one human (*ren*), he remains perennially an outsider in the city where he toils. The personhood that has been promised recedes every time he seems to inch closer to modernity. Accordingly, despite the fact that his greatest achievement inheres in his having reached the city where he successfully operates a business, he gets little recognition for it. In the meantime, he knows fully well the sacrifices he has had to endure: the memories of his past, his family, his children – such images that remind him of his alienation from his real life - flicker in his head. What accounts for the disparity between the modern promise of becoming *ren* (human) and its actualization? By a twist of fate, perhaps I had become a rare passing soul with whom he could discuss such matters?

Since he had again raised the issue of children, and I had not yet seen them around, I thought it an opportune moment to inquire about them. He confirmed that his children had been left in the care of their grandparents back home, not unlike arrangements common among many migrant-workers that I have described above.

"I have a son and a daughter. My son is eleven and my daughter is nine; one is in Primary 5 while the other is in Primary 4. When I left, they were about three or four… four or five years old." He wore a somber expression which he overcame with a contrived smile. He added, shaking his head, "We don't have a choice; it can only be like this." Despite what he had said earlier about separation from family being "a relatively small problem", the memory of having to part with his young children elicited an emotional response. There was a pause before he spoke again, "My wife and I came out together. We return once every year to see our relatives. It's like this, the reality of life."

Obviously, the separation from his children was taking a toll. I asked if he had considered how long he was prepared to put up with the present arrangements of working in Shenzhen and returning only annually to visit since the consequences for family life were evidently detrimental.

"My plan has been to work in the city for ten years before gradually returning. I'm not able to return in one move, or we won't be able to sustain our present lifestyles. I need to find and establish a suitable business at home first. Otherwise I'll have to support over ten people while not having an income. Everything requires that money be spent. Actually I haven't carefully considered this matter. I have a plan to return but haven't carefully considered when. My goal was always to return after ten years, but whether it can be achieved, I still don't know. We'll take things one step at

a time."

Berger (2010[1975]: 218) is percipient to observe that "his annual return is a preparation for his final return. None of his experience has ever led him to doubt the power of money in hand. He is nearer to fulfilling his plan."

The alternative was of course to lay down roots in Shenzhen itself, an option to which Mahmud said: "I never had this idea at the beginning. And after I moved to Shenzhen, the property prices escalated and became too high. What we earn is not in proportion to the inflation of property prices. So, we have no belief or confidence in being able to settle here and to make Shenzhen our home. Besides, our children are not studying here. We can only stay here temporarily to do business… and being here involves a sacrifice. We feel there's no need to make this sacrifice any longer than is necessary. So, it's best to return home where we can take care of them. We have no plans to stay here longer than is necessary."

Besides, although loosened since the beginning of the post-Mao reforms, the Chinese household registration (*hukou*) system continues to be discriminatory against and unfavourable towards rural residents, an institutional contrivance devised to control rural-to-urban population flows to maintain the rural-urban divide. This is no different from the sort of restrictions that have been imposed on labour historically throughout the globe. Hence, Berger (op. cit.: 115) notes: "The majority are prevented or discouraged from settling permanently in the country in which they work. Governments and multi-national corporations plan their policies on a global scale, and the advantages for capitalism of worker migration being temporary are considerable." But the short-termism is not exclusive to states and capital but is the orientation of the rural migrant too. Berger (ibid) writes of the European migrant worker thus: "The convenience for capitalism of his migration being temporary accords with his own wishes. He certainly did not come with the intention of staying." In fact, according to Berger (op. cit.: 150), "the migrant knows he is here on sufferance so all his spontaneous interests are short-term ones." This seems to be just as Mahmud has described it.

"The pressure of life in the city is intense. Life feels intolerable when business is not good… even for a single day. We're open every day, three hundred and sixty-five days a year, and don't close for a single day. We are like machines that upon starting don't stop; unlike those who are employed, who still have weekends off. We don't have days off. Never had. And we've been like this from the first day

we opened. When business is not good, we get to rest a little; otherwise, we get busy. If we find more workers, we can rest a little more. But that means we need to pay. If we want to relax, we need to spend money. That's why we're busy trying to earn money: so that we can spend it."

In this way, concerns about money, work, and general economic well-being constantly re-emerged in our discussion even when the conversation had supposedly drifted on to broach non-economic issues, such as the raising of children, the caring of the elderly, or whether one will return home to the countryside or not. Such an intrusion of the economic into virtually every aspect of the social domain may be explained by the fact that the organization of Chinese life in the post-Mao era has increasingly, everywhere, come to be mediated by capitalist market imperatives. Society and the reproduction of its constituent institutions have consequently become subject to the logic of the market, thus turning decisions about the organization of one's life into decisions centred fundamentally on economic concerns. As is clear in Mahmud's case, even being with one's family - to raise children and to care for the elderly – a practice that has been as longstanding as it has been traditional, can no longer be taken for granted, for even that is subjected to the economistic considerations of remuneration and loss. There are therefore no non-economic issues per se to speak of, for the economism that is pervasive in contemporary China has resulted in the pricing not only of economic-related activities and commodities; it has, via the notion of opportunity cost, effectively also put a monetary value on what were traditionally non-pecuniary activities. Economism is an attitude that appears to be infectious and ubiquitous: it is to be everywhere and at all times, on the lookout for revenue-generating opportunities. There is no respite from the marketplace and all things, tangible and otherwise, are up for sale. In such a pecuniary-centred world, the imperative that one has the means to eat only after having labored (for money) leaves one feeling perennially insecure. Hence, one does not quite seem to have a choice but to constantly deploy the calculus of costs and benefits in decision-making. The means of getting by is dependent upon always having something for sale, and so the choice of either putting one's labour-power or one's wares up for sale. With Mahmud's survival contingent on making an adequate number of such economic exchanges/transactions, it is unsurprising that he should feel the unrelenting pressures of urban life. Berger has noted that the priority of European migrant workers who have left home has been "to get as much money as they can and send it

out of the country." (op. cit.: 118). Perhaps his observations aptly capture Mahmud's predicament, and to the general situation of rural migrants in China's cities today?

(iv) Ku [苦] (Bitterness) *and the Countryside*

The considerable emotional and psychological burdens of life in the city – to say nothing about their physicality - prompted me to inquire about the prospects of living in the countryside. Assuming that he had derived from a line of farmers, I asked if farming could not still be an option as a means of survival.

"There's no land. What's there to farm? If you have no land, you have to endure the hardship of going to work. Anyway, relying on farming for sustenance is no longer an option that exists. In my view, such a choice does not exist where I come from unless one has a big plot of land. If we have 70 or 100 mu, for example, sure, we can still rely on agriculture to support our family. Otherwise, it's not possible to survive from agriculture today."

Evidently, each of us had used terms for which the other had intended different meanings. Since the interpretation of terms such as 'survival' was highly subjective, varying according to the living standards one expected to have, their meanings naturally tended to vary with individual expectations. Hence, whereas I had in mind a notion of subsistence – primarily a needs-based, largely self-sufficient farm economy allowing for the physiological reproduction of the familial unit plus a small surplus – Mahmud was probably thinking of 'survival' in terms of sustaining the aspirational middle-class lifestyle he had now a taste of. He was thinking of large-scale cash-crop agriculture that would generate enough income to allow his current lifestyle to continue (and even expand); hence, the declared need for 70 or 100 mu of land.

At this moment, our conversation was momentarily disrupted by one of his young charges, who had come to retrieve something from the fridge. Mahmud points to him and says, "His family, for example, has no more land. Their land has been appropriated. The only option for them is to work (*dagong*) or to do some business. This is the nature of *chengzhenhua* (urbanization)."

"Those living in the mountainous regions (*shanqu*), on the other hand, still depend on the cultivation of crops, but their standard of living is much lower than ours. We live closer to the city and can still make a living from doing some small business, but they're entirely dependent on growing crops. They can harvest only once a year. And the weather can be a little cold."

Would they too have liked to come to the city, I wondered. The reply was swift and unequivocal, spoken so matter-of-factly to suggest that my question was rhetorical to begin with: "Of course they would. Everybody would." Indeed, this response echoed the sentiments of many rural folk I had spoken to throughout my time in China. To many of them the city was a contrast to everything that the countryside was not. Most of them have been made to believe that the countryside – along with its residents - were symbols of backwardness; hence, I have lost count of the number of times during conversations when my interlocutors felt it pertinent to qualify – almost apologetically - that they hailed from this or that 'underdeveloped' region of China. Indeed, this affirms Yan Hairong's observations above about the 'backwardness' of the countryside.

What they intended to mean was obvious but the matter-of-fact association of rural poverty with backwardness and the perception that this was something for which embarrassment was an apt response, was an interesting phenomenon in itself. In contrast, the cities, especially the coastal cities, were celebrated and thought to represent the vanguard of development and, by extension, modernisation. Such perceptions were never challenged by any of my interlocutors, revealing how entrenched the telos of Eurocentric developmentalist ideas were. Not unexpectedly, along with such overt ideological prejudices, the city was believed to abound in economic opportunities; it was a place where the poverty of rural labourers could potentially be eradicated. This association between the city and employment opportunity was correct insofar as it was the city where the commoditization and marketization of goods, labour, and capital were carried to their furthest. But the perception that the city was somehow the promised-land where one could find the salve for poverty was perhaps a tad wishful. It was likely that this wishfulness derived from an unwarranted generalization of observed correlations between wealth and cities, from the observation that wealth was most concentrated in the cities. Nonetheless, we know that correlation does not explain causation, and that such wishfulness is very much the sign of inadequate analysis: hence, the city is associated with wealth because that is where it finds its greatest concentration; similarly, the rural countryside is identified with poverty because much of it is impoverished. I would offer that the putative connection between places and the state of their economic development is so simply deduced. It is seldom asked what the operative mechanisms are. The question that is even less often posed is why such

patterns exist: the metropoles are wealthy and the rural peripheries are poor; the former is therefore considered 'developed' while the latter, 'backward'. That is often as far as reflection on such matters is carried. Perhaps one can begin to understand why 'everybody' would like the opportunity to migrate into the cities.

Mahmud continued, "People naturally aspire for better things. Everybody hopes to be able to earn more money. Everyone hopes to have better days, don't you think? Every person hopes his child can eat and dress better. Everyone hopes to have these things for themselves, and to have more leisure. One cannot envision a lifetime of bitterness (*ku*), a lifetime being stuck in the *nongcun* (rural village/community/countryside)."

We had once again moved into the terrain of the ambiguous. Again, it was difficult to disagree with the aphorisms of wanting 'better' or having more 'leisure'. But central to the issue was the determination of what constituted 'better': was 'better' self-evident and a matter of fact, or was it being 'defined' for us? In that case, who or what furnished these prescriptions? Similarly, more 'leisure' was preferable to less, but what did such forms of 'leisure' entail? We should recall that according to Veblen, 'leisure' implied everything that was "not of the world of everyday, productive work and of the workmanlike habit of mind." (Mills 1953: xii). Indeed the association and identification of hardship (*ku*) with the countryside appeared to represent the different side of this same logic. One can hardly deny the physicality of a life lived close to the land, but according to what scale of values is such an assessment made? Although the identification of rural life with hardship (*ku*) was subjective, it was also likely that it contained elements of truth: was there a way to sort out the objectivity of fact from the subjectivity of desire, to appreciate the actual physicality of rural life without the exaggerations spawned by the wish to avoid it?

(v) *Modernism and the Pathology of Discontent*

Although I had heard such sentiments being expressed before, I remained fascinated by Mahmud's association of bitterness (*ku*) with the *nongcun* (countryside). I wanted to hear what he considered to be hardship, particularly so that I could trace the genealogy of such ideas and try to parse out socially conditioned ideas of desire from ontologically established facts. I reproduce below the details of our conversation here and have coded each utterance to facilitate the exposition and analysis that follows.

***

T (myself) Line1: Is being in the *nongcun* bitterness/hardship?

M (Mahmud) L2: It's hardship. Of course it is. Definitely.

T L3: But isn't it true that life is not as intense and that one has more time?

M L4: Yes. The lifestyle of the *nongcun* is very different from that in the city. One is more relaxed. The pressure is not as great. And if you look around, the people around you are more or less the same. But if you want to improve, you need to work hard.

T L5: Then why would you call it 'hardship' if the *nongcun* allows you to be more relaxed?

M L6: I'll tell you why: because all of China is developing. All the people are developing. All the countryside is developing. If you're not, then you feel like a failure: that is bitterness/hardship (*na jiu shi ku*). Moreover, farming and sheepherding are very physically demanding activities. If you continue to be engaged in these, it's hard to eat and live well. They are highly labour-intensive, but without returns. The effort one has to invest is not commensurate with the returns.

M continues L7: That's how I think. If you were to work here all day and I gave you only ten dollars, isn't that hardship for you? If, instead, I gave you one hundred dollars, wouldn't you be relaxed because your heart's satisfied? So, it is no longer considered *ku*. But if you received ten dollars for a day's work, isn't that ku? Of course, it's *ku*.

T L8: Then you're using monetary remuneration to measure *ku*?

M L9: Yes, I'm using monetary compensation to determine whether an activity involves suffering. Tell me if my thinking has been affected by modern change?

T L10: "What if you did not look at the monetary aspects of the problem and were just content with what you have…?"

M L11: I get your point… if I were content, I'd be quite happy with any job in Shenzhen earning a wage of 1000-2000 yuan per month and living my life… not having to worry about what to drink and eat… But that's not possible. What you're also saying is that after one has worked in the city for a while, one can simply retire in the countryside and relax. Yes, one may be relaxed but the pressure has in fact escalated. There is such a reversed relationship..

M elaborates L12: The person may be relaxed. Take sheepherding: all you do is to let the sheep graze. You take them up to the mountain. That's relaxing. There's no one to boss you around or to scold you. You only see sheep, the mountains, and water. We have a saying back home that says that after someone has become a shepherd for three years, he'll even refuse the offer to become an official. Why? Because he's become too comfortable. After he's been a shepherd for five to ten years, he'll remain a shepherd the rest of his life.

T L13: And what's wrong with that?

M L14: Right, right. This person lives in China. Out of ten people, there's only this one sheepherder. The other nine are busy earning money. Today one of them returns home with a handphone. The next day another returns with a television set. The next person returns with

all manner of things, but the shepherd remains without anything but his whip. Can he remain a shepherd? It will be difficult for him to do so, won't it?

M continues L15: If I had another way of thinking, it might indeed be possible to remain a shepherd all of one's life. What's wrong with that? Nobody says you can't and that you have to go to the city. But you cannot stop unless you live alone, don't socialize, and have neither relatives nor aspirations.

M provides me with an illustration L16: Someone once asked a young shepherd, 'What plans do you have for the future?' The boy replies, 'After I've herded for a while, I'll get married. After that, I'll have children but will continue being a shepherd.

B drives home his point L17: The shepherd remains this way forever... There's no development.

He elaborates L18: This is not possible in China… Under the present circumstances of urbanization and development in China, one cannot remain like this unless one does not wish to have relatives or friends. The ability to socialise requires that one spends money. Whatever one does, one has to spend money. Even a sheepherder needs money for transport. Where's he going to get it?

M spoke as if sheepherding were truly a thing of the past.

T L19: So, being a shepherd is no longer possible?

M L20: It was possible in the past, in the 70s, in my generation. Before the 80s, the thinking was very different. It was all production teams (*shengchandui*) and communal kitchens (*daguofan*). All belonged to the sate: collective labour, communal meals. We all worked together, just like in North Korea. This way, we were all happy and relaxed. There was no pressure. What you ate, I ate. There was not a big difference. Now the difference is very great, don't you think?.

M continued L21: Now, the transformation of the entire country is very great. We ordinary citizens have to follow in their wake. Let me give you another example: there were no television sets in my village in the 80s. Then there was one that was brought back by this person who frequently travelled outside. He had brought back a black-and-white TV set. And the entire village converged to watch it… waah… it was overwhelming, just like a cinema. Eventually, someone else brought back another… Oh, my God… others started doing the same… you buy a set, I'll buy another. We were reacting to one another… not that we had to, we were just reacting..

M elaborated L22: We are now also merely reacting. You just asked about me returning to my village to tend to sheep or to farm. Can it be done? Can we get by? Getting by is not a problem; it is just that getting by in such a fashion is unbearable.

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The above exchange is revealing of how taken-for-granted notions of development and progress are and the power they have in shaping Chinese realities. Especially notable is the way these notions confer meaning with regard to life's purpose, create the expectations by which many Chinese live, and engender anxieties when such expectations are not realised. I would propose that the brief exchange above offers a view into the psychological make-up of the Chinese subject transitioning from a traditional, fundamentally, rural society into a modern, essentially, urban one. While this emerging Chinese subject appears unequivocally cognisant about the imperatives of the new system, such as the need to increase his money earnings, there does appear to be a blind-spot with regards to what this pursuit of money entails in terms of personal sacrifice. Equally, there seems to be little questioning about limits: what amount of money would be deemed adequate? At what point does one decide to give up the game? It is almost as if the sweeping tide of modern change, with its singular emphasis on pecuniary calculation, has submerged all erstwhile established benchmarks of meaning. And in the meantime while new and more enduring meanings are being sought, reconfigured and stabilised, the only game in town is a no-holds-barred scheme to get rich, preferably as quickly as possible.

The acquisitive tendencies have been given licence but not without some destabilization of the erstwhile social and cultural order. Among members of the population, an example of the resulting sense of disorientation is given by Mahmud's ambiguous, if not confused, use of the term 'hardship' ('*ku*'). Mahmud confirms (in L2) that he considers a life in the *nongcun* (countryside) to constitute hardship. Yet almost in the same breath, he contradictorily acknowledges (in L4) that rural life is more relaxing. This apparent contradiction is resolved when he explains (in L6) that the sense of hardship or suffering he associates with the countryside has primarily to do with feelings of 'failure' when left out of the 'development' purportedly experienced by the rest of the country. On this score, it is apparent that 'development' is being viewed by him to be none other than positive. Meanwhile (also in L6), the physical nature of rural work was but a secondary concern, and only because the monetary returns were incommensurate with the labours expended. Subsequently, Mahmud concedes (in L7) that his evaluation of hardship was based on remuneration in nominal monetary terms: hence, while he believed that one was entitled to feel happy and relaxed if receiving a hundred dollars for a day's work, he

thought, in contrast, that hardship was being inflicted if one received only a tenth of that. Indignation at such blatant forms of exploitation – even if hypothetical - is understandable and justified. Nonetheless, there appeared to be little consideration of the nature of the work per se, of what it actually entailed in terms of time and effort.

Mahmud's line of reasoning therefore related the qualitative human conditions of suffering, equanimity and, ultimately, development and progress to nominal monetary quantities. Inferring from the illustration he gave, money was believed to be the ultimate measure of human well-being: the more one had, the more relaxed one could afford to be. This bespoke a curious fetishism that is symptomatic of much of modern (and especially, capitalist) society: the human condition was being rendered healthy or unhealthy according to the extent of one's holdings of money, an institutionally-backed means of payment that was only indirectly related to human well-being. It was true that in its triple function as a means of payment, a medium of exchange, and a potential store of value, money was indirectly related to human welfare insofar as it allowed one to purchase goods that qualitatively improved one's life: holiday packages, additional labour power, more restaurant meals, better medical care, a nicer home, etcetera. Yet, what was particularly striking in Mahmud's thinking was the evaluation of the qualitative (in this case, suffering or equanimity) using a nominal and quantitative referent: money. There was no reference to the actual (qualitative) conditions, such as the nature and intensity of the work involved, which had immediate and concrete implications for well-being. Consequently, whereas money was a lubricant of economic activity in its original institutional function, a means to ends that would have included considerations of improved well-being, its reification in the modern capitalist era has resulted in it becoming an end in itself. Concomitantly, the lack of money was automatically equated with *ku* or suffering; never mind if one's physical and other-worldly needs were already being met. Since the acquisition of money had now become an end per se, one of such prominence as to be among the foremost preoccupations of human existence, the conception of suffering and equanimity in exclusively quantitative terms was maybe not wholly unexpected.

Nonetheless, since this manner of evaluating human well-being was not bound to any objective, physiological referents, there appeared to be the problem of extreme subjectivity. Since the rule of the game was to accumulate as much as possible in pecuniary terms, the distinction between needs and wants was elided. The drive for

pecuniary accumulation, consequently, was unleashed without any conceivable limits, which was consistent with the economists' axiomatic prescription that 'more is better'. Indeed, 'more' is absolutely 'always better' despite what economists might have to say about diminishing returns to having more. In this fashion, we witness the central tenet of the modern economist – or what is effectively an endorsement of greed – find its way into the practicalities of everyday life in contemporary China. This was ominous, for it meant that discontent would henceforth become the condition of the modern Chinese person.

Contentment is a subjective, largely individually-determined condition that has generally to be strived for. Yet it might be that it is never quite attained - nor attainable - for some. A return to the countryside after a working stint in the city could present one with an opportunity to relax, but as Mahmud underscores (in L11), the result is quite likely to be just the opposite. One could enjoy the tranquility of the countryside but according to Mahmud, this appearance is deceiving since the pressure has not abated but in fact increased.

Like his explanation of the related notion of *ku* (hardship), Mahmud's views here about contentment and pressure were clearly also paradoxical. It was only after he had elaborated that the basis for his views became clear.

Hence, Mahmud refers (in L12) to the apocryphal story of the person, who after having been a shepherd for three years would refuse the offer to become an official. The supposed pretext is that he had become too comfortable tending to sheep to have further aspirations. When I asked (in L13) what was wrong with being so readily content, the reply (in L14) was that the shepherd possessed very little in comparison to those who had gone to work in the cities: he was said to have virtually nothing but his whip whereas those returning from the cities would be in possession of all manner of updated technological gadgetry. And this, according to Mahmud (see L15), was anti-social: it was a condition for those wanting to have nothing to do with others.

Mahmud concludes (in L17) that the way of life of the shepherd is static, representing an occupation that shows no promise for development. There are therefore allusions not only to backwardness, but to obsolescence. Moreover, it is representative of a way of life that is fast becoming socially unacceptable in an increasingly modern and pecuniary-oriented China (see L18). In such a milieu, socialization requires that one spends money, yet as Mahmud correctly points out (in

L18), money is exactly what the shepherd lacks and struggles to earn. Consequently, it is because of the professional shepherd's perpetual indigence and his financial inability to socialise that Mahmud considers him to be inevitably anti-social.

Being a shepherd is therefore no longer possible in China according to Mahmud (L20) and it is deemed to be an activity that belongs to the past. What is striking is that Mahmud's evaluation seems constantly to be heavily influenced by what others around him are doing and thinking: hence, his reference to the 70s where collectivization, if not the ruling order, still existed in some form. His comment (in 20) that, "We all worked together… we were all happy and relaxed. There was no pressure. What you ate, I ate," was especially illuminating, for it laid bare the logic of his reasoning.

To be sure, what was apparent was that Mahmud unconsciously derived his motivations from purposes that had their provenance in the social, in the *We*. He was fundamentally motivated by intentions that were 'his' only insofar as they were also shared by significant numbers of 'others'. That suggests that his sense of *I* was embedded within a socially larger entity such as a collective *We*. Hence, what was considered legitimate was dependent upon what Others around him were doing. It is from this collective of Others from which his identity derived. And it is from such a perspective that he recalls his 'happy' experience of the period of collectivization in the PRC, an era more commonly known for its crushing poverty. His remarks convey a contrasting scenario; they recall a distinct fondness and a certain sense of nostalgia for such a period: "We all worked together… we were all happy and relaxed. What you ate, I ate. There was not such a big difference."

Hence, while one could choose to take Mahmud to task for adopting a posture that so uncritically succumbs to the larger social forces surrounding him, it would be wise to regard it, along with the sentiments he expresses (in L20), as an invaluable insight into our (human) nature. In other words, despite whatever else one may choose to say about it, his tendency to refer to what others are doing ("What you ate, |I ate") should be regarded as an indicator of our innate sociability. So, while Mahmud has undoubtedly demonstrated a tendency for comparison and emulation that can be said to potentially border on an unhealthy sense of competition and one-upmanship, I am here suggesting that such comparative tendencies are largely natural insofar as our identities - our senses of *I* and *We* - are always shaped in relation to and in comparison with Others. Mahmud's emphasis (in L20) on working

‘together’ and being able to derive ‘happiness’ in the process despite the likelihood of extreme poverty, thus underscores the essential sociality of our *individual* being, whose health, paradoxically, is predicated on the integrity of our *collective* being. Moreover, it is because the individual bears such an intimate relationship to the collective that we observe Mahmud raising (in L20) the issue of relative ‘difference’ (or inequality) and its lack in accounting for the ‘happy’ and ‘relaxed’ milieu of the 70s. Indeed, his unceasing concern about where he stood relative to others – a theme that recurred throughout our interview - was therefore the practical expression of the (sociological) fact that his sense of self was embedded in and contingent on broader social formations, such as that of his community or village. Again, this was an affirmation that there is effectively no *I* without the *We* from which it derives. Mahmud’s constant attempts at comparison and emulation, consequently, were in fact expressions of an innate social desire to be sociable and to become socially acceptable.

It is by filtering Mahmud’s remarks through such an understanding of our social needs as humans that his seemingly paradoxical comments begin to cohere. Thus, his concern (in L21) about gaping inequalities becomes understandable, as does his mention (in L22) of the ‘copycat’ behaviour of villagers ‘reacting to one another’ in the purchase of TV sets. Most importantly, one is able to understand what he means (in L22) when I ask if farming or sheepherding can provide a subsistence living. “Getting by is not a problem,” he replies, “It is just that getting by in this fashion is unbearable.”

In the spirit of what has been said, what Mahmud is suggesting that subsistence is no longer the criterion by which to make judgments about adequacy. Indeed, ‘enough’ is not adequate and subsistence no longer suffices: not especially when others are accumulating riches. Perhaps it can be said that the kind of pressure the modern Chinese person faces no longer originates from economic indigence alone, but increasingly from the need to satisfy intersubjective as well as personal psychological expectations. It also suggests that increasingly, perhaps, Chinese are moving beyond the logic of need-based economics into the terrain of consumption for conspicuous display. But the adversarial, highly individualistic and anti-communitarian nature of such a tendency is perhaps why Marglin (2010: 4) has counseled that “We may have good reason to dismantle the engine of growth – not because growth is a threat to our relationship with nature, but because it is a threat to

our relationships with one another." (2010:4).

At any rate, anticipating that this emergent economistic worldview of individual utility-maximisation would open the door to a perennial state of discontent, I could not help but to ask the most obvious of questions: "Isn't this a psychological matter?"

(vi) Demise of the Nongcun (Village Community)?

"It is psychological but all the people in our society bear it," Mahmud responded. He then defended his migration to Shenzhen as follows: "Actually, for people like us, there's no land for us to farm on even if we returned… unless we leased someone else's land. There isn't much land to begin with. Unlike in Xinjiang or Henan… they have lots of land. We don't, so the best way for us is to leave for the cities."

He continued, "Besides, the notion of farming to sustain oneself… that was left behind at least twenty years ago. Even though it was already on a smaller-scale, we were still farming twenty years ago, and it was possible to sustain ourselves. Eventually, we did the calculations and realized that based on the compensation we received for farming, we were better off moving to the cities to work. We discovered that we could earn the same amount in a shorter length of time… There are still those who haven't come to this realization. They're only in the process of discovering this now. And there are those who are still dependent on farming to survive. The very little that they earn from farming is pathetic… That is real suffering, our suffering is small in comparison. Because we can earn money, our suffering is inconsequential, isn't it?"

Having left his village relatively early, Mahmud explained how he has used his urban experience to encourage others to do likewise: "We were also farmers. We're also from the village. We understand the hardship involved in their circumstances. I've told many of them to stop farming. It has no future. It is a dead end. The only way is to leave… only then will one find opportunities. I am constantly telling them this. Because I came out early, I would tell them to go to the city if they had the chance. That's my thinking. One needs to go out to explore: there're opportunities as well as money to be made outside. Even if one were only to find an average job in the city, the wages would still exceed one's earnings back in the village."

At that point, a female employee walks by and Mahmud takes the opportunity to refer to her situation back home. "Let's assume a household has 5 mu of land.

Someone like her – just one member of the family – working in the city can earn as much as the entire household. Someone like her can earn roughly 20,000 yuan a year. What returns can 5 mu of land give you? Roughly the same amount. So you see, by working in the city, she alone would make the equivalent of what a household would earn from farming. Do you think it's better to stay home or to come out?"

The views expressed above are self-explanatory. Nonetheless, I wish to draw attention to the unmistakable economism that characterizes and orients the thinking underlying the statements above. My reference to the psychological was intended to refer to the fact that if our physiological requirements were not used as the objective basis for determining the limits of our 'needs', then little else could since our 'wants' are theoretically unlimited. After all, unlike needs, our wants are subjectively determined: each of us is potentially able to consciously decide at an individual level what they might be, to curb as well as to expand them. In other words, if we do not abide by the notion of there being limits to our physiological needs and adhere to the economists' axiom that 'more is better', then our wants and our desire to accumulate could theoretically escalate without end, to the detriment of producing the ongoing sense of discontent indicated above. I was therefore trying to point out that the emulative proclivities, although inherent to our sociability as social beings, could be restrained insofar as its invidious and insalubrious aspects are concerned. I was ultimately intending to suggest to Mahmud that the decision about what constituted 'enough' rested with him, that he had agency and did not need to succumb to the unhealthy comparisons and competitiveness resulting from the increasingly apparent economic differences across Chinese society.

Perhaps failing to grasp the intent of my remark, Mahmud responded by saying that it was a psychological matter experienced by all in Chinese society. He then moved on to defend his migration to the city on the grounds of not having adequate land to be sustainably engaged in agriculture. All the signs of economism thus crept back into the discussion and we were once again on familiar territory. As life decisions continued to be justified on the basis of costs and benefits expressed in monetary terms, the space for conceiving of alternative means of livelihood seemed to shrink.

And since these were decisions revolving around internal Chinese migration and relocation, predominantly from the rural countryside to the urban centres, it became apparent that the implications of what Mahmud was describing - and indeed,

recommending - would be severe, leading to the surreptitious elimination of rural economy, community and culture. Hence, if Mahmud were correct to think that monetary considerations were the only criteria upon which to make lifestyle decisions - and if he were successful in persuading rural folk to be like him - then the countryside as a viable way of life is clearly doomed. Economic rationality entails bleak prospects for Chinese rural life, the *nongcun*, and all that it implies.

(vii) Sacrifice: The Present for Future

Our discussion had somewhat come full circle. I pointed out that we had just been discussing the emotional sacrifices and costs of leaving home. I continued, "The question is whether one considers the sacrifices worthwhile. Moreover, at what point does one decide that the sacrifice is no longer worth it? At what point does one decide that one has had enough?" I was restating the question about limits: if one has continually to keep running, when does one stop? At what point was it going to be adequate?

After some consideration, Mahmud responds, "Yes. The question of a suitable limit is not something anyone has any idea of because this market is moving too quickly. So, there may never be enough." I took his response as an indication that he was uncertain about the future; that he was unaware of where this process would end up.

I added, "When you compare what you earn with the ordinary Shenzhener, you may realize that you're getting less. So, when will you be content with what you have or do you simply continue running trying to catch up?"

Appearing to be resigned, Mahmud admitted, "That's right. It'll never be enough. The main thing is that we're only responding to circumstances. We're only hoping to become more comfortable, to have better days ahead so that the next generation can have it better. That's why we're doing this. As for the question of adequacy: it will never be enough."

"I'm not sure how you'll analyse this problem. For me, I'll be satisfied if I can return home and lead a comfortable existence after having worked like this (in the city). If you ask me if the sacrifice is worthwhile for such an outcome, I'll say it is. If one wants a good outcome in the future, there's definitely a sacrifice."

I did not react at the time but thought Mahmud had to be respected for appearing to be so mindfully considerate of the welfare of those under his care. In retrospect,

however, his response seemed to be begging the question. After all, what he stood to benefit in the future could not be clarified in the present but only hoped for. Meanwhile the sacrifices he was forced to make in the present were very real and immediate, involving, most notably, separation from his family. What was thought to be a 'comfortable existence' and a 'good outcome' was presumably a lifestyle that was replete with modern accoutrements, but what about the non-monetary costs that resulted from his absence, which were unknowable as yet? Perhaps the notion of trading the present for a putatively better future is a story those presently making sacrifices like to tell themselves. Perhaps it is only then that the sacrifices can be legitimated to be worthwhile making.

As Berger (op. cit.: 191) has observed, "To make present sacrifices for the sake of the future is an essentially human act: a constituent of the human condition. All stories from all times offer examples. And, in this, his story is as old as the first traveller's… The sacrifice is offered now in the conviction that it will be recognizable and receivable in the future. " Yet in this case "the migrant worker sacrifices the present for the future under circumstances which continually confound his sense of continuity. Scarcely anything he experiences or witnesses confirms the value of his sacrifice… Meanwhile he lives in a situation of almost total acknowledgement." (ibid).

Nonetheless, to affirm his point about the need for sacrifice, he added, "It's like a young child who goes to school. For the sake of her future, she has to endure being chastised by her teachers and parents from the time she's about six years old, the best years of her childhood. As soon as she enters school, there's pressure. It's suffering that she has to endure. For the sake of a better future, she has to go to school. That's the logic."

Mahmud therefore compares his situation with the plight of a child coerced into attending school. It was an undesirable but necessary process. He notes, "It's like that. For the sake of a better future, we must continue to work hard. Regardless of how severe our suffering, we have to bear with it." Of course what was assumed in the analogy was that the outcome would be as advertised: it would ultimately be positive. Who would oppose schooling or 'education' anyway? Yet, omitted from the analysis was the issue of what the schooling in question entailed or why coercion was necessary in its implementation to begin with. Was it because non-school attendance - just like the refusal to be dictated by the imperatives of modernisation –

constituted an alternative that potentially threatened to disrupt the modern and capitalist way of life?

(viii) The Cage of Modernity: Time is Money

There's a pause. Mahmud is pensive then laughs out aloud. "Rural society today is undergoing *chengzhenhua* (urbanisation). The farmers are forced to move upstairs now. It's impossible not to run faster." He repeats himself for emphasis, "It's impossible not to run faster."

He continues, "The State is urging you, beating you on the bottom, saying, 'Quick, move up… it's good upstairs.' But once you've moved upstairs, what do you do - you have no more land? You can only run… you can only come out to work. Where's the food going to come from as you're sitting upstairs? You have to buy it. And you're responsible for everything you consume. To be crude, even taking a pee requires money. You have to flush it with water that you need to pay for. That's why it's said that while we're reacting, it's the State that's forcing us to run faster: 'Quick, move upstairs. Quick, buy a car. Quick, buy a TV.' The entire country is developing. So the common person has no choice … unless you don't consider anything else. But that's not possible."

Again, Mahmud has identified here for us the complicity of the Chinese state in the accomplishment of modernity. It should be added that the 'modernity' being referred to here is not that in its abstract and general sense but in its specific economistic dimension. Mahmud is indicting the Chinese state for its direct role in creating the conditions for economism. He is alluding to the fact that via its pro-urbanisation orientation, its various policies create the necessary conditions that render the marketplace the primary arbiter of economic and, more generally, social life. Hence, it is possible only via land policy and the subsequent appropriation and development of erstwhile collectively-held land that the state is able to encourage its citizens to move into high-rise apartments. But this measure, accompanied by the exhortation to "move upstairs", suggests more than just a change in the type of dwellings inhabited by the Chinese citizen. It constitutes a wholesale and revolutionary transformation in the Chinese way of life as well as his perception of that life. For, as Mahmud's statement so poignantly underscores, the replacement of the institution of collective land ownership by that of private apartment ownership at once serves to remove and sunder him from the land. In the process it effectively

deprives him of the means of sustaining himself. This necessarily turns him into a worker and a consumer in the same instance. As Mahmud rhetorically asks: what are you to do for food but to buy it? How are you to acquire money but to work for it? This sentiment is enunciated when he reminds us that even taking a pee requires the expenditure of money.

Apart from demonstrating how the modern Chinese worker-consumer has been simultaneously created as a result of policy, this instance of state-supported and induced marketisation that Mahmud mentions is noteworthy, since it reveals the frequently touted antithesis between state and market to be somewhat of a fiction. If accurate, Mahmud's example reveals the important role the state plays as an 'under-labourer' for the market. By helping to appropriate collectively-held land and converting it to private property, it creates the conditions for the emergence of markets and, more specifically, money-based economies in basic life-necessities such as land and food.

Mahmud proceeds to sum up our discussion as follows: "We've just discussed the shepherd, who occupies the bottom rung of society. It's no longer realistic for him to remain a shepherd in China. Like I said, he needs money just to catch a bus into the city. Otherwise, others will take just minutes to get around whereas he'll take an hour or more. He'll take too long to get anything done."

I interjected to point out that for the shepherd or farmer, generally, time was of little or no concern. Either of them, in their traditional capacities, would only be concerned and content with producing for subsistence. There was therefore a regularity given by nature and things came and went in their own time.

"That's right," Mahmud responded, "time is inconsequential for them. But the entire pace of China has sped up. The speed of development from the time the TV set arrived in the village until now, with the IPhone, has been extraordinary. It's been only twenty over years…it's been much too fast, not just ordinarily fast. Do you know the electronic beeper (pager)? The evolution from the pager to the hand phone has taken just a few years, not even ten years. The pace has been extraordinary. So, it is impossible to not be a part of this development."

Evidently, he felt a strong compulsion to conform to the dominant techno-economic cultural trends in society. As I have noted, this was normal since it was indicative of an innate desire to feel socially included. Yet perhaps more than anything, Mahmud's statement reveals the conundrum that modernization presents:

one may not like contemporary developments but remains trapped by them. The ubiquitous and intensive commodification of things as well as non-things forces one, as a matter of necessity, to partake of market transactions in order to survive. In the final analysis, therefore, involvement in a transactionary mode of life was an existential imperative rather than a lifestyle choice.

The situations Mahmud invokes below provide the strongest justification yet for why being 'rational' and 'economistic' might still be the surest form of insurance against the fundamental uncertainties that modern life throws up. We now turn to examining them.

(ix) Health and Sickness

"You've asked about the possibility of staying in the village to continue with a rural lifestyle. It seems to be good but it is impossible and unattainable in my environment. Everything requires us to spend money, which needs to be earned. This is the very first condition that leaves us with no choice. So, life in the village may be good since one has access to housing and food, but these still have to be bought with money."

Mahmud continued, "When you talk about returning to herd sheep…(he shakes his head, followed by a pause)… One can occasionally do it for the exercise and to enjoy the environment … but one does not have the circumstances to do it full-time. Where do you have land? Do you own sheep? We don't have any of these and so can only *pao* (run). Is what I'm saying not reasonable?"

It's fair enough; it's the logic of the city, of capitalism," I replied.

"That's right. The country is moving towards capitalism. Society has changed and has compelled us to change along with it. We require money for our most basic needs, even in the rural village, and the money needs to be earned. That's why we cannot stop. We've gotten on the highway and so can no longer stop."

I thought that the metaphor of a highway to describe modern life was extremely apt. Just as the highway - a symbol of societal-wide acceptance of automobile transport - was seemingly ineradicable in so far as it locked a society into a certain mode of getting around, urban life as a symbol of modernity similarly appeared irrevocable once it had been established. The fundamental obstacle to reversing the unfolding of these processes seemed to rest with the fact that both were

all-encompassing institutions established on the back of tremendous investments of land, labour and capital resources, not to mention the displacement and resettlement of people *en masse*, which upon being committed appeared to determine the trajectory of the society in question for the foreseeable future. There was, in other words, the effect of what some call 'path dependency', in which past decisions to implement certain institutions have led to a present that is more or less locked into reproducing those same institutions. This appears to be the case with modernity, of which Mahmud has so perceptively deployed the metaphor of 'the highway' to symbolize: upon entry, one has no choice but to adhere to its logical demands, to keep pace with its minimal speed requirements.

And Mahmud is intent about having me see that that there were good reasons for keeping pace. He says to me, "It's fine if we don't generally have such high living standards. But what if we were to fall sick? Who wouldn't wish to go to a better hospital? This is the same with everyone. Everyone would like to go to a better hospital, to recover more quickly… Think about it, isn't it right?"

"Let's not discuss shelter, food, clothing and transport. When one falls ill, one definitely has to spend money to get better. You'll definitely want to go to a better facility to recover. If you have the money, you can afford it. There, everything is better: the treatment, medication, hygiene, service, everything. If you don't have the means, you can only visit the community clinic. They'll treat you with medication worth 3rmb. After three days you return because your condition does not improve. What do you do in those circumstances?"

Mahmud was not finished. "And that's not suffering of the worst kind. If your children need to go to school and you're unable to afford nice clothes for them, the teacher and their fellow-students will look down on them. When other kids have Coke and bread and yours don't, that's real suffering. It's unbearable. So, we have to put up with our suffering so that they can have a better life and so that they aren't looked down upon. In other words, it's impossible in China not to be keeping pace with society's developments. Capitalism… this is capitalism."

(x) Chinese Islam and Modernisation

Mahmud was of Hui ethnicity, Islamic in religious affiliation and Chinese by citizenship, an identity of cross-cutting cultural influences. I had in my earlier conceptualization of Eurocentrism connected Christianity's transformation in

Western Europe with the emergence of modernity and Eurocentrism. Propitiously given the ethno-biographies of my interlocutors, it would seem natural to be similarly asking about the the relationship between Islam and the globalizing forces of capitalist modernity: to what degree could Islam be undergoing a similar transformation? Is it reasonable to be positing such a change in Chinese Islam in the first place? How is Chinese Islam being reconciled with the sweeping economic changes and opportunities in China? What is the relationship between Chinese Islam and Chinese economic development, if there were one?

These are some of the more obvious questions one would ask about Chinese Islam in light of our understanding of Christianity's contribution to the rise of the West. Yet, if I were to consider Mahmud's views in the context of my observations of life in contemporary China, there would be considerable difficulty determining the role his religion (or ethnic cultural heritage) has played in shaping his views. After all, his words seem to reflect the worries commonly found among many, if not most, ordinary Chinese. They could just as well have come from a secular Han Chinese person. There was the same concern about existence, well-being, and survival: worries about employment, money, food, shelter, clothing, health, and education for their children. Of course, there were egotistical considerations too: concerns about how others perceived them, whether they were seen to be 'successful' or looked down upon for being 'failures'. While I have noted that this was in part due to an innate sociability of wishing to gain social acceptance, one has at the same time to be careful not to rule out the egotistical motivations entirely.

In short, if one had expected to hear about the dramatic conflict/contradictions thrown up by Chinese development in light of Islamic teachings, one would have been disappointed, for Mahmud said to me: "It is only when the country is prosperous that we can we have the conditions for existence… only then can we have the conditions for worshipping God. Only then can we have our mosques built and our freedom to worship. So, the practice of our religion is closely related to the nation's development. Ours is a faith… it's only when you have the circumstances that you can have faith, isn't it? If you're unable to eat, what energy do you have to worship?"

What ever happened to traditional religious asceticism, or are we to consider that merely a fiction? After all, Mahmud's comments amply demonstrate that because ideas necessitate subjective interpretation to be meaningful, any article of faith or

body of ideas could be deployed and interpreted to suit one's intent.

It was only after I had suggested that traditional religious teaching had historically been suspicious of economic motives that Mahmud suddenly sensed the potential conflict between the religious life he sought to practice and the economic system in which he felt compelled to participate. "That's right. The faster is China's development, the faster the extinction of Islam here. At the beginning, we had no pursuits except our devotion to God. Now that conditions are better… but on this, much depends on the individual. For myself, I try to be pious… I don't smoke or drink… And if my conditions are good, I try my best to worship, to glorify God. There are some who, upon obtaining favourable conditions, proceed to do everything against the teachings of Islam. And over time, religion is neglected. Finally, it may not even exist in their lives. This is well-understood. Much depends on the individual. That this (neglect of religion) could result from the gradual development of society cannot be helped. It cannot be controlled… and that can't be helped."

Based on these impressions, one cannot help but to think of the forces of modern development as being unstoppable, relentlessly sweeping aside all obstacles that lie in its path. I do not seem to be alone in making these observations about the relationship between Hui Islamic religiosity and modernisation. Berlie (2004: 36) has pointed out that the Hui are close to the Han on the subject of secular modernity. This thesis is affirmed by the work of Maris Gillete (2000), who studied consumption among urban Chinese Muslims. This seems to be confirmed, too, by Jonathan Lipman (2004), whose presentation to the Congressional-Executive Commission on China spoke of the acculturation of the Hui to local Chinese contexts throughout the country: "most of them use local Chinese language exclusively, and they have developed their 'customs and habits' in constant interaction with local non-Muslims, whom they usually resemble strongly in material life. To add to this chorus, Gustav von Grunebaum has argued, somewhat analogously to my observations vis-à-vis modernization and China that "in accepting Western influence, Muslim elites aimed not at renewing a heritage but at eliminating marks of inferiority." (quoted in Berlie, op. cit.: 29)

(xi) Further Observations

As part of my attempt to better understand their circumstances in Shenzhen, I requested and was granted the opportunity to work at the noodle shop. For two weeks

I showed up at around nine o'clock every morning and left after the busiest lunch period at two o'clock. My experience confirmed that the work was not easy. It was highly labour-intensive and the hours were long. The shop was opened from nine in the morning until two the next morning and involved two working shifts: one group would begin by opening the shop at eight in the morning and end at eleven in the evening, while the other would begin work at eleven in the morning and finish by closing the shop at two the next morning. The shop is therefore opened for business for up to seventeen hours every day three hundred and sixty-five days a year and my Hui friends – whether in the capacity of proprietor or worker - spend literally all of their waking hours operating it.

Moreover, all working there - including the proprietors and their spouses - would share the relatively small apartment at the back of the shop. As far as I could see, the apartment was conceived of solely in terms of its utilitarian function of providing shelter. I saw bunk-beds and a few rudimentary pieces of furniture; there were certainly no signs of any creature comforts. Therefore, unlike what one has come to expect of the material disparities that typically exist between bosses and their employees, the proprietors in this case appeared to share the same living and working conditions in Shenzhen. If the conditions were harsh and exploitative, they were borne by the boss as much as his employees. This was exemplified by Mahmud's wife, whose industriousness was evident: she opened the shop every morning, prepared ingredients and took control of operations in the kitchen throughout the day. It is no wonder that she often looked exhausted and sleep-deprived. Nonetheless, such a distribution of labour, in which the 'boss' shouldered at least as much of the workload as the 'worker', was very obvious. It is in fact likely the reason why the conduct of working relations in the shop appeared to transcend that between employers and employees. As noted previously, their relations approached those of family members. Since the shop's proprietors and workers were mutually co-dependent in the material reproduction of one another's lives daily, the observed relations between them appeared family-like, dissimilar to that typically existing between employers and employees. Consequently, any hardship experienced by one was effectively shared by all. This observation can be summed up in a more generalized anthropological insight: a familial (communal or tribal) sense of *We* is sustained by frequent and repetitive social encounters with others; it is nourished by the sociative 'work' of drawing closer and negotiating with the alterity of the other.

Despite the complexities and difficulties such interactions may sometimes entail – despite having even to 'compete' vis-à-vis others for limited physical space around the shop's working and lodging environments, I would proffer that it is only through such sociative 'work' of literally encountering and reflexively engaging with the strangeness of the Other that the strange may be rendered familiar. In other words, a communal sense of *We* is not created *ex nihilo*. Nor does it emerge merely from platitudes or verbal commitments to 'the greater good'. Instead, the sense of *We* is forged in the crucible of practical social activity that is everyday life; it emerges in the throes of inter-Other experiences in the effort simply to get along. These are shared - not individualistic – experiences. And they are, as such, necessarily reflexive.

7 EUROCENTRISM AND CHINESE SOCIAL LIFE: A CASE FROM RURAL QINGHAI

I. Background and Methodological Considerations

This chapter consists of an ethnography conducted in Minhe, Qinghai, Western China in the province (*laojia*) of my Shenzhen-based Hui interlocutors. It seeks to understand the life conditions and economic circumstances that prompted my interlocutors' migration to Shenzhen city. Having seen, observed, inquired and, to some degree, participated in their everyday lives in Shenzhen, I had an appreciation of the challenges they faced in their work lives. Despite the fact that they made considerably more money in Shenzhen than they would have if they remained at home in rural Qinghai, it was evident that they did not have it easy in the city. As noted, they had to put in seventeen, eighteen-hour days, not to mention, to endure the emotional turmoil of separation from their families, especially their children. Given such considerable sacrifices, my interlocutors' decision to relocate to Shenzhen would not have been easy. How difficult were their circumstances in Qinghai? Notwithstanding what Mahmud had already told me, I was curious to know about their circumstances that warranted such a decision and its corresponding sacrifices.

Were they as economically disadvantaged as Mahmud had made it seem? One may have been furnished with a certain account of events, but since accounts are ultimately constructions whose integral elements are subject to the predilections of

those narrating them, the ethnographer is best advised to take up the task of personally examining the evidence on which they are based. Accordingly, I undertook an ethnography to better understand their circumstances in rural Qinghai.

The chapter is structured by the events and occurrences that transpired during my visit, and my ethnography is based on my observations of them. Again, there has been an underlying preference here to re-present phenomena as and in the order that they occur. As previously indicated, this is in keeping with the phenomenological principle to allow for the 'looks of the world', which gives priority to *discovery* and the contingency of everyday life happenings. The reader will see that as phenomena and events unfold, they present themselves as topics of reflection. This may be spoken of metaphorically as being akin to objects striking the mind to become objects of our analyses. Since the concern of my project is with the presence of Eurocentrism in its multifarious and multi-layered existence in everyday Chinese life, the goal is to 'capture the everyday' in its fullness so that we may see how, in the multiplicity of ways, it manifests. I believe the approach proposed here allows me to best do this. Again, I feel that it is the nature of the phenomena of interest, the multi-dimensionality and stratified nature of Eurocentrism, which best suggests the methods for its study.

Having said that, my ethnography is not entirely subject to the random and capricious forces of life and without order either, since it is ultimately structured by the ongoing concerns that define this project: To what degree has Eurocentrism affected Chinese life? Consequently, to what degree does Chinese culture remain 'Chinese'? Translating this into a practical research question, I had first to ask: What is socio-cultural and economic life like for my Hui interlocutors in Qinghai? And from this survey of their lives, ask: To what extent have their lives been influenced by Eurocentrism? Concomitantly, do their lives in Qinghai offer alternatives to that suggested by a Eurocentric and Modernist teleology?

In light of these queries, the reader can expect descriptive accounts of both the natural as well as social milieu of my interlocutors, with a particular emphasis on the modes of social relations that characterise the everyday lives of my interlocutors and their families, including issues such as child-rearing, children-adult relations etcetera.

The opportunity to visit Qinghai had presented itself to me during the course of my interactions in the noodle shop. Seeing my inquisitiveness, Mahmud had welcomed me on several occasions to visit his province and his home to gain more of

an understanding. My research had reached a stage where this appeared necessary and so in July 2012, I made a two-week visit to Minhe County [民和], Qinghai, the home of my Shenzhen-based Hui interlocutors. I provide below a description of my visit, paying particular attention to the nature of the *social forms* and *modes of sociation* that sustain the lives of my hosts.

Given that my knowledge of their working lives in Shenzhen has already furnished some insight into a critical aspect of their lifestyles, the following information should be taken as supplementary, illuminating that dimension of their lives beyond the realm of wage-work. The following therefore helps to fill in and make more complete what is essentially a partial view of my Hui interlocutors' lives: whereas my account of their Shenzhen experience focused heavily on the challenges of their working lives, the material presented below highlights the conditions at 'home', circumstances they have often told me they felt compelled to leave behind so that they could 'progress'. Indeed, the ostensibly dismal quality of their lives in Qinghai is often cited as justification for their desire to relocate to cities such as Shenzhen to search for 'better' prospects. Since these evaluations were highly subjective and reflected a certain judgment of what constituted good and bad, progress and regress, advanced and backward, they were expressions of an ordering of preferences that in turn revealed a certain worldview. My visit to Qinghai was undertaken to allow me to evaluate just how 'dismal' their conditions in the village were and, therefore, to better ascertain the nature of the worldview implicated in conferring such judgments.

The chapter is structured as follows: In Section II, I provide a description of my experience of Qinghai's natural and social environment. Herein contains an account of the kinship/familial relations that I witnessed in the community of my hosts, including the social status and roles of children within it. This provides an opportunity to compare between my interlocturs' lives at 'home' in Qinghai against that in Shenzhen, as previously described. Section III features a story of Mahmud's cousin, Mustafa, who lives the traditional life of a shepherd in the mountains. I have included Mustafa as a person of interest as he is committed to a life that is antithetical to what has observed in Shenzhen and much of contemporary China. Indeed, Mustafa's iconoclastic views about life serve as a useful contrast to those popularly found throughout China today, which I believe have been given voice by Mahmud. These initial Sections reveal different dimensions and variations of life in

Qinghai, throwing light particularly on the key issues that were raised in earlier chapters: concerns about economic production and sustenance, the purpose and meaning of life, social relations, childhood and child-rearing, and what these taken individually and as a whole, convey about notions of a 'meaningful life'. Essentially, the contrast that is highlighted is distinctively one between the aspiration for Modernity/Eurocentrism and the rejection of it. This sets us up to revaluate the nature of Modernity and Eurocentrism in Section IV, and to consider 'well-being' and the ultimate question about the 'meaning of life' in Section V.

II. 'Home' in Minhe [民和], Qinghai

(i) Impressions of the Natural and Social Environment of Minhe, Qinghai

If Guangdong in South China gives one a sense of being a place in a hurry, China's Western interior would, by comparison, be considered a sleepy backwater. This was at least the perception of my Hui informants, who invoked just such a contrast on numerous occasions. At the outset, this generalisation did appear to hold true. I flew into Lanzhou, the capital city of Gansu Province and was met by Mahmud, his son, his nephew, as well as his friend, who had driven one hundred kilometers from neighbouring Qinghai Province to receive me. I was touched by their welcome, especially by the fact that three of the four in the group had previously been unknown to me.

What is one to make of such hospitality? What was there about a gesture as mundane as receiving guests at the airport that it would be considered socially significant? The act caught my attention because of how rarely I had borne witness to it in my everyday experience of modern life. I felt that the act was important, not so much in itself but because it highlights certain absences in our modern ways of life.

Hence, it is likely that they came because they were not preoccupied. One could alternately say that they were 'free' from the clutches of (capitalist) work, exempted from having to *dagong*. The boys were simply being children, carefree and happy just to tag along wherever the adults went. Since they were having their summer holidays, there was all the more reason for this. But one just needs to spend time in the more economically "developed" cities of Hong Kong and Singapore outside the

PRC – or, increasingly, even in the major cities within it - to realize that such conceptions of childhood as an age of uninhibited leisure to be somewhat obsolete, for one will see that many, if not most, children in those regions are no less busy than their adult guardians. School holidays may imply a break from the routine of mandatory schooling but they do not free them from the constraints of time as such. For what one finds during the school holidays is that, typically under the prodding of their anxious parents, they are enrolled in a litany of extra-curricular activities and remedial classes. If the child should resist, the fact that their peers are doing similarly quite often provides the necessary pressure to result in their acquiescence eventually. The schedules of these children are consequently filled with an unrelenting number of remedial classes and extra-curricular lessons, giving them all but little respite. This seems especially to be a trend among children living in the cities. Moreover, it is generally their parents who, sensing the unrelenting competitiveness of modern-urban life, feel a compelling sense of responsibility to at least ensure their children are not left at a disadvantage. For other parents who adopt a more proactive stance, it would be a case of wanting to give their children a headstart over their peers. It is owing to a mixture of such vicarious parental anxiety and ambition that results in the endless litany of additional classes their children are made to suffer. While such parental intentions are generally well-meaning, the inadvertent institutional effect is the conscription of their young children as unwitting participants in the dog-eat-dog world of the modern socio-economic machine, thus seeing to its perpetuation. The outcome is the widespread perception that time is scarce, along with the loss of the experience of a free and unstructured childhood. That is, the consequence is the elimination of a milieu where children can discover the world in a way unmediated by the careerist ambitions adults have for them.

It is in light of the situation just described that the reception I received can be said to be so significant. That Mahmud's companions were able to find the time to welcome a stranger at the airport - even if that stranger might have been acquainted with a relative or close friend - serves as a useful contrast to urban life. It would be difficult, for instance, to imagine something similar occurring in the hectic and time-sensitive urban circumstances described above. In the urban milieu, time becomes a precious commodity and the notion that 'time is money' very quickly becomes accepted as an inevitable and accomplished fact, with all its concomitant (detrimental) consequences for sociality. Hence, people in the city are generally

harried and often unable to 'find' or even 'make' time. They are perpetually preoccupied and so struggle to give their friends the time of the day, to say nothing about strangers. In contrast, presented here is an example of the different sort of social consequences that emerge from the mode of life found in the countryside. Being somewhat peripheral to the centres of accumulation, life is 'slower' and one is more 'carefree'. There is time for a friend's friend – perhaps to entertain the notion that my friend's 'friend' is also *mon ami*.

The built and natural environments also elicit a sense that the pace of life in China's hinterland is considerably slower. To begin with, there is significantly less human manipulation of the landscape than what I have been accustomed to seeing in Southern China; so, the environment is less 'built' and more 'natural'. On the hundred-kilometre drive back from Lanzhou to Mahmud's village in Minhe County, Qinghai Province, I did not see any high-rise structures that stood out of the landscape. Meanwhile, the roads were not congested, the sky was blue, and the air was fresh. These features allowed one to imbibe the breathtaking beauty of the gigantic reddish-brown geological formations (Severe land erosion? Desertification?) that broke out from the yellow and green expanse of canola fields, all set against the backdrop of a clear blue sky.

Our haste to transform the natural environment and to turn nature into an exploitable resource has led us to downplay the delicate connection that exists between our physical environment and psychological well-being. To be sure, the psychological and emotional consequences of our alienation from nature have largely been overlooked. Our well-being is contingent on our ability to commune with the natural environment. Yet this crucial relationship is neglected because our commitment to modernization demands that the natural world be mastered, then transformed. The loss that ensues from our alienation from nature is ours. Nevertheless, since *we are a part of nature*, it is a loss from which there remains the possibility of recovery. It is an estrangement from which we can be restored if we can rediscover the natural environment of which we are a part, but from which our lives have mostly been sundered. Perhaps that is why we often have images of the wild or of natural landscapes adorning the walls of our interior spaces. Or why some of us urbanites seek adventures in the great outdoors or indulge in the simple pleasures of farming. I speculate that such explorations with and within nature have largely to do with the desire to be re-connected with nature in order to feel 'whole'

and ‘alive’ again. The road trip from the airport in Lanzhou to Minhe seemed to afford me such an ‘awakening’ to nature, even if I were merely taking in the sights of the natural landscape of China’s hinterland from the comfort and safety of an automobile.

(ii) Life in Minhe: Kinship Relations, Family, Children, and Islam

Minhe County is Mahmud’s ancestral home, his *laojia*. It was in Qinghai but located close to the border it shared with Gansu. It was roughly midway between Xining, Qinghai and Lanzhou, Gansu, a hundred kilometers from either. We arrived at the home of Mahmud’s parents’, where his father came out to welcome me. It was a traditional village home, a large rectangular compound comprising a courtyard in the middle and five to six rooms along one side of the property. Of these rooms, three served as living quarters, one served as a kitchen while another functioned as an outdoor toilet. Since there was no modern human waste management system, one could identify the latter from a distance: there was an odour emanating from it. On the opposing side of the compound was a chicken coop where the family raised their own poultry.

I learned the day after my arrival that their extended family lived in the neighbouring compound. Mahmud brought me over for a tour and to introduce me to his uncle, the eldest of his father’s siblings and the compound’s patriarch. Since two of Mahmud’s cousins who lived there had established families of their own, it was also an opportunity for me to meet some members of his extended family. Since it had to accommodate a few households, the compound was noticeably larger than Mahmud’s father’s. It had more rooms as well as more land; I even noticed the sizeable patch at the back dedicated to growing vegetables.

As Mahmud’s intended purpose was to take me on a tour of the premises, my visit was brief. As such, I am unable to recall exactly how many people or who I met. What remains memorable about my visit that late afternoon, nevertheless, was the fact that the compound was a site of immense social activity, a scene heaving with social life because of the combination of children being absorbed in play and adults engaged in conversation. There were bouts of laughter emanating from the group of children who were skipping. The sight and sounds of people at ease and enjoying themselves are unmistakable, and my attempt to remember the experience calls up the sounds and scenes of conviviality.

I do know that Mahmud has cousins besides those who live on the compound. Dalia, for instance, was a member of this family but now lived in an apartment in the city with her husband and daughter. Presumably she had moved out of the family home after getting married. Still, the fact that I had the opportunity to meet her helps to underscore the point that I wish to make: despite the fact that she no longer lived in her father's house, my opportunity to meet her was largely a result of the way their social lives were structured. Because their forms of sociality was centered around the family unit in particular, Dalia would on the weekends return to visit the familial home, hence giving rise to our chance encounter. But Dalia's circumstances notwithstanding, the situation I describe above verily underscores the kinship type of relationality that undergirds the life of my Hui interlocutors. One could see that there were sufficient kin-members living together to bring into reality the *gemeinschaft* as a bona fide social formation.

The photo below shows a total of twelve children, seven or eight of whom lived on the compound while the rest came from the household next door. It is evident that thechild growing up in such an environment will seldom encounter the prospect of having a shortage of children to play with. Loneliness, the lack of company and inadequate socialization – perhaps synonymous terms signifying the general absence of community/gemeinschaft – are non-starters. One would expect an analogous situation to also exist among the adults.

Moving across space and time, a parallel may be drawn to the social settings I witnessed in my Shenzhen apartment complex. There seems to be good reason to regard the sociality witnessed in Shenzhen as a sort of legacy of the quotidian kinship and family-based way of life we see here in China's rural interior. We have said previously that humans are inherently social beings because selfhood is inextricably bound by and contingent upon the collectivity of others in material and non-material (psychological and emotional) ways: individual subjectivity emerges only in the context of the greater We and, hence, the Self is transpersonal. Tomasello (2009: xv) points out as follows the extent to which human beings are cooperative: "To an unprecedented degree, homo sapiens are adapted for acting and thinking cooperatively in cultural groups, and indeed all of humans' most impressive cognitive achievements – from complex technologies to linguistic and mathematical symbols to intricate social institutions – are the products not of individuals acting alone, but of individuals interacting." It is therefore unsurprising that in the absence

of the extensive kinship and family ties described above, my interlocutors seek out surrogates: company is sought with their neighbours instead of family members. There seems to be good reason to believe that it is ultimately this human tendency for the company of others, coupled with the memory of more deeply communitarian modes of being and living, such as that exemplified here, which give rise to the forms of sociality observed at my urban Shenzhen apartment complex. That is to say, sociality is partly innate and partly the result of the interiorisation (via socialization) of longstanding cultural practices.

What is worth underscoring is the fact that the innate sociality we speak of is co-operative rather than exclusively selfish and competitive, as per Hobbes. Referring to research he conducted on collaborative problem solving among children, Tomasello concludes (2009: 44-5): "Infants and young children come to culture ready to be helpful, informative, and generous in the right situations (though selfish in others, of course)… Children do not only respect social norms, as is typically argued, due to the benefits of reciprocity and threat of punishment. Instead, they are sensitive from a young age to their own interdependence with others in collaborative activities – a kind of social rationality endemic to shared intentionality." He adds, "Children are motivated to engage in these kinds of collaborative activities for their own sake, not just for their contribution individual goals." (op. c.it. 105).

When returning to Mahmud's familial home, I witness the children of the house – both his and Ali's, who are respectively of the ages of 15, 12, 11 and 10, assuming responsibilities that in modern societies would generally be performed by adults. They clean tables, sweep the floors, serve the guests, and perform all manner of household chores. They bring tea, serve dinner and wash up afterwards. This was not a one-off observation but something I consistently witnessed throughout the time I spent with them. Their precocity and dutifulness is impressive as they carry out their tasks conscientiously without being told and do not openly complain about having to do them; in effect, they display a maturity beyond their years. Their apparent willingness to accomplish these practical domestic chores seemed to contrast markedly with that of urban children generally. I was intrigued by this and so finding the opportunity one morning, asked Mahmud about it.

"Yes, our children are independent. They wash their own clothes and they wash the dishes and pots after meals. On the weekends, they clean up the house. We've trained them gradually. As soon as they were able, we got them to do these things.

Now the older children can sweep, mop and clean. The four of them are like that." Perhaps the 'shared intentionality' that Tomasello observed in his research of infants explains the collaboration I witnessed among the children in Mahmud's household.

In line with this, there is perhaps also not the sort of drudgery that is typically associated with work within the modern context, which Marglin (2008: 43) writes, "closes us off thinking of hard work as something other than drudgery." In contrast, Marglin refers to the Amish, who have maintained much of their traditional lifestyles against the technoculture of today's United States, and notes that "drudgery is not one of the words that come to mind in describing the Amish at work… For one thing, Amish women, like Amish men, see themselves as doing God's work. They value not only the product but the process. They value themselves through their work. For another, Amish women do their washing and ironing, and much other work, together, communally. Work is a social occasion." (ibid.). In short, the Amish tolerance for hard work is attributed to the pervasive influence of God on the one hand and an appreciation for community on the other. In fact, we have previously seen that the latter was implicated by the former in the pre-Modern era, where social life was communal and work was something of a calling dedicated to a God-centred end. It seems useful here to compare this (traditional) conception of 'work' with Tonnies' (1957[1887]: 168) description of *gemeinschaft*: "The Community, as far as possible, turns all disagreeable work into an art form in tune with its own nature, giving it style, dignity and charm, and a particular status within its social structure, in the form of a 'calling' and honourable estate."

It should be apparent that the extent to which these observations about Amish life are relevant for my observations of Mahmud's community life in Qinghai is debatable. It is also questionable if the children of my Hui interlocutors looked upon work as favourably as Tonnies has it. Nevertheless, the attempt to draw them into consideration might not after all be so far-fetched, for with my Hui interlocutors there is ostensibly also the analogous focus on the divine as venerated in the Islamic tradition. Besides, it seems reasonable to say that my observation of the dutifulness and co-operative nature of children performing household tasks in Qinghai took on, at least to some degree, features Marglin and Tonnies speak about. Work, while perhaps baneful, was lightened by the fact that it was an opportunity to enjoy the presence of others: indeed, it was a 'social occasion'. In retrospect, one could argue that this description applied not only to the children performing chores in Mahmud's

household; upon recollection, it also accounts for the certain playfulness I had witnessed at the noodle shop in Shenzhen.

It is important to note Mahmud's use of the collective pronoun 'our' in his claim over the children, for he was clearly referring not only to the two biological children of his 'own' but also to his two nephews, the children of his older brother, Ali. What this appeared to demonstrate was a view of paternal obligations extending beyond the modern nuclear family consisting of two adult parents and their immediate children. The children being claimed by Mahmud here included Ali's as well, which suggested a more extensive – or extended - familial structure, one more akin to traditional forms of kinship. Still, it is useful to note that such traditional relationality was limited: 'Our' children, for instance, did not include those living next door, the progeny of his cousins. But this was not wholly unexpected, for the human capacity for empathy and caring exists up until a certain point. Perhaps Mahmud's assumption of responsibility for his brother's children revealed the extent to which parental obligations were circumscribed in their system of kinship. It appeared that Mahmud considered his parental responsibilities to extend to all the children living under his father's roof, but perhaps not beyond it. Hence, while relations with and responsibilities toward extended family (such as uncles, aunts, and cousins) might have been familial and kin-like, it seems reasonable to think that they were of a different degree of intimacy from those existing between immediate family members (parents and siblings). Kinship structures that were observed here were therefore traditional insofar as they were extensions beyond the prototypical conjugal family unit. With the integration of children-in-law and grandchildren into the original familial unit, the latter has been enlarged into an extended family living under one roof. It seems reasonable to conclude that such consanguinal co-habitation of extended family members constitutes a marked contrast to the modern, conjugal-family arrangements one finds in the societies of the more 'advanced' countries.

Once again, it is in relation to these more traditional familial arrangements that one can begin to make sense of what I observed at the Shenzhen noodle eatery. The siblings and their spouses pool together their financial resources, contribute their labors, and presumably share in the returns from the business. During the school holidays their children occasionally visit their parents in Shenzhen and help out at the shop. The adults take turns returning to Qinghai and in their absence rely on the

others to keep the business in Shenzhen running. In turn, those who stay behind rely on those returning to help supervise and watch over their children at home. There is therefore an ongoing reciprocity - or more than that, a profound sense of the abovementioned type of kinship relationality - that extends across the family. It is a kinship which Sahlins (2013: 2) refers to as involving a certain 'mutuality of being', an intersubjectivity in which one becomes 'intrinsic to another's existence'.

Returning to the subject of the children's adeptness in household chores, Mahmud added, "Once our children finish their homework and when they're done with that, they help wash up the dishes. That is their business. My mother helps cook their meals but they're able to help wash the vegetables, peel potatoes and, generally, prepare the ingredients. They even help me wash my car...They're not able to make their own meals now, but once they're able to do that, it'll be even simpler and more straightforward."

The kinship relationality that we witnessed therefore prominently entails the following two features:

First, there was a prodigious display of what Sahlins (*ibid*) calls the 'mutality of being' among immediate as well as extended family members. As noted, the strength of these relations were proportional to the degree they were natally-determined, being strongest among members of the conjugal/ immediate family and weakening as they diffused outward to include extended members.

Second, another effect of such kinship relations among family members was the existence of overlapping relational worlds where children, in virtue of being dependents, are from a very early age integrated into the lives of their parents. Importantly, because the worlds of the adults are so closely intertwined, parallel structures of sociality also result for their children. This actualizes a socio-cultural milieu of kinship ties, where both adults and children weave a rich fabric of reciprocal trans-generational and intersubjective relations. Besides, given such a milieu where the well-being of Self and Other is irrevocably intertwined, events that threaten the stability of the community (through episodes of personal and collective crises) may be anticipated and ameliorated by the intervention of members within the group. We therefore see here that the extension of kinship practices beyond the typical nuclear-family produces synergies that morph into a social network of safeguards. Indeed, it is because of the presence/existence of such synergistic kinship networks of reciprocity that Mahmud and his wife are able to leave the countryside

to work in Shenzhen for extended lengths of time: the presence of grandparents and a large extended family ensures the possibility that their children can be dependably cared for.

What I consider to be the exemplary conduct of Mahmud's children thus becomes easier to grasp in this context. Since their lives are very much integrated with those of the adults, they get to witness and experience hardship from a young age. They are made, for instance, to endure long bouts of separation from their parents. And when an explanation for their parents' long-term absence is offered to them, it is usually cast as being necessary for their well-being; necessary to ensure that they may be afforded a good education and some rudimentary material comforts. As we saw previously (Chapter Six), the prospect of his children being humiliated at school on account of being indigent seemed adequate reason for Mahmud to leave his family behind to search for better opportunities in Shenzhen. As regards his children, one can perhaps say that while having to grow up without their parents is painful, understanding that it occurred so that they could be afforded better opportunities would have been particularly sobering for them. It would be unsurprising if the reconciliation of such means and ends were to result in the child's precocious development, since s/he quickly learns to associate pain and reward, sacrifice and gain. But more significantly, the child will likely ponder the selfless and vicarious suffering his parents endure for his (or her) sake.

Gratitude would seem to be quite natural a response for the children under such circumstances. I would in fact submit that their willingness to undertake responsibilities around the house arises largely from their realization that they have the capacity to lighten the burdens of their adult minders. This willingness to pull their weight, I believe, is reciprocal and stems from their gratitude towards their parents. It also emerges in part from their mature understanding of the harsh realities of the world around them. But appreciation and mature self-understanding are not the only sentiments they experience, nor are they the most immediate. Rather the trauma of separation often engenders feelings of resentment in the child, especially initially. As Mahmud's mother said to me, "The children did not want to acknowledge their parents early on when they were younger. They did not want to refer to them as *papa* and *mama*. It was only when they became older and understood more that matters improved."

Mahmud's children's reluctance to acknowledge them as parents could point to the adverse psychological effects experienced by children left behind in the rural migrant's experience. Similarly, it would have been agonizing for Mahmud and his wife to have experienced what must have seemed like rejection by their children; probably the reason why Mahmud had never mentioned the incident to me. Hence, when viewed in consideration with the long hours they needed to put in at work, the quality of their lives in Shenzhen had undoubtedly to be called into question. Their social lives that were woven around the idea of kinship in Minghe were substantially attenuated when they had come to Shenzhen. But there were still traces of that legacy. Indeed, as I described earlier, they existed mainly in the kind of sociality I had observed among all working at the shop. Notions of kinship ran deep and what we witnessed among people who did not share 'blood-ties' but common Hui ethnicity was kinship that was understandably attenuated in form, a compromised variant of the sort that existed among blood relatives back home.

In the final analysis, then, one could say that while their economic conditions improved as a result of their move to Shenzhen, the quality of their lives – particularly their social lives – likely declined. Apart from having very little time outside that spent managing the business enterprise - and apart from doing little else but run it - Mahmud and his wife were separated from their children and other members of their families, who had been central to their lives back at home. Besides, while in Shenzhen they were also sundered from the larger practices of Hui Islamic culture. This was made clear to me when Mahmud's wife emphasised to me one day, "We cannot stay here in the long-term since we are muslims. Life is not convenient as we are a small minority here." I did not proceed to inquire about the nature of the 'inconveniences' they encountered but, presumably, these would have been of the day-to-day-living variety, implicated in matters as mundane as diet and religious practice. Having seen that *qingzhen* (*halal*) eateries and mosques in Minghe were ubiquitous in the landscape - being the rule rather than the exception - one could easily appreciate her feelings about Shenzhen vis-a-vis home. Unwittingly, perhaps, Mahmud's wife was highlighting what constitutes well-being for them, and she was noting that it did not only lie in the accumulation and consumption of wealth, but also consisted in non-things, in the domain of cultural and relational praxis. Although not explicit, she seemed here to be suggesting that the 'good life' was constituted by more than the possession of mere 'things' (materialism) and her idea of living well

included their ability to participate in cultural and religious practices of their choice. Unselfconsciously, then, she was aware that a meaningful life consisted in qualitative and not only quantitative parameters. Hence, while she did not make it known explicitly, she appeared very close to acknowledging that their improved economic circumstances in the city came at a cost: their departure from home had removed them from a socio-cultural milieu in which they were fully-fledged members. As this was not the case in Shenzhen, where they were separated not only from familial kinship networks but rendered 'outsiders' by virtue of their ethnic and religious identities, it could be said that they were not fully living their lives and realizing their potential. Contra the creed of individualism, therefore, the possibility of human realization was considerably affected by the social structures those individuals found themselves embedded within: my Hui interlocutors could not *be* the same human subjects in Shenzhen that they *were* back home in Minhe. It was apparent that the loss of conviviality associated with traditional forms of kinship and culture was for them an accepted fact of city life. While rural-urban migration might have in this case brought about quantifiable material improvements, the diminishment of the quality of one's social and cultural life in the urban environment was an immeasurable cost. One could reasonably make the case that this was a kind of psychological and emotional violence inflicted on the individual by the demands of modern life.

Nonetheless, much of this violence is internalised and few are willing to talk about or address it. Instead, in keeping with the times, there is an unquestioned commitment to modernity throughout much of contemporary China, manifesting itself in the desire for the material, economic growth that I argue is the consequence of a Eurocentric cosmology. It is this same desire that instigates the movement of people from the countryside to the cities. Moreover, this was a rural-country migratory flow that Mahmud (cf. Chapter Six) was quick to point out 'everyone' wanted, for the city was popularly perceived as the place where the 'good life' was to be found; where not only economic opportunity and money were believed to exist in abundance, but where the most advanced forms of individual and social development had their place, removed from the supposed cultural backwardness and deprivation of a life lived off the land. Here, Mahmud's words about the hopelessness of farming and its associated ways of life resonate. As he says, "One cannot expect to spend a lifetime in the *nongcun* (rural village) suffering". This was the grim view of life in

the countryside and it was and is still being held throughout much of contemporary China. In contrast, life in the city was regarded favorably despite what has been noted above about the psychological violence it inflicts.

III. Mustafa: The Story of an Anti-Modern Outlier

While this cultural narrative about the countryside may be dominant throughout much of contemporary China, thus reinforcing the notion that a meaningful life was to be found in the modern urban environment, it is obviously not without acknowledged problems. As even Mahmud himself has acknowledged, the natural environment of the countryside allows one to be more relaxed. Yet the recognition of this is unrelentingly being undermined by the sheer power of modernist ideology: the belief in the superiority of the quality of urban life seems to persist and large numbers continue to aspire moving to the cities despite the abovementioned psychological violence inflicted by social alienation, atomization, and loneliness.

Although this aspect of modernity is inadequately acknowledged and discussed, it is not missed by Mustafa, who caught my attention when he told me, "I also ran a noodle shop in Shenzhen, but after a year had had enough. I had to work extremely hard and my mood and psychological state were not good. People should not get themselves too tired; it's no good for them."

What was being stated was so obvious a fact, a truism. But it seemed to carry even more weight in the context of contemporary China with its pro-growth hysteria. Truths have to be spoken to be affirmed but here was one that in contemporary China could barely find an audience. And so, about the emotional and psychological costs of Chinese modernization, the silence was deafening. The speaker, Mustafa, was Mahmud's cousin and my encounter with him had been somewhat fortuitous.

Early on during my visit to Minhe, Mahmud had taken me to inspect the little patch (roughly 1 mu) of farmland his family still held. One had to ascend the mountain adjacent to his parents' home to get to it, and he told me that when he was a boy growing up, this was done on foot and would take approximately half-an-hour. It was a journey he had to make a few times every day in order to help his parents with the farmwork. These experiences would likely have contributed to his view of farming as sheer toil. Subsequently, as their conditions improved in the 1990s, they acquired a tractor (*tuolaji*) that not only facilitated their work but that became a means of transportation. The purchase of an automobile for the family a couple of

years ago then dispensed with the need for the tractor. This was especially the case since the family had by this point given up farming. It has therefore been parked in the courtyard of the familial home, seemingly as a monument to an obsolete past. In his enthusiasm to show me around on that day, however, Mahmud was excited to re-deploy it. We were going up to the mountains to 'play' and, ironically, the tractor had become an instrument of leisure. There seemed to be a fitting sense of justness in the fact that the machine that was associated with the hardship of farming was now re-designated for the purpose of leisure. Just as labour had been liberated from the drudgery of farming, so, too, the humble tractor which was to find its new purpose in the activities freed up by that human liberation. There was indeed a powerful sense of progress that was found in this narrative, observable in the changing ways Mahmud's family moved around, initially depending upon raw human-power but increasingly becoming reliant on motorization. This narrative of supposed progress was also implicit in the changing forms of work the family engaged in for their livelihood, beginning with labour-intensive farming and gradually evolving towards less onerous, non-farming occupations that afforded them the opportunity to partake of middle-class forms of consumptive leisure. As both these parallel developments shared in being underwritten by an evolution of 'work' that went from being fundamentally labour-intensive to supposedly labour-saving, it is easy to understand why Mustafa and his family would consider themselves as having made significant progress. That is to say, it is unsurprising why they would see themselves as being materially much better-off than in the past. As noted, he is now able to choose to operate the tractor as a toy, not as an appendage with which he has to work the land.

At any rate, in keeping with the type of sociality that we have come to consistently observe in the countryside, Mahmud's plan to take me up to the mountain generates the interests of all at home. Three of the children of the household climbed into the back of the tractor with me, while Mahmud's father sat at the helm with his son, who steered the large machine. As if its size were inadequate in calling attention to itself, the tractor sputtered noisily along, leaving in its wake a trail of fumes and dust. Nevertheless, the openness of the vehicle exposed one to the elements and to the conditions of the road, which made the journey more enjoyable. The experience was further enhanced by the fact that several people on the street we drove past knew and were known to Mahmud's family, giving rise to an exchange of greetings that inevitably and discernibly imparted a sense of community.

It was not long – some ten minutes - before the road under us turned from bitumen to gravel. The ride, which had been relatively smooth, suddenly gave way to one that was severely bumpy. We had left Mahmud's village behind and were beginning to ascend a steep incline. Perhaps we were already on mountainous terrain? The contrast between the gentrified and the untamed, between the domain of culture and of nature, is striking. One becomes aware of passing from one realm into the other by way of the senses, at least by way of sight and hearing. As we begin our ascent up the mountain, I am immediately taken in by the beauty of the brown geological formations against the expanse of the clear blue sky. The vastness of the world beyond humans can verily be appreciated when it has not yet been adulterated by the artifacts that signal our putative mastery of it. In such circumstances, the sight of the natural world is breathtaking in its beauty and overwhelming in its vastness. Looking out into the expanse of the blue sky, I experienced just such a moment, one marked by the realization that humans are but bit players within the larger ecological order. Additionally, one notices that the din of motorized traffic has died down, and when the tractor's engine is switched off, I become aware of the sonorous chirping of birds in the immediate environment. It was all quiet but for the sounds of nature that I found to be soothing: the wind, the fluttering of leaves, birds, insects and other life forms that populated the milieu. They have always been there, I suppose, if only we had taken the time and found the state of mind to listen. On inhaling, one could detect a difference in the quality of the air. There was not the odor of industrial waste or automobile pollution. An Edenic sense of serenity prevailed, and I could not help but wonder how anyone could even consider trading this in for the insipid modernist trappings of Shenzhen.

We travel a little further and are treated to the sight of lush green vegetation. We had arrived at the villagers' agricultural plots. In their excitement the three children jumped out of the back of the tractor even before the engine had been turned off and ran to locate the familial plot. The three adults followed behind. There seemed to be a genuine excitement and joy that came from being outdoors and, especially, from being in such serene natural surroundings. The joy was ineffable. The exact relationship between human well-being and its exposure to nature cannot be quantified, but that it consists of a positive relation seems visibly apparent. Again, maybe this should not be surprising given that humans have ontologically been a part of nature for much of their history? Perhaps our joy here was merely an expression of

deep relief at being reconnected with the primal source of our (well-)being; or at least, of relief at being let out of the repressive confines of modern life? It seemed safe to say that all were enjoying the experience.

While the adults discussed the various issues surrounding the use of the plot (for instance, the fact that it was now being cultivated by a relative), the children seized the opportunity to run in the open fields and to climb trees. I was particularly self-aware of my profound joy at that moment simply by being in the midst of such seemingly unlimited natural abundance, away from the grinding industrial sounds of my routine existence. (Indeed, photos from that day show me wearing a broad, ineradicable smile that afternoon, as if I had stumbled before the garden of Eden). If a few minutes of respite from the din of industrial society can induce such self-conscious equanimity, what more for emotional and psychological health if these minutes could be extended to months, years, even a lifetime? Again, these are questions seldom asked, very likely because we are born into the desecrated wastelands of industrial life. For the most part, we have been deprived of the opportunity to know better.

I watched as Mahmud and his son helped the other boy onto the branch of an olive tree. It was very clear that the children were also immensely thrilled to be playing in nature. Even though the mountains were for them still relatively accessible, it was apparent that this was a rare opportunity since their parents no longer had any reason to come here. It was in this particular regard that their childhoods were unprecedentedly different from those of their forebears; different in being lived in the absence of any necessary connection to the land. Again, perhaps the conspicuous joy elicited by being close to nature was a natural consequence and should not have been surprising? Was it, after all, not the result of restoring what was an indefeasible connection between humans and their natural environment? But this was not the time for philosophical speculation, for the sky, which had progressively been darkening, suddenly opened up and poured rain.

It was under such fateful circumstances that I had the chance to meet Mustafa. Our attempts to seek cover from the rain had been unsuccessful: we had hopped back into the tractor and Mahmud tried to speed off, but it was too late. Since we were out in the open, our predicament worsened as the rain began to fall more intensely. Was this not one of the problems of a life lived too close to nature? That one would be subject to nature's unforgiving capriciousness? But that was not all. Our attempted

getaway became more dismal and comical. The sudden storm had resulted in water overflowing some of the tiny ravines in the landscape, and as we approached one such crossing, the tractor became mired in quicksand. Our collectively desperate and clumsy efforts to extricate the machine eventually succeeded, but not without a few severely muddied shoes and soiled trouser bottoms. Nature might inflict its 'inconveniences' and 'crises' upon us, but our experience of it and our ability to resolve the challenges it throws in our direction had in this case been nothing short of enjoyable. Maybe this was due to the collective nature of our experience? After all, "shared" experiences allow us to connect at a deeper ontological level, one that was beyond ourselves. They entail a sociality that affirms our common humanity and, as noted above, our rootedness in one another. It is therefore conceivable that the 'shared' nature of collective experience derives a certain solidarity - and joy - that downplays the inconveniences in question. The desperation of the circumstances had spawned a necessary sociality – a community of necessity that was affirming of our humanity. This would seem like a plausible explanation why we might have found this 'crisis' of the afternoon so pleasantly memorable. Not unlike children at play in the rain, we had great difficulty containing our happiness. The quiet serenity of the place was punctuated by our fits of laughter, a testimony to our joy.

But as it continued to rain, Mahmud suddenly thought about taking shelter at his cousin's and diverted the tractor. "I have a cousin who lives nearby," he said. We drove for several more minutes, passing along the way a vociferous dog tied to the base of an electric tower before we arrived at a small house that overlooked the town below. There was a motorbike parked out in the front and a mud wall demarcated the residential compound from the rest of the plateau. A large opening along the wall served as the compound's entrance. Our arrival had alarmed the dwelling's only human occupant and he came out to receive us. He was Mustafa and he wore a white *taqiyah*, a skull-cap(?) on his head, presumably as a sign of his faith.

Given the circumstances, Mustafa quickly ushered us into the compound to shelter us from the rain. He brought us to the sheep-pen where he had been feeding his animals before our arrival. He proceeded to complete the task, filling a long trough with grass while his flock of approximately twelve sheep chewed voraciously. The tranquility of the surroundings seemed to enhance the sounds of their voraciousness and sporadic but cacophonous bleating. For an urbanite, these sounds were novel and I found their clarity and crispness to be extremely soothing.

Moreover, I was enchanted by the presence of the four tiny lambs that had been born the several days before. The beauty of an experience of nature is ineffable and cannot be adequately underscored. Perhaps, as with most things, we become aware of nature in its beauty only by way of contrast; that is, presences tend to stand out against what is not normally there.

Having for most of my life lived in an urban milieu, where the environment has been de-naturalised to the point where 'quiet' could be understood as the whirring of an office air-conditioning unit or the sound of cars in the distance, I was captivated by the sublimity of the moment, by the primal nature of the experience. As is too rare the case in modern life, I was having an experience of 'reality' unmediated and undistracted by the technologies that have come to be a measure of our civilisation. At once removed from the audio-visual stimuli of industrial life, I seemed to be afforded the opportunity to be attuned to the rhythms of nature. This enabled me to experience 'quiet' not as an absence of 'noise' but as emotional and psychological equanimity. It might have been sheep I was observing but in the quietude of the mountain plateau, I felt as if we, humans and animals, were connected at some deeper ontological level. It would not be an exaggeration to describe the experience as being 'transformative'. I describe it as such because one's encounter with nature in its silent but magnificent powers seems to deflate the human ego and to restore humankind to its proper ecological place. Indeed, nature is most potently felt when our experience of it is unmediated by the accoutrements that characterize modern life (which, almost invariably, are artifacts that have been created precisely to shelter/protect us from a more complete experience of nature). When we encounter nature in such circumstances, we are humbled, reminded that humans are but merely one species among others on the planet. It is likely because this experience re-establishes the immutability of our connection to nature that I felt a certain sense of equanimity. It was, in any case, under these fortuitous circumstances of being subject to nature's whims and wonders that I came to know of Mahmud's cousin, Mustafa. [As it turns out, this deep experience of nature would help me understand what he was about to tell me.]

If it appears that I have belaboured the point about our connection to nature and the quality of my experience of it, it is only because I discovered the extent to which our well-being depends on it. It also anticipates and helps us to make sense of what Mustafa was about to tell us.

The rain had by now reduced to a drizzle and all of us we were sipping tea in his room to keep warm. The sun had begun to set and, consequently, one could feel the temperature drop. It was getting cooler but given that it was summer, it was still very much bearable. Mustafa's modest living quarters comprised of two rooms that were adjacent to the sheep-pen. The room that the main doors opened up to was large but sparingly furnished. I noticed that there was not a lock to secure the doors to his home. One can see that a latch was once installed, but the bolt has since fallen out. Essentially the property is accessible to anyone with the intent to enter. One has simply to push the doors open. The room is approximately 15 feet long by 12 feet wide. The floor is laid with brick and upon entry one sees two tables and a cabinet lined against the wall. There is also a fridge and a miniature washing machine. These appear to be the only signs of electronic technology in the room. To the left of the room is a platform that is raised approximately half a metre above the ground. In China this traditionally serves as a bed. Mustafa's possessions are minimal – and utilitarian/functional. There are farm tools, a broom, cooking pans, water flasks and buckets lining the floor of the room. These features of his living conditions are noteworthy, for they suggest something about the isolation as well as the simplicity in which he lives. There is nothing in the least bit pretentious about the place.

Mustafa's bedroom was adjacent. It was a third of the size of the room at the front and so was warmer. This was also because it contains a hearth, where Mustafa does his cooking and has his meals. Just as with the room in front, there is a raised platform – a bed – above which is a nice-sized window that looks out to the garden patch at the front of the house and beyond that, to the mountain on the other side of the valley. There is also a television that has been set up on the chest of drawers opposite the bed. Apart from the TV set, a cupboard and a bedside table, there is little else. This apparent paucity of possessions is consistent with the initial impression one gets about Mustafa's lifestyle. But the apparent deprivation does not dampen our ability to have a good time. We have for the meantime converted his bedroom into a makeshift living-room, and are seated on his bed around a tatami table sipping hot tea to keep warm. The adults chat while the television is turned on to keep the children preoccupied and distracted.

As I was the foreign guest, the conversation was deliberately focused on addressing what Mahmud thought were my interests. In his Hui dialect, he told Mustafa about my wish to better understand their lives in Qinghai, especially in the

context of their desire to migrate to the cities. Since Mustafa's preferred choice of lifestyle was evidently quite different from many in contemporary China, the discussion revolved on how and why he had chosen to live the way he did. In fact, such a lifestyle was not only different; it was at odds with the predominant views and practices of those around him. Needless to say, I found this streak of ascetic, anti-modernist iconoclasm striking and intriguing, especially when much of contemporary Chinese life appeared to have capitulated to unbridled materialism.

Hence, in contrast to many of his relatives who aspired to a life in the city, Mustafa openly rejected the city and what it stood for. As illustrated by his statement above about the need to be relaxed, the stress of urban life was simply not worth it for him. He explained, "My noodle shop in Shenzhen two years ago was in the Futian district in the city centre. I left Qinghai to understand what it was like and to test the market. Business was quite good but I decided to come back since I realized it was unsuitable for me."

"I'm basically interested in our original way of life, of agriculture and sheepherding, not in the way of life promised by the market. I consider feeding the animals to be satisfying enough. That is and has been our original way of life (*yuanshi shenghuo*)."

To illustrate the richness of his present lifestyle, Mustafa mentioned that his natural surroundings provided for most of his dietary needs, adding that there was an abundance of wild geese and rabbits, and that all his vegetables were homegrown. Mahmud's father added that if he should crave other types of meat, such as beef and lamb, then his wife and son, who operated a restaurant in Qinghai's province of Xining some two hours away, could always provide it. It was owing to such a highly autonomous lifestyle that his dependence on money could drastically be kept to a minimum. Mustafa informed me that of the 600 yuan he earned monthly doing odd jobs about town, his expenses amounted to only about 100 yuan a month. And if he were ever in urgent need of money, he could simply sell off one or two of his sheep at the market, which would fetch between 1000-2000 yuan each.

Such an autonomous way of life, of course, was rendered possible by Mustafa's substantive ownership of land, all forty *mu* (1 *mu* = 1/15 ha) of it. That is to say, his ability to have access to such a sizeable plot of land provided the means with which his 'primitive' lifestyle of living off the land, sheepherding, and being close to nature, were possible. In this, it was undeniable that his 'primitivist' and ascetic

inclinations, as much as sheer good fortune, had played an important role, for Mustafa had purchased the land ten years ago for an affordable sum of 3,000 yuan per mu (one *mu* = 1/15 ha), with the entire plot costing some 120, 000 yuan. I say "inclinations" because, as observed, his wish to lead a more 'primitive' way of life was not shared by others, which inevitably resulted in there being little competition for the land and, consequently, his ability to come to own a large chunk of it at a relatively affordable price. As his cousin, Mahmud, concedes, they were not interested. Neither was any of the 400 other households to whom the government-supported option of buying land in the mountains was also offered. Obviously, the trend was to move down from the mountains, not the reverse. Gesticulating with his fingers at the mountains around us, Mahmud reminded me that the predominant desire, if not tendency, was still to move into the cities: "That's what most of the people on these mountains would generally be thinking, including those who live in surroundings much more beautiful than what it is here. Generally, if they had the financial resources, they would leave the mountains to settle down in Xining, Lanzhou and other cities. I, too, would do the same." He did.

Yet more recently, along with the speculation-fuelled boom of property prices throughout the country, the value of Mustafa's 40 mu of land had dramatically appreciated. Just a few months before I met him, a developer had offered him 800, 000 yuan for it, an offer that he declined. (He tells me that there are no plans to sell.) Nonetheless, with the value of his investment increasing more than sevenfold in ten years it is difficult to miss the fact that Mustafa had become, at least in theory if not in practice, a potentially wealthy man. Now, given his predilection for an ascetic and more authentic way of life, this was a development that was as propitious as it was unlikely. There was obviously a curious twist of fate here, for his desire to remain 'backward' by remaining closely tied to nature had paradoxically rewarded him with the financial means to 'escape' that fate. That is, by virtue of (market) forces beyond his control, his inclination towards non-acquisitiveness and non-accumulation resulted in the opposite result of his being the beneficiary to a potentially substantive fortune. On the other hand, the aspiring modernist who has rejected a life in the mountains to 'make it' in the cities was now discovering that even those lands in the mountains that s/he had sought to escape from had become unaffordable, which must raise the question of whether their efforts in the city to accumulate had reaped commensurate returns or were at all worthwhile. As Mahmud notes, "Before, when

we had the option of purchasing this land, we weren't interested; now, even if the interest were there, it's simply unaffordable." This verily underscores a central but often understated aspect of economic modernization: while economic incomes may rise in nominal terms due to the ability to participate in the increased number of monetized transactions that accompanies the modernization process, the inflation that results tends to cause incomes to fall in real terms (i.e. in terms of what the new income level can buy); yet the ideological faith in modernization as a superior way of life seldom allows a proper accounting of the cost of the process. That is, the persuasive power of the ideology of modernism prevails despite negative experiences of it. Hence, the process continues largely undisturbed.

IV. Revaluating Modernity

Note that considerations of the question of modernity are made largely on the basis of pecuniary factors – monetary revenues as opposed to costs – and seldom take into account much else. The quality of life one already has and is made to forgo in the process of augmenting one's money income, for instance, quite often passes unnoticed under the conviction that the future that is up for grabs, will be incomparably better. Faith in the modernist promise of a better life, partly on account of having greater monetary resources at one's disposal, puts paid to all doubt. Never mind the zero-sum tendency of the process. It is often forgotten/underappreciated that money is a means (of payment, unit of account, medium of exchange) because it has been instituted as that to facilitate a monetary mode of existence by the powers-that-be (state institutional apparatus). Consequently, having more money meant, increasingly, that one needed still more money as further domains of the social and natural worlds, previously readily accessible as commons, now come under the ambit of a monetized economy. In this sense, the capacity to earn more money begets the need to earn more money. This is a fact quite often underappreciated: whereas the use of money was once an option, modernism, by instituting the monetary-economy as the preponderant institution of economic reproduction and provisioning, has rendered it an imperative.

This gives us a more general insight into the nature of modernity, which is that it is a cultural project based on a blueprint of human being that is incomplete at best,

and that is illusory at worst. In short, I contend that modernity conjures up illusions of our possible futures based upon half-truths about our natures. Since it entails the prepossession of certain characteristic institutional features, modernity is a claim and a project that implicates the notions of development, temporality, and spatiality.

According to its logical scheme, one's 'arrival' is marked only upon having become 'modern', which is signified by evidence of having developed a series of characteristic institutions. In their absence, one is in the category of the 'primitive', 'pre-modern' and 'not yet'. But according to the standard narrative of modernization, not all is hopeless since through 'development', the best is yet to be. Through development, one becomes modern, and in so doing, a people's potential is realized: they are said to be delivered from the category of the 'not-yet' and so enter History. Modernisation thus holds out the promise of self-realisation by way of development through time. 'Time' is the parameter that separates the 'pre-modern' from the 'modern'; and its passage sees to a people's arrival at modernity. Built into this narrative of modernity, then, is an inevitable teleology of development, a teleology that not only links the present with the future, but that carries with it the promise that the 'modern' future would be 'better' than anything preceding it. This returns us to the above observations about economic modernization and modernity more generally: just as the belief in the association between urban employment and higher cash earnings leads many to flock to the cities without a second thought as to the concomitant and overall costs of such an action, the messianic conviction in the superiority of modern life leads many to its fervent pursuit without a true accounting of the consequences, which are invariably considerable. Such is the power of modernity: its seductiveness resides in its teleology of a better future, which is largely illusory.

But this is still to leave unaddressed the question about the institutional constituents of modernity. Indeed, what are they and who gets to decide on them? It is here that, as I argued earlier (see Chapters One and Two), modernity finds its inextricable connection to Western power and Eurocentrism. It is in this regard that I have also considered the spatio-cultural as a parameter implicated in the project of modernity. Hence, not only is modernity believed to entail a time element, unfolding with the progression of time, it does so in adherence to a spatio-cultural referent that is the West. As Marx has noted in the preface to *Das Capital*, Volume 1: "The country that is more developed industrially, only shows to the less developed, the

image of its own future." Invariably, modernity tends everywhere to develop with reference to the historical experience of the West, which accounts for why it is inevitably Eurocentric. In other words, while modernity manifests in distinct and particular forms across different places subject to the cultural idiosyncrasies of time and place, I contend that these are but sub-species of a genus, variants of a cultural archetype whose origins/birthplace we have traced to the West. The question of who gets to determine the institutional content of modernity thus seems rhetorical. Posing the question in the present tense tends also to be misleading, for this is a historical issue that has already been decided. As argued (see Chapter Two), the ideological seeds of modernity were sowed in the course of the religious and cultural revolution that occurred between 1600 and 1800 in Europe; it is this same permutation of ideas that has subsequently set into motion the modernist transformations of the rest of the world. Given this, it is no accident that the West (perhaps a banal but still accurate description) became commercially, politically and culturally hegemonic over the ensuing four hundred years. The West has been referred to as the 'core' of the world-system largely to signify its (erstwhile) status as the center of the capitalist world, but I would add that it is the 'core' for other historically-enduring reasons, not least of which is the fact that it remains the fount of discourses – 'master discourses' - about what it means to be fully human. The West is also the 'core' of the world system in its ability to enforce its epistemic hegemony. This is the 'soft' side of Western hegemony, its 'soft-power'. Let us now turn to addressing the contents of modernity.

What did Western control and dominance of the modernist agenda mean in terms of the content of that agenda? At a practical level, it implied that a society would be judged to be supposedly modern or backward by the nature of its political, economic and cultural institutions. For instance, since Western economic modernisation was accomplished by way of a country undergoing a transformation in its dominant modes of production, evolving from agriculture to industry to finance in what is supposedly a progression from 'backward' to more 'advanced' economic activities, it follows that economies dominated by agricultural production have had to wear the stigma of 'backwardness'. Indeed, it is this modernist-inspired sentiment of backwardness (*luohou*) that is invoked when the topic of the countryside, farming and rural life is broached. This was amply revealed in my discussions with Mahmud, but since it was also demonstrated in countless other conversations I had with others

in various parts of the country, there seems good reason to consider it a widely held, even dominant, view in China. In any case, it is the preponderance of such a modern view of progress, of backward and advanced, of the undeveloped and developed, that would seem to express itself in what has been conspicuous in our research until this point, namely, the intensification of rural-to-urban migration throughout the country over the past three decades. This flow does not only occur inter-provincially, as evidenced by Mahmud's own migration from Qinghai to Shenzhen; even in a *xian* such as Minhe, there is a similar structure of migration, marked by a continuous movement of people from the mountains to the towns below. Indeed, it is the aspiration to leave behind the supposed backwardness of the mountains that made land so readily available, which in turn enabled Mustafa to acquire so much of it a decade ago. To sum, there is a conspicuous and irrepressible urge in today's China to pursue a 'developed' or 'advanced' lifestyle, and it is believed to take the form of an urban or urban-like existence.

Nonetheless, I have been trying to argue that the 'advanced' life as conceived as such is based on a Eurocentric and modernist prejudice against rural and agrarian life. And the tremendous rural-to-urban flow of people, numbering roughly 440 million in the 30 years since 1979 (Chan 2011) is in part a manifestation of this ideological bias. [Indeed, this rural-urban exodus can very well be said to be the embodiment of aspirational modernity.] Yet, when the nature of my interlocutors' lives in rural Qinghai can be contrasted with what I witnessed in urban Shenzhen (see Chapter Six), this formulation of 'development' becomes questionable.

Hence, whereas work in the countryside might have been hard and labour-intensive, as it is widely thought to be, it was largely unstructured and one was generally 'free' to plan the day according to whim. Mustafa's life on the mountain, in particular, was not laborious but seemed carefree. As he boasted - and as I duly witnessed during my stay with him - his day's work of cutting grass in the fields to prepare as fodder for his sheep was accomplished within half-an-hour. Then with the help of an electric chaff cutter, he took approximately another fifteen minutes to reduce the grass stalks to chewable bits, before bringing and depositing the proceeds in the troughs next to the sheep-pen. All in, the task of feeding his sheep was completed in approximately an hour every day. "This is all that I need to do every day," he beamed to me with pride. Typically, he would then settle down for breakfast and after that, his day would be free. He would sometimes take a walk

around the acreage before having lunch, which would normally be followed by a two-hour nap in the afternoon. When he awoke, he would sometimes head outdoors again and spend the afternoon hunting wild geese. At times, he would occasionally run into shepherds from the village bringing their sheep up the mountain to graze. He usually knew them and so would engage them in conversation.

On one occasion when Mustafa and his elderly interlocutor were conversing in a dialect that I did not understand, the clarity of their speech suddenly made me realize how peaceful the environment really was. There were no chugging engines or wailing sirens in the distance, background noises that I had come to consider normal in my everyday urban environment. The clarity of their voices was a result of the absence of any such noise. Indeed, their voices resonated because of the silence. This silence, in turn, rendered a certain timelessness to the moment. A mystical relationship exists between silence and the consciousness of being and time. It is, after all, in quietude that one becomes more aware of oneself as well as others; it is in such circumstances that one begins to take note of the environment and one's relation to it. One finds in silence the conditions to discover what noise - visual as well as aural - typically obscures. Hence, as they chatted and watched the sheep graze, I stood looking into the horizon, mesmerized by the deep, encompassing silence and the sight of the vast expanse populated by the 'things' of nature: animals, trees, the parched earth and the clear blue sky. In the circumstances, one did not nor could feel too harried. Indeed, the two men conversed as if oblivious to the passing of time.

Some would consider them to be wasting time or idling, not unlike watching grass grow. In contrast, we have typically been conditioned to be goal-oriented and, consequently, are perennially pressed for time. Our lives are motivated by a certain means-ends instrumentality and dictated by the rhythms of task accomplishment. In our purposiveness, we move from executing one set of tasks to the next, measuring our efficiency in terms of how quickly it takes us to complete them. As a recent Shenzhen billboard puts it, 'Time is money, efficiency is life'. It is a posture that coheres with Mahmud's perception of his own life in Shenzhen, which he aptly likens to being on a highway where he has to keep pace or be ploughed under.

Nevertheless, for those of us accustomed to maintaining the relentlessly tight schedules of routine modern existence, such a disregard for time may be disconcerting. After all, according to the teleology of modernism, time supposedly

bequeaths to us a sense of who we are (i.e. our sense identity). We are 'modern' or 'backward', always in relation to time. But more concretely, time measures the success with which we succeed or fail; it is an index of our 'efficiency'. I recall Mahmud's explanation to me earlier in Shenzhen about why even the shepherd needed money: "He will be too slow and inefficient compared with others if he does not even have money for bus-fare." But seeing how relaxed and unperturbed the two men before me were, I wondered to myself: Where would he be rushing off to? Why would the shepherd be in a hurry? Why would he need to be in a hurry?

At another level, 'time' is the parameter we associate with 'producing' and 'doing'; it is the constraint that stands against our ability to 'get things done'. For many of us, we are disciplined by the clock because of our participation as workers in the capitalist workday. On that score, it should be noted that regardless of how much we may object to being a part of such a system, our complicity may ultimately be inevitable. This is the case because the all-encompassing nature of the monetary capitalist system implies that our ability to reproduce our physical existence is, at least to some degree, predicated on our participation in the system. It would thus seem reasonable to say that our notions of time are significantly derived from the fundamental human predicament of having to reproduce itself under the conditions of capitalism. 'Time is money' precisely because the latter is obtained in exchange for labour-time, the provision of one's labour for a given period of the day. In this sense, time translates into potential money earnings; it could be spent working for money as opposed to its alternative, from which no pecuniary payoff occurs. In this fashion, time becomes a commodity in a monetary economy. Additionally, because time is intimately linked to our work of economic provisioning, it inherently confers a life purpose and structures the rhythms and patterns of our lives. I submit that our 'productivist' tendencies appear to have been similarly derived.

It follows that as a result of our conditioning under such circumstances, the sense of 'not working', 'not doing', and not having 'anything to do', is particularly harrowing for many. The thought of letting time whittle away by watching sheep, as in the scene above, is for many of us, anathema. We are afraid of 'wasting time' and being 'unproductive'. For many, it is unthinkable not to have the pressure of time bearing down. Since commodified time is inherently disciplinary in that it structures the workday by wedding the labourer to his job, a sudden 'freeing up of time', as occurs when the worker is relieved of his employment, can engender fear. Not only

does the inherent organizational structure of one's life disintegrate when liberated from the constraints of time, often the identities bound up with the erstwhile economic preoccupations also crumble. This symbiotic relationship between commodified time, being, and the formation of modern identity, is perhaps why the prospect of life in a world not subjected to the compulsions of time is sometimes greeted with a mixture of fear and dread. If our long-term conditioning has disciplined us into paying obeisance to the clock - additionally, if a sense of purpose is derived from activities that are accomplished by the compulsion of time - it may well be that the absence of such pressure results in ambivalence. One may simply not know what to do if freed from temporal constraints; yet there is the instinct that one ought to be 'doing something' out of a sense of guilt about 'wasting time'. A sense of listlessness persists.

I have often been asked, rhetorically, not least by parents with regard to the raising of the young: "How is anyone going to accomplish anything without pressure, without coercion?" This is the same question Mahmud had asked with respect to the apocryphal shepherd who has grown accustomed to his lifestyle (cf. end of Chapter Six). It was argued that, after having become accustomed to the freedoms and autonomy associated with his profession, the shepherd is content. He harbours no greater ambition and chooses to remain as he is. As Mahmud puts it, there is no 'progress', since the shepherd's material well-being is the same today as it was yesterday; should his worldview be maintained, it will remain the same into the future. Of course, in the materialist economism of our times, it is easily forgotten that human well-being is constituted by more than the mere possession of things. The modern ethos is 'to have', and to have in abundance. Since possession in a capitalist economy is generally possible only through money-denominated consumption/exchange, which in turn is only realisable via commoditized work, the condition of 'wanting' and its realization in 'having' is linked indirectly by the act of laboring for wages, followed by the act of consumption by using those wages. Therefore, the general condition of 'having' implies 'doing' and 'producing' for 'exchange' (rather than 'use'). Herein, perhaps, lies the reason for the 'productivist' inclination and the concomitant concern with 'efficiency'; there is always the looming fear that one is not 'doing enough' in the time given. Indeed, with one anxiety laid upon another, it is easy to forget that life is to be 'lived', not drowned in the potentially endless preoccupations of 'doing'. In contrast with this, an

observation - if not actual experience - of Mustafa's minimalist way of life affords us a remarkably simple yet invaluable discovery: the purpose of life is not 'to have', as the modern marketing message tries to have us believe; it is simply 'to be' and 'to experience' life in its fullness.

It is apparent that this insight radically challenges common Eurocentric perceptions of being, time, and development, and their associated ontologies. Indeed, insofar as it represents a line of thought and praxis that runs against developmentalist, modernist, and civilizational philosophies, it explains why we are able to witness Mustafa's ability to be so content despite what appears to be material paucity. It explains why, in contrast to Mahmud and the majority of the Chinese population, he does not harbor an aspiration for modern life. Concomitantly, he makes no effort to strive, nor does he appear bothered by any notions of progress or regress. Additionally, he is not anxious about having to give others the impression that he is successful. As a matter of fact, if the explanation for his return from Shenzhen is to be believed, it is apparent that Mustafa objects to the nature of modern life because he considers its unquantifiable costs, particularly the stresses and pressures that it generates, detrimental to mental and emotional health. As he told me, "I was constantly in a bad mood. I did not have enough rest but still had to be up early to open the shop and to stay up late to close it almost every day. One year was enough. It is no wonder why city folk have all sorts of emotional and psychological problems. It is why they're unhappy, why some go insane, and why some commit suicide. I experienced it and so was very aware of it. I had enough and so I left."

Having witnessed the autonomy he is able to enjoy at home and having personally experienced the bountiful natural environment that he calls home, it is understandable why he considers the working and living conditions of the city intolerable. After all, it was not that he did not know of a qualitatively better way of life. Nor was it that he did not have access to such a way of life. With access to land and the means and freedom to cultivate and hunt for food in Minhe, Mustafa had all the constituent elements of what, by his standards, made life meaningful. Moreover, he would not have considered his expectations to be unreasonable, for it was seen as a perpetuation of the way of life of his ancestors; he was merely planning to continue with a tradition. As he had explained it, he had relocated to the mountain so that he could live as his forefathers had. "This is our original, primal way of life. (*yuanshi shenghuo*)," he said nonchalantly, hoping to dismiss or at least downplay the notion

that his decision was somehow extraordinary.

V. 'Well-being' and the Meaning of Life

Despite seeming to prefer understatement, Mustafa's decision to opt for the 'original and primitive way of life' was resounding in the iconoclasm it implied. It was certainly outside the boundaries of 'normal' by the standards of the new China. And it was significant in that it radically challenged mainstream conceptions of what the meaning of life was. More importantly, at the level of praxis, Mustafa's way of life broke radically from the established and ongoing trajectory of Chinese modernization, which may aptly be personified by the rural peasant migrating to the city to work his (or her) way up the aspirational socio-economic hierarchy. Hence, because he held up rural existence as 'meaningful' in opposition to the conventional wisdom that disparaged it as 'backward', he was necessarily turning the dream of Chinese modernization - and in effect, Eurocentrism - on its head. It was an act of non-conformity that was audacious.

For our purposes, it brings into stark relief the disparity of interpretations about what makes for a *meaningful life*. We see here at least two interpretations: one that is purveyed by the master-discourse that has been greatly shaped by Eurocentrism and that is personified by Mahmud, and the other, a counter-cultural variant of which Mustafa's way of life was exemplified. Since both interpretations can arguably be said to be similar to the extent that they revolved a wish *to consolidate one's well-being* - physical, psychological, and emotional - a more careful analysis to tease out their differences is necessary. Such an analysis follows below.

Although the notion of 'well-being' is understandably a widely shared human aspiration in the sense that we all hope to be well, what is said to constitute 'well', as much as our 'physiological, psychological and emotional needs' is subject to variation. All this is unsurprising, for it is the very nature of human variability that what is 'well' for some may turn out to be infelicitous for others. By a similar line of reasoning, that which may be considered adequate for meeting one's 'needs' might be deemed to be insufficient for another. What is 'good'- as much as what is considered to be a 'need'- is therefore extremely subjective and constitutes terrain of considerable contestation. We consequently have a situation over which considerable disagreement could exist: whereas some find it gratifying to watch sheep graze, others simply deem it a 'waste of time'.

Still, notwithstanding individual differences in the evaluation of what 'well-being' should consist, our essential and common human qualities simultaneously imply baseline physiological as well as psycho-emotional needs that are satiable within certain limits. Hence, for all our individual 'differences', our common humanity entails a certain degree of 'sameness' as well. We are endowed with natural physio-psycho-emotional limits that have upper bounds so that our differences, although undoubtedly real, are also inherently constrained. This is particularly the case at the level of our human physiology: more food is better only until a certain point. While it is important, then, to recognize that we would invariably disagree as to what constitutes a 'good life', it is just as important recognizing that beyond a certain threshold, such differences cease being a matter of physical *need* and become objects of desire or *want*. And desires or wants could in theory expand indefinitely; they are principally without limits.

Since such differences are a function of desire, I am suggesting that they are socially determined rather than natural givens that are physiologically necessary. The recognition of the limits to human difference is important exactly because it allows us to distinguish between 'needs' and 'wants'. On this scale, 'needs' can be thought of as being prescribed by physiological imperatives and are inherently limited whereas 'wants', shaped rather arbitrarily by matters of affect and psychology, are potentially infinite, as observed above. With this distinction, we are able to speak more analytically about the differences that separate the rural vis-à-vis urban ways of life and the corresponding versions of 'well-being' they suggest. Especially with the benefit of having experienced them both, we can compare and analyse the fundamental orientations that these two modes of life imply.

Even though it has been amply demonstrated in our study till this point, it bears repeating that Chinese rural life is, by and large throughout China, not considered to figure in visions of either a meaningful life or personal well-being. This view was expressed earlier by Mahmud but is echoed by Zhang Tianyong of the Party School of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, who assumes that it is the 'dream' of peasants to become urbanized; he writes, "Hundreds of millions of countrymen are dreaming of becoming townsmen." (2014: 8). Indeed, we have seen rather explicitly, self-conscious as well as unselfconscious renunciations of rural life as 'backward' and 'uncultured'. In the Chinese social imagination, the 'countryside' and the 'peasant' synonymously evoke derision for what they represent. Mahmud very

automatically associated rural-life with *ku*, suffering. We have seen in our study that if one were a peasant in the countryside, the compulsion has been to try to change that fate by migrating to the cities. Because of the 'backwardness' and poverty that they synonymously imply, it is strongly and widely felt that the countryside as a geographic location and the peasantry as a social class have to be transcended. Naturally, this is not only a Chinese bias but is generally consistent with the modern temperament. Even Marx, so widely known as one of the more vociferous detractors of capitalist modernity, harboured considerable equivocation about the peasantry's ability to progress, to say nothing about the undisguised contempt he seemed to reserve for them. This is demonstrated in the *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, where he writes about the French peasantry as follows (italics mine):

> The small-holding peasants form a vast mass, the members of which live in similar conditions but without entering into manifold relations with one another. Their mode of production isolates them from one another instead of bringing them into mutual intercourse. The isolation is increased by France's bad means of communication and by the poverty of the peasants. *Their field of production, the small holding admits of no division of labor in its cultivation, no application of science and, therefore, no diversity of development, no variety of talent, and no wealth of social relationships.* Each individual peasant family is almost self-sufficient; it itself directly produces the major part of its consumption, and thus acquires its means of life more through exchange with nature than in intercourse with society.
>
> A small holding, a peasant and his family; alongside them another smallholding, another peasant and another family. A few score of these make up a village, and a few score of villages make up a Department. In this way, the great mass of the French nation is formed by simple addition of homologous magnitudes, *much as potatoes in a sack form a sack of potatoes*. Insofar as millions of families live under economic conditions of existence that separate their mode of life, their interests, and their culture from those of other classes and put them in hostile opposition to the latter they form a class. Insofar as there is merely a local interconnection among these small-holding peasants and the identity of their interests begets no community, no national bond, and no political organization among them, they do not form a class. They are consequently incapable of enforcing their class interest in their own name, whether through a parliament or through a convention.
>
> *They cannot represent themselves, they must be represented.* Their representative must at the same time appear as their master, as an authority over them, as an unlimited government power that protects them against the other classes and sends them rain and sunshine from above. The political influence of the small holding peasants, therefore, finds

its final expression in the executive power subordinating society to itself. (cited in Feuer1959: 338).

Marx's opinion of French small-holding peasants as being as helpless as 'a sack of potatoes' who demonstrate no inclination for science, 'no diversity of development' and who are unable to 'represent themselves' smacks of the usual modernist derision for the countryside and its peasants. But leaving such prejudices aside, it is more serious that such a view could quite simply be erroneous. Our experience reveals, for example, that the claim that small peasant-holdings 'did not admit a wealth of relationships' is simply not borne out by the Chinese context. The findings of my ethnography in Qinghai directly challenge Marx's claim here: they underscore a sociality that is in full-flourish in traditional village-rural life. Indeed, my observations in Qinghai affirm *a la* Tonnies that *gemeinschaft* relationality is central to rural life, and that convivial social forms, if present in my residential compound in urban Shenzhen, are even more pronounced in the Qinghai countryside. This is hardly surprising. By being at all times reliant on communal resources and forms of social reciprocity, and in a mode of spatial organization that entails frequent face-to-face encounters, village and rural life necessarily involve the constant negotiation, formation, and consolidation of kinship, neighbourly, and community relations. Contra Marx, therefore, rural life necessarily and inevitably involves a 'wealth of relationships' or a 'mutuality of being'. It is apparent that Marx did not consider the peasantry capable of being progressive, much less revolutionary, and for this reason, vested his hopes of revolutionary change in the working class, his 'chosen people'.

But it is here, precisely because of such widespread urban and certainly Eurocentered prejudices against the countryside that our experience in Qinghai is valuable, for it is a site to evaluate their appropriateness. Our experience in Qinghai, after all, appears to call into question all popular notions of what a meaningful life consists. And, more than that, it provides us with an opportunity to critically re-evaluate and perhaps offer suggestions as to what it ought to be.

Hence, whereas there is no doubt that a meaningful life in China is broadly believed to be associated with some generic Eurocentric concept of being modern, our fieldwork has enabled us to observe what this means in its practice. We have observed in the life of our key interlocutor, Mahmud, for instance, how this putatively good life was pursued, involving his migration from Qinghai to

Shenzhen and his contributions toward running the family's relatively successful noodle eatery. This has consequently translated into his ability to purchase a car, a modern apartment in downtown Minhe, and also a van in Shenzhen. In addition, Mahmud tells me that he and his brother, Ali, have been able to remit enough money to their parents in Minhe to care for their children. Their children are thus able to attend the best local schools and, presumably, to avoid being teased by their peers and teachers for being needy, which had been a primary concern.

In short and in line with the Modernist narrative, Mahmud's story can be seen to be one of success. He has made good his move to Shenzhen, obtaining the financial means to acquire the many material and symbolic accoutrements of modernity: downtown apartment, automobiles (hence, private transportation), private schooling for the children, and the ubiquitous technological symbol of the times, the so-called 'smart-phone'. The distinguishing feature of these items is the fact that they are commodities, things produced to be bought and sold in the market requiring considerable amounts of money for their acquisition. They are consumer items and in his ability to consume them, he has demonstrated that he has somehow 'made it' within the Modern scheme.

It is important to note that Mahmud's migration to the city had simultaneously transformed him into a consumer at a level that he could only have imagined previously. His powers of consumption had previously been curbed because their money incomes had been limited, diminished by among other things, the fact that they were part of a rural economy that had not been fully marketised, where the community's resources had not yet been completely privatized and commodified. Meanwhile it is undeniable that consumption is the *sine qua non* of a meaningful life in modern capitalist society. Consumption is the means by which we acquire the 'luxuries' that in turn confer meaning to our lives. At the same time, at the material level, it is by way of consumption that capitalists' profit-expectations are realized. As their inventories of goods are run down, they are encouraged to undertake further investment and production, thereby allowing the cyclical process of accumulation to continue. Indeed, the systemic necessity of consumption for the reproduction of the capitalist system is the cause for why the marketing industry expends such tremendous efforts bombarding us with advertisements. Their aim is to elicit a sense of need on our part, perhaps, more accurately, to confound us with an inability to distinguish 'wants' from 'needs': or more accurately still, to render

‘wants’ as ‘needs’. The ultimate purpose of the advertising message is to urge us to think that a ‘better life’ is within our grasp, it is ours if only we buy the latest model techno-gadget or other such inanities. Such is the nature of capitalism’s dependence on mass-consumption for its perpetuation. At any rate, although Mahmud may be considered to be somewhat of a testament of success, we know that his maintenance of it is contingent on his ongoing ability to earn a commensurate monetary income. That is, he was required to continue selling his goods and services in the monetary economy to sustain the Modern lifestyle he had attained. Consequently, whereas his search for money first prompted him to leave the Minhe countryside for Shenzhen city, his wish to maintain his newly-acquired lifestyle meant that his life would have to continue being wedded to the marketplace.

Mahmud underscores his predicament as follows, “Now that I’m on the highway, there’s no way to stop.” The metaphor of the highway is apt, for it connects the modern and, certainly, urban life with notions of speed, time, movement and irrepressible progress - all notions that affirm the tautological slogan that ‘time is money, efficiency is life’. Hence, Modern life is invariably consumerist and pecuniary-oriented. Logically, it can be sustained only if one remained employed as a participant in the money-economy, broadly as either a worker or entrepreneur, to earn an income. Since a life that is subjected to the capriciousness of market forces is one in which subsistence is rendered uncertain, one has no choice but, as Mahmud has put it, ‘to keep running’ in order to keep pace with economic and social change in modern China; hence, the comparison with being on a highway.

Yet the drawbacks of such a life, supposedly deemed to be meaningful according to the telos of Modernity, are apparent. A life in which subsistence - or the sustained reproduction of that life itself - is precarious and that is subject to the rationalizing pressures of time and efficiency is one that is emotionally and psychologically deleterious. After all, the fundamental material conditions that sustain life such as shelter, food, clothing, healthcare, and education should be readily accessible, for they are ‘needs’ as we have outlined above. No less important, perhaps, are non-material and affective factors such as love, caring and empathy, which induce a general sense of psychological and emotional well-being for those receiving them - as much as those dishing it out. Given their status as ‘needs’ and their fundamental importance in sustaining life, these critical elements that render life possible should be readily accessible within the social order. If not,

they will induce anxiety and stress, which in turn generate all manner of psychological and emotional imbalances. It would appear then that Mahmud's notion about the prospect of having 'to keep running', of being perpetually "on the highway" is anything but beneficial. A life where uncertainty is institutionalized by design can hardly be meaningful. But we do not need to come to such an evaluation analytically, for the consequences of such a way of life have been made plain in the details of our ethnography. We now conclude from such evidence to help with our analysis.

VI. Ethnographic Analysis

To recap, Mahmud's move to Shenzhen had separated both he and his wife from their children for much of the past eight to nine years. The same may be said about the predicament of his brother and his spouse. This separation began when his children were very young and resulted at one stage in their not wanting to acknowledge them both as parents. There was, of course, also the hard work and interminable hours – the sixteen-hour days they have to work to operate the eatery. There was the issue of not being home, being removed from the milieu of their traditional religious and cultural practices and to instead have to live among the dominant and largely secular Han, in whose cultural domains they did not and could not fully participate. Finally, being in the city also meant having to put up with a degraded, sub-optimal natural environment and to be without recourse to the inherently therapeutic experience of being in feral, unadulterated nature. (Those of us who live in cities would be familiar with its various bonuses and shortcomings).

In contrast, we may compare our observations of the Shenzhen urban experience with those that were made of rural Minhe, Qinghai. We have seen that in Minhe, Mahmud lived among immediate and extended family in more or less consanguineal arrangements. The fact that Mahmud's father's property was directly adjacent to his uncle's compound meant that there were continuous interactions between immediate and extended family members on an everyday basis. As observed, it meant that the children were seldom ever without other child-companions. Moreover, given the variation of ages among the children, the context was ideal for cross-generational socialization, as younger children learned to interact with those older, and vice versa. Consanguineal living also meant that adults often had to look after children who were not 'theirs': siblings and cousins

were constantly being called upon to look after one another's children in the tacit understanding that all help rendered was mutually reciprocal. There was no hesitation calling on one another for help in other matters as well: sometimes to assist with shopping, other times for help to repair a broken tool, and still others, to borrow a shovel. As managing everyday life required the generous dispensation of assistance mutually, we witnessed bonds of kinship and community constantly being affirmed and strengthened. Such was perhaps a fitting demonstration of 'kinship', or what was described above as the 'mutuality of being'. It is the social condition in which one's life is extensively interwoven into the lives of others. For Mahmud, then, 'home' in Qinghai was a place where he was embedded within an intimate 'community' of dense kinship networks. It was also a sociality that was partially simulated and that existed in traces among his employees in the urban context of Shenzhen: but that was obviously not quite of the same order.

Much has already been said about Qinghai's natural environment, and I shall not belabor the point here. Suffice it to say, since an apprehension of nature is most profound when experienced, I have used a phenomenological approach to attempt to capture the redemptive impact that the natural environment has on one's well-being. It is by (re-experiencing and being (re-)embedded in nature that one can begin to appreciate the sense of loss resulting from our estrangement from it. On the other hand, the process of modernisation has very literally helped to turn this estrangement into a reality. Through urbanization, modernisation has engineered spaces to maintain a safe distance between the social and the natural, the civilized and the primitive, the modern and the backward, helping thus to give the erroneous human-nature dichotomy the appearance of a *fait accompli*. Much of the natural world may already be socialized; and, indeed, much of our own natures may have already been de-naturalised, but this is hardly immutable. With the help of Mustafa's story, my phenomenological account of Minhe's natural environment has sought to convey, albeit incompletely (since nature is ineffable), the regenerative capacities of nature, along with our innate inclination to be restored by them. It reveals that even a slight experience of nature's bounty – the quality of silence included - can initiate a return to psychological equanimity.

We may therefore conclude by saying that the difference between the urban and the rural can be signified in terms of the conceptual and ontological difference that separates 'wants' from 'needs'. We have discovered that many, if not most, in

today's China associate a life of meaning with urban life and, conversely, 'backwardness' with the rural countryside. What is revealed in our ethnography is that urban life is construed desirably because it represents a site of 'mobility' ('freedom'?) from any notion of limits - material, technological or even ideational. This representation of urbanity is overblown, no doubt in large part as a result of the advertising industry I alluded to above. But that is not the point here. Illusion or not, the city is imagined as a site where life finds meaning: homes are grand and lavishly furnished, cars glitter, and life-partners satisfy popular beauty standards and are immaculately decked out in the latest fashions from the West.

There is actually some conviction in the belief that such a dreamlike urban existence is indeed a living, if not livable, reality. Take the automobile, for instance, and its representation in advertisements that to a greater or lesser degree affects popular imagination about what a car ultimately is. In advertisements, it is made out that people in their tuxedo suits and ball gowns actually have the pleasure of driving their cars on endless and open freeways by the sea, their coiffured hair flowing in the wind. There is a literal association between the car and freedom. This vision detracts from the more realistic image of driving as a mundane, sometimes necessary act – that is, as simply a way of trying to get from point A to B. It is certainly the reality that, more often than not, even accomplishing the task of getting between two points in the city in a car is laboured. In most instances, there are no panoramic views of the sea or a sense of 'getting away' but, in contrast, an immediate and pressing reality of being stifled in an endless sea of cars under a blanket of noise and air pollution. Yet the images of angst that result from being stuck in traffic, or from being unable to find a space to park, are – thanks again to the machinations of advertising – obviously omitted in the car's representation. As such, typical imaginations of the motor car tend to be overwhelmingly positive, for it becomes (incorrectly) associated with the freedoms that it brings. It is only such idyllic but illusory images - illusory for being unrepresentative - that are sold to us. Hence, as the car is mis-represented/marketed primarily as a symbol of individual autonomy and freedom and ultimately becomes an object of our desires, we inevitably confuse 'wants' with 'needs'; that is, we begin to classify our 'wants' as 'needs'. Meanwhile, much of the imagination of urban life as meaningful seems to be centred upon the belief that such desires, commonly associated with urban existence, can be realised there. Hence, perhaps, the reason for the association of

‘mobility’ and ‘freedom’ with the city.

But it is important to note that such ‘freedoms’ that the city purportedly represents is contingent upon having the means to sustain a way of life that revolves around consumption. One is only ‘free’ from technological or material want if s/he has the means to pay. As a matter of fact, mere subsistence in the city requires one to have the monetary wherewithal to pay since food and shelter were commodities like any other. On the other hand, we have seen such subsistence pressures to be less in the countryside. In virtue of the fact that there is always land to potentially grow food on, the reliance on consumption in reproducing subsistence is not as complete in the rural countryside. And even if rent for housing had to be paid, they would be considerably lower than in the city. In the case of our interlocutors in Qinghai, these were not concerns since they already had access to food and shelter; that is, their basic needs were already being met.

Given these circumstances, it is apparent what the idea of urban life as ‘good’ and ‘meaningful’ entails. It is basically a life centred upon the consumption of commodities. However, since the city was generally more densely populated than the countryside, space was typically scarce and commanded a premium; similarly, food had generally to be imported from without, where land was cheaper. All this meant that life’s ‘needs’, the most important of which includes food and shelter, would be highly commoditised in the city; with the price being higher, the greater the scarcity. This invariably meant incessant pressure on the urban resident/citi-zen to earn his keep through his participation in the formal (monetary) economy. As subsistence or the ability to reproduce oneself was dependent upon the means to pay, one was relentlessly compelled to find monetary sources of income and ways to augment it. In this manner, life in the city was akin to being on a treadmill, or as Mahmud said it, ‘on a highway’. That was clearly the reason why Mahmud and his wife had to keep their Shenzhen eatery opened sixteen hours of the day, virtually everyday of the year, not to mention having to be away from their families in Minhe for most of that time. Needless to say, this was and could only be a high-pressure lifestyle. Things were good when business was brisk but anxiety began to set in when business slowed, even for a day. Now, this aspect of urban life, of having to worry about reproducing one’s existence, seldom featured in popular imaginations of the ‘good life’. (On this score, it is interesting to note just how often advertisements portray ordinary people at work rather than

"successful-looking" people indulging in activities of leisure, which was theoretically possible only as a consequence of their having worked.). That one could eat, clothe and shelter oneself was simply assumed away almost as if it were not part of the equation.

This is not to say that 'work' was unimportant for the reproduction of the system; on the contrary, we have noted that wage work was the basis upon which the 'good life' could be realized. Consumption of the things that made life 'good' came from money earned through the remuneration of paid work. But 'work' was indeed an inconvenience from which the monetary system had to draw attention away from, since the system made no guarantees about securing it for us. In a market society, one was almost entirely subject to the whims of forces beyond one's control, but at the same time, one remained entirely responsible for obtaining the pecuniary wherewithal to survive. Hence, from the perspective of those marketing the system of commodities to us, 'work' or how one obtains the means to consume is not their concern; only that we ultimately consume or maintain our desire to do so. Unsurprisingly, the 'good life' that is being envisioned and pursued – because it is that version most heavily promoted to us through the mass media – is one that is focused exclusively on consumption. The ends of being able to consume are drawn into focus whereas the means, often of sheer toil and drudgery, are obscured. And in the meantime, those of us who have internalised this message seem readily to go along with it, quite oblivious to the toll that it takes on the other - certainly no less important - aspects of our lives. If one had the opportunity to pursue and live the 'good life', what more could one ask?

But it is precisely here that we see an indictment of this as a supposedly meaningful life. This so-called 'good life' is predicated almost exclusively on a materialist cosmology that shoehorns the mysterious wholeness of life into the narrow confines of its material domain. This is done to the utter neglect of life's non-material dimensions that, incidentally, are integral to making us human. We have in the present and previous chapters noted what this includes: it is the relational ties – the sociality, the 'mutuality of being' – that crucially connect us to one another, but that is blithely overlooked by virtue of being ineffable and unquantifiable. Marx seemed to recognize this problem when he spoke of 'commodity fetishism' as the confusion that exists under capitalism when relationships are fundamentally believed as being between things/commodities

rather than people. There was an exaltation of the things rather than the social relations of life. Hence, Mahmud's pursuit of the 'good life' in Shenzhen was justified on the grounds that he did not have a choice and that the material rewards would somehow outweigh the social/emotional toll that resulted from his absence from home. To put it differently, the measure of life quality was reduced strictly to economic and material parameters, to his ability to acquire what we described above as more closely belonging to the category of 'wants'.

I would offer that this was a form of economism, a key symptom of Eurocentrism in so far as it was a subsumption of life by material and materialistic priorities. What appears to constitute a meaningful life, then, was simply the means to consume. It follows that what is non-material and unquantifiable, such as the emotional toll the prolonged absences of parents have on children or even on the parents themselves, tend to be neglected and underestimated. There appears to be a tendency in today's China in which the wish to 'modernize' and to increase one's material standard of living are so preponderant that the non-economic trade-offs involved are generally downplayed. Consequently, while one's aspirations are realized in the form of being able to afford more and better commodities, the unquantifiable and non-material dimensions that nonetheless nourish life, are neglected. I have already mentioned the affective ties that exist naturally between parents and children. No less important to human well-being is the need to remain connected to nature, which is inevitably attenuated in the city by virtue of modern-urban life. On that score, I have in the present chapter provided a phenomenological account of my experience in Minhe to attempt to convey just what some of the emotional benefits of such a human-nature reconnection might be.

Of course, for all the talk about the dominance of Eurocentrism, modernism and developmentism as ideologies that compose the prevailing ethos of today's China, they are not totalities from which there is no hope of escape: there is iconoclasm, dissension, and rupture too, albeit limited. Hence, whereas our ethnography in Shenzhen and Qinghai has demonstrated popular Chinese life to be dominated by an evident economism that tends towards a less-than-healthy cultivation of the individual ego, individualism and invidious comparison, we also witnessed these trends to be simultaneously offset/diminished by certain counteracting tendencies.

It was refreshing to see, for instance, that the realization that humans needed nature was far from lost. Akin to a process of modernisation-in-reverse, we

witnessed Mustafa defy societal trends by moving from the semi-urban town up to the mountains. Within the cultural milieu of twenty-first century China, this was somewhat an act of apostasy, the rejection of 'progress' in favour of 'backwardness' characterized literally by going from a lifestyle that was relatively more 'advanced' to one that was more 'backward'. Yet, in explaining his choice, Mustafa's claim that, "This is the way of our ancestors, I'm just trying to do the same," seemed to cut right through the noise of modern marketing and their enticements to reveal a profound yet simple truth, whose meaning can be expressed in the form of the following challenge to the status quo: our human needs have historically been rudimentary and limited, what more would I want?

Indeed, the utter simplicity of the way-of-life Mustafa seeks, and the unobtrusive manner in which he goes about it is loud, acerbic, and potent by virtue of its asceticism. It is a radical act of disobedience, even if it might not be self-conscious. For in its being free from want, it is a mode of life that irreverently lays bare modernism for the empty illusion that it is. Hence, we see in Mustafa's epistemic and ontological stance a striking sense of self-content, resolve, self-sufficiency and a defiance of modern ambivalences. There was, moreover, clearly a deep awareness that human physiological needs are limited and amply met by one's participation in the immediate natural environment. Mustafa seemed, furthermore, to intuit that humans needed nature. Citing his own experience, he seemed to realise that psychological equanimity came by way of being in nature; and that it was a person's interactions with the latter that s/he was emotionally and psychologically restored to health. "I feel emotionally much better this way, feeding the sheep and being able to relax in this environment. I remember my situation in the city. It was stressful everyday, and it was unending. And I noticed plenty of people who were mentally disturbed." It was something I could attest to: my visit to the mountains in Minhe afforded me an inexplicable joy beyond words.

Contra the notions of modernism, the Mustafa's perspective did not suffer from a confusion between 'needs' and 'wants', for being content meant that little else was sought beyond one's rudimentary needs. Moreover, since nature provided for the bulk of the latter, pecuniary concerns were incidental. There was no need to be frantically searching for and accumulating money since money-based consumption was kept to a minimum. As life-style expectations were low, one's limited needs were almost always met.

In contrast, because modernist notions of a meaningful life were founded upon the acquisition of commodities or 'wants', there existed a perpetual sense of dissatisfaction with one's existing lot. As one of the central tenets of the dismal 'science' of microeconomics has it, 'more is better'. No less responsible for inculcating this modern sense of dis-ease and dis-satisfaction across the psychological landscape of society is, of course, the marketing industry about which I have already critiqued in passing, for it is an industry that specialises in perpetuating a constant state of unfulfilled desire. Yet, discontent is but just one of the curses of modern life. Since 'wants' are satisfied by consumption that is at the outset afforded by paid work in the formal economy, there is the further anxiety of making sure one earns enough, if not, of ensuring that one's job is secure. So, apart from discontent, modern life under capitalism is also characterized by an unrelenting sense of uncertainty and anxiety about the future: about being and staying employed, which furnishes the means for one to eat, no less consume. Under such circumstances, the question of happiness becomes one about its possibility, since even the attainment of emotional and psychological balance/equanimity has been put into serious doubt.

And it is here that Mustafa's lifestyle seems to reveal and affirm a long-lost, if not longstanding, truism. For his way of life offers those who have been knocked into a stupor by the juggernaut of Euro-modernism much food for serious thought and, perhaps, an escape route. We see in it a philosophy/cosmology that is as perennial as the mountains he has retreated to: and it is simple. We have elaborated on it in the discussions above but highlight its essential features here as a way to conclude. Contra the central premises of modern life, a 'good', meaningful life does not consist of the pursuit of 'wants', which are potentially infinite, but resides in acknowledging that our 'needs' are limited and can reasonably be met by the bounty of nature. Notice, then, that we don't start from the niggard posture of Eurocentred materialist metaphysics whose intellectual discipline of bourgeois economics claims itself to be the 'science' of the 'allocation of scarce means (resources) among alternative ends (wants)' (Robbins, 1932), but from a nature-centred, ecological approach that recognises human needs and nature's abundant ability to provide for them. Since the latter conception is ecological insofar as it conceives of humans as being a part of nature, 'humans' are not conceived merely as 'takers' and 'nature' merely as a 'giver', but that both are

co-contributors mutually nurturing the other to maintain the sustainability of the larger web of life. As co-contributors to this life-cycle, a notion of 'limits' becomes inherent and integral to the human-nature symbiosis: there is the recognition that humans cannot 'take' from nature indefinitely without adverse consequences.

Consistent with this nature-centric view, then, is the understanding that the quality of one's life cannot simply be measured in material terms. And, concomitantly, that the pursuit of a life committed to endless pecuniary and material accumulation at the cost of physical and psychological strain, is questionable. Stated otherwise: material betterment should not occur at the expense of psychological and emotional turbulence, for since a truly good life is built upon material and psychological well-being simultaneously, the enhancement of one to the detriment of the other will necessarily still leave one's life unfulfilled.

Unwittingly and likely unbeknownst to Mustafa, his brand of 'anti-modernism' pointed the way toward an alternative that, incidentally, had its roots in the Chinese traditional setting of the rural countryside. It was a conception of life that was not just profound in its simplicity but radical in its timelessness. Indeed, as Mustafa sought to point out, "It is how our human ancestors have lived." And herein was its revolutionary thrust: the attainment of what was 'good' and 'meaningful' in life was not predicated on unrelenting change or upon a ceaseless pursuit of our endless 'wants'; it was a life already here for the taking, rendered ours as an indefeasible right, a birthright. It has been the (our) primordial human condition: and it is found, inevitably, among kith and kin, hearth and home. Meanwhile, modernism seems to send us along chasing after shadows.

In line with this, it would seem that the impressive forms of sociality I was able to witness in both Shenzhen and Minhe constitute a countervailing force to the apparent march of Eurocentrism in China. I submit that such forms of sociality, which are undergirded by a sense of kinship affinities - are consistent with the meaningful life just elaborated. These kinship-centred relations also happen to be an integral feature of traditional rural and agrarian social life. It is, as Tonnies called zit, *gemeinschaft*. Indeed, our observations have demonstrated such kinship forms of relationality tend to be stronger the more rural and less urban the environment. I would in fact offer that the convivial relations observed among urban neighbours in Shenzhen are derived from traditional rural practices. As our ethnography in Minhe reveals, neighbours in the rural countryside who were

afforded more face-to-face encounters by virtue of their living arrangements more frequently sought help from one another, resulting in the affirmation and deepening of their relations still further. Yet it would seem safe to say that hardly any Chinese person brought up and nourished on such a rich social diet would consider these relations exceptional.[25] But exceptional *and crucial* it is, for I contend that in the context of the highly individuating, socially divisive, and community-effacing tendencies of contemporary Chinese modernity, it is the sociality of Chinese traditional (read: rural and agrarian) social life that continues to sustain the possibility and meaningfulness of Chinese urban life. Despite not being conceived of as such and in fact remaining under-appreciated, the cultural resource that is signified by Chinese kinship relationality, serves as a fitting bulwark against the eviscerating effects of Eurocentric cosmology.

VII. CODA: Multiple Modernities?

With latter-day globalization giving rise to the increasing spread of Modernity throughout the world, we have witnessed efforts to pluralise and relativise the notion of Modernity. This has been more recently marked by a trend in scholarship that challenges the traditional association of Modernity with Westernisation, such as the emergence of arguments about 'other' and 'multiple modernities' (Rofel 1999, Eisenstadt 2000). Against this seemingly postmodern or postructuralist trend (for lack of a better term), I have retained the Modernisation-Westernisation identity, contending that such an identity can be sustained on the ontological grounds I established in Chapter Two. That is to say, the Modern was and remains Western in the historical and cultural ontological and sense already highlighted, being predicated on the materialist and individualist cosmology that emerged out of Europe's religious revolution in the 16th to 17th century. I believe my ethnography empirically reveals the emergence of just such a fledgling cultural ontology in today's China.

Let me elaborate. It is true that no two modernities will ever be alike: Chinese modernity will be different from Indian modernity, which will in turn differ from Western modernity. And we could refine our ethno-geographic categories and

[25] But this is in itself unsurprising: just like the fish is likely unable to apprehend the water in which it lives, people can seldom fully appreciate the extent to which the social milieu conditions their existence. This blind-spot, or lack of self-awareness, arises exactly because there is in practice no subject-object/ self-society dichotomy: the self is a part of the society from which it emerges; hence, it is shaped by the society that it is at the same time helping to shape.

multiply the variations and comparisons indefinitely by referring more specifically to modernity in Shenzhen instead of generically in China, Bangalore instead of simply India, etcetera. It is a truism that no two modernities are alike: this is true by virtue of the unique permutation of cultural, spatial and temporal circumstances extant in each local and specific instantiation of Modernity. And it is true because of the constructivist nature of much of human experience. Modernity is, as Eisenstadt (2000: 2) notes, a "story of continual constitution and reconstitution of a multiplicity of cultural programs." Grossberg (n.d.) wants to pose the problem of other modernities 'as the possibility of a multiplicity of ways of being modern', which apart from being true by being tautological, is true again by virtue of our subjective agencies in making the modern. Hence, what I understand as being said by those proposing 'other', 'multiple', or 'alternative' modernities is that all modernities are uniquely particular to the conjuncture of circumstances that are present at the time of their formation. I am sympathetic with the above authors if this is what is meant.

However, my concern is that they are invoking a partial and somewhat trivial truth, one that comes especially at the considerable expense of obscuring more than it illuminates. For in being so intent to highlight the variations of modernities according to differences in nationality, race, creed, and other specific identity-categories, such a position fails to recognize and account for what these variations ultimately share in common. Here then lies the conceptual problem in the apparatus of those making the argument about 'other', 'multiple', or 'alternative' modernities: despite all that they say about difference and multiplicities, they ironically appear to have neglected to acknowledge such complexity in the very nature of reality itself. In other words, reality is not homogenous or monolithic but ontologically stratified. This conceptual blind-spot has resulted in their mistaking the superficial differences they point to as *the* distinguishing feature across the various modernities. As such, they have seen difference in terms of identity-based categories, which undoubtedly exists at one level; yet they have not been attendant to the systematic and homogenous elements that structure those differences at a deeper ontic level[26].

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[26] The importance of appreciating the multi-dimensionality (and, hence, stratified nature) of reality has already been alluded to in Chapter One, where I discussed the distinction between 'deep' and 'surface' notions of Eurocentrism.

More worryingly, in positing 'other' and 'multiple' modernities according to different national, ethnic or cultural identity categories, there appears to be a capitulation to a certain sense of ahistoricism and aculturalism that downplays - if not completely fails to explain - where or how Modernity originated, or even what it is. Arturo Escobar (2008: 347) seems to have firmly grasped the problem: "It seems to me that in many recent anthropological works modernity is, first, redefined in a way that deprives it of historical coherence let alone unitary, social and cultural logic; and then, second, found ethnographically everywhere, always plural, changing, and contested." Indeed, the conundrum thrown up by such a pluralisation and relativisation of Modernity can be further underscored by posing the following questions: if the modernities presently existing across cultures are so unalike, so plural, and so lacking in coherence, what renders them modern? Why still refer to them as 'modern' and not by some other name? Escobar prudently suggests the necessity of 'a new balance', asking why, after all, we are "so ready still to ascribe to capitalism powerful and systematic effects, while denying modernity any coherent and dominant cultural logic." (ibid).

So, here then, to the heart of the matter: the problem of pluralist and relativist accounts of modernity is that they fail to give an account for its historical and socio-cultural origins, therefore downplaying the deep, ontological, structural and causal properties undergirding all so-called modern formations. Concomitantly, they become accounts with seemingly little explanatory power about the nature of Modernity and seem more like paeans to its many variegated, idiosyncratic and certainly local manifestations. This discounting of history leads inevitably to a failure to understand the nature of the beast. While this results epistemically in an impoverished understanding of how our world became ubiquitously modern; it more seriously leads to an apolitical, uncritical, and hence, amoral reading of modernity by glossing over the violence and exploitation that were crucial, historically, to its formation.

Hence, a relativist idea of modernity tends to celebrate the particular role of Chinese agency in bringing about Chinese modernity while it downplays the role of Western influence. Take for instance, Rofel (1999), who although acknowledging that the 'history of colonialism' has made 'modernity' a 'global phenomenon', proceeds to declare: "Discussions have led me to propose a cross-cultural approach to modernity that, as against the (aforementioned) notions that treat it as a located

imaginary, arising from and perpetuating relations of difference across an East-West divide. I am most interested in the 'other' modernities necessarily produced by those who have been the objects of the world history of the West. These other modernities are neither merely local enactments nor simply examples of a universal model." (op. cit.: xi).

I believe such sentiments derive implicitly from a meta-philosophical epistemic position consistent with the postmodern/poststructuralist posture. This orientation invokes an explicitly self-conscious emphasis on human agency, but it does so to the considerable or complete neglect of structural, systemic, and historical factors. After all, despite the emphasis about 'other' modernities being unique, how does one distinguish between 'cross-cultural translations' and 'examples of a universal model?' At what point does the 'example of a universal model' cease being just that to become a 'cross-cultural translation'? What cultural hybrids are involved in such crosses? And what are the criteria by which such judgments are made? If colonialism did indeed play a part in imposing modernity, then is it not conceivable that some degree of 'transnational homogeneity' would exist, notwithstanding the wish for 'other' modernities?

Again, it is obviously true that Chinese modernity is different from the Anglo-American variety – not only do I make a similar argument, I believe my ethnography has documented aspects of the Chinese experience to allow it to be empirically demonstrated. Still, to ignore what these supposedly different modernities share in common, and to especially appear to be celebrating Chinese agency when it was exactly the historical loss (or diminishment) of that agency that forced their hand to adopt Modernisation/Westernisation in the mid-19th century, is not only to miss what is morally objectionable about the historical development of Modernity and Capitalism, it is to fail in social analysis. In this regard, the move to relativise Modernity appears akin to whitewashing the 'original sin' of the Western Modern prototype just because that sin has been multiplied to render modernity the inescapable curse of all humankind. Indeed, the fact that the entire world has become – or is in the process of becoming - Modern does not make Modernity any less ethically questionable, and so does not absolve us of giving a moral critique of it. As Ci Jiwei (1994: 25-6) has sought to remind us, "It is arguable that China might have developed capitalism on its own initiative, in which case what would have happened would not be perceived as Westernization… Be that as it may, China's actual

transformation occurred under, if it was not exactly set in motion by, the Western impact. It made a world of difference, both to the actual process of change and to the perception of its nature, that what might (or might not) have happened voluntarily happened under coercion, that what might (or might not) have occurred through the dynamic of domestic factors occurred under the overwhelming influence of foreign powers."

Hence, I submit that while relativist and pluralist theories of modernity might wish to highlight the autonomy of Chinese human agency by insisting on the *sui generis* nature of Chinese modernity, our analysis is impoverished when such an epistemic and idealist (ideological?) predilection is allowed to prevail without an adequate consideration of the overarching structural or historical context. As Ci Jiwei's citation above has urged us to keep in mind, Chinese modernity was historically brought (coerced) into being as result of the Western impact. Can Chinese modernity in an ontic sense be *sui generis* under such historical circumstances – or is this merely a postmodern discursive affectation, a semantic construct? Fortunately, the resolution of these matters need not - for they cannot - be left to ideology; rather, a serious evaluation of the (ontic) nature of Chinese modernity needs foremost to be ontological and so, *empirical*, by way of the researcher's confrontation with the phenomena in question. This is indeed what my ethnography in Shenzhen and Qinghai has sought to do.

Moreover, my ethnography has revealed that the experience of so-called Chinese Modernity is marked by the same underlying features that attend to the experiences of Euro-Modernity in particular, and of Modernity, more generally. Thus we see in our ethnography of Chinese modernity the emergence of the same anxieties and ambivalences, instigated by the same-old, unrelenting processes of individualization on the one hand and rising economism and de-culturalisation on the other. In other words, I have witnessed in my fieldwork in China a movement towards what I have been referring to as the cultural ontology of individualism and materialism that constitutes Eurocentrism. Moreover, it is significant to note that the homogenizing tendencies of the latter appear to be held in check and hindered - howsoever minimally and even if only momentarily - by the rich sociality of traditional Chinese life.

To sum, while I have observed and can attest to the claim that the Chinese modern experience today is different from what one can encounter in contemporary

(modern) Western society, it is my observation that the difference arises precisely because Chinese society is still being sustained, if only precariously, by the vestiges of its traditional cultural forms. Accordingly, I submit that Chinese modernity is different from that of its Western progenitor not as a result of the (ontological) difference in their respective projects of modernity, but because traditional Chinese cultural practices have not yet been completely overrun by modernist impulses. The claim about the existence of 'alternative', 'other', or 'multiple' Modernities therefore seems overstated. Crucially, in my ethnographic observations, it is the 'traditional', 'non-modern' or 'pre-modern' that seems to sustain the appearance of 'otherness', 'alterity', or 'difference', whereas the cultural ontology of modernism – by way of individualism and materialism – appears to inflict the same-old desecratory effects upon social and cultural amities.

It is because of these shortcomings associated with the discourse on 'multiple' and 'other' modernities that I believe it important to retain the identity between Modernisation and Westernisation for our analysis. I have brought my field observations to bear on our discussion about 'different' modernities, yet we could also have come to somewhat similar conclusions by evaluating the issue historically. Indeed, the contents of Chapter Three reveal that it was precisely because the Modern was perceived to be Western that the Chinese adoption of Modernity was felt to involve a Chinese loss of self-identity (i.e. Chineseness). Now, if Chinese modernity were indeed ontologically unique, then it would be reasonable to think that the Chinese would have suffered no such discomfiture. In this case, Chinese ways-of-being would cohere with Chinese ways-of-knowing, and ontology and epistemology/ideology would be reconciled. The contents of Chapter Three, however, reveal this not to be the case.

CONCLUSION

I. Theory

On the theoretical front, my project has sought to clarify what Eurocentrism is and to explore its relation to Modernity. This has required me to trace the origins of

Eurocentrism and to distinguish it from other ethno-centrisms. Ethnocentrism refers to the inability to transcend the prejudices of one's cultural particularities. It is inherent and inevitable since 'we all have to stand somewhere'; our evaluation, as such, is always coloured by the idiosyncrasies of our own culture. I have argued that Eurocentrism is *not* an ethnocentrism. In claiming the universality of its experience for all humankind, the West confers upon itself a God's-eye-view of the world, or what Mignolo (2011: 89) has termed the 'zero point of observation'. This posture lies in contrast with the notion of an ethnocentrism since the putative universality of the ways of the West effectively renders Eurocentrism an ethnocentrism-in-denial. It is from this 'point-of-nowhere' that pretensions to Truth (first, in its divine then secular manifestations) became the exclusive province of the West. Accordingly, in virtue of the ostensive objectivity and value-neutrality of Western science and reason, what was in fact the result of a particular cultural (hence, ethnocentric) outlook and experience was not being recognized as such but with unparalleled hubris asserted to be universal. It is with reference to the geographic and cultural provenance of such universalistic claims that Trouillot (2003) has coined the term 'North Atlantic universals'.

The concept of universality in Trouillot's formulation underscores just why Eurocentrism is not just another ethnocentrism. While other ethnocentrisms – as ethno-cultural parochialisms - are confined to and limited by their particular geographic and cultural boundaries, Eurocentrism extends beyond the spatiality and temporality of the West. As Marglin (2008: 36) notes, "In the twenty-first century, modernity has spread well beyond the Atlantic heartland. The elites of Lima and New Delhi are as Western in their culture as the elites of New York and Paris and as far from the nonmodern cultures of the pueblos of the Peruvian Altiplano or the villages of rural India as are the Americans or the French. The modern West is no longer only a place; it is also a frame of mind." Conceivably, it is for the same reason that Douzinas (2010) has been prompted to note that Europe is not just the name of a landmass but a 'spiritual geography'.

Irrespective of its validity, Eurocentrism's claim to universality has allowed it to transcend the ethno-cultural and geographic particularities of its own ethnocentrism. Here, then, resides the uniqueness of Eurocentrism: its currency and material power vis-a-vis other mundane ethnocentrisms. The term 'material power' is here literally implied. Hence, whereas other ethnocentrisms only remain *ideational*, as 'ways of

seeing' and are restricted to their respective ethno-cultural domains, Eurocentrism has been given tremendous institutional support – political, economic, and intellectual - and has materialised throughout the globe. It may be said that Eurocentrism is one significant reason for the Western hegemony of the past four to five centuries. Consequently, it is in my grappling with the query of 'What is Eurocentrism?' (Chapter One) that I dispensed with the notion of it as an ethnocentrism. Additionally, because Eurocentrism has hitherto been widely treated as either a self-conscious (eg. Orientalism) or unselfconscious (eg. ethnocentrism) Euro-American bias in interpreting the world and its history, I had in light of its tangible material and everyday manifestations, proposed that it be reformulated as a way of being, as ontology. On this score, Eurocentrism is especially a problem affecting the lived-experience of Euro-America's colonized or post-colonised Other. The reconceptualisation of Eurocentrism that I commend therefore entails a theoretical move involving that we shift from viewing it as an epistemological issue to an ontological one. More than just an epistemological issue, a tendentious Euro-American parochialism in ways of seeing, knowing, and representing, I suggest that Eurocentrism is a material problem of everyday existence throughout much of the world. That is, Eurocentrism is a mode of being and as such, an ontological problem. I contend this to be the case even if its putative victims are oblivious to it, eventuating in lives that are somehow blighted by a perpetual sense of being inadequate and incomplete, and where personal discontent is the status quo.

But what does it mean to speak of Eurocentrism as a mode of being - and a supposedly global one at that? After all, it is one thing to proclaim universality, another to have the wherewithal to realize it. Why was it able to successfully proliferate when other ethnocentrisms could and did not? What were its origins and what gave material support for its perpetuation? Since these queries seemed tantamount to asking about the origins of the rise of the West, I devoted Chapter Two to examining the history of and basis for Europe's ascendancy, especially its accomplishment of what is widely termed Modernity. I considered this appropriate given that the supposed supremacy of the West rests on the claim that it was the first to have become Modern. That is to say, Eurocentrism is justified on the basis of ostensible Western superiority, which in turn evokes its supposed first-placed status vis-à-vis the non-West in the achievement of Modernity. It is because of this imbrication of Modernity with Eurocentrism that each of these terms simultaneously

implies the other: one cannot speak about Eurocentrism without invoking Modernity and vice versa. Apropos, if its relation to Modernity is the basis for Euro-chauvinism, it follows that the question of what is Eurocentrism-as-Ontology amounts analytically to asking about the ontology of Modernity. Or to put the matter differently still: If being Modern is the basis for Eurocentrism, then what are the ontic grounds of Modernity?

Hence, with the aid of secondary textual sources, I begin my account in the period before European hegemony. According to Carolyn Merchant (1980), social life in Europe was centred around close-knit and cooperative communities, as it was for other peoples. This was the case in as late as the 16th century, with the 'organism' serving as the central metaphor binding self, society and the cosmos. Indeed, I demonstrate that everyday social life in mediaeval, pre-modern Europe existed in the milieu of a God-centred Church-civilisation sustained by mutually reciprocal and obligatory relations – a *gemeinschaft* social formation. But this pattern of social organisation had been radically transformed by the 17th century following the Reformation in Europe. As Janet Abu-Lughod (1988) has pointed out, the impetus for this transformation arose from changing economic circumstances in the erstwhile world-system. Owing to a confluence of political, economic, technological and demographic factors, the Orient-dominated world-system that revolved around the Mediterranean, India and China fell into disarray and allowed the North Atlantic to be fortuitously opened up to trade. These economic energies were multiplied at the end of the 15th century after the European 'discoveries' of the New World, giving rise to a sudden and exponential expansion of trade, commerce and finance on the European continent, affording it the chance to play a more significant role in the world-system.

It is at this juncture, I argue, that things get interesting/intriguing, for the outburst of economic forces afforded prodigious opportunity on the one hand but because of the severe ethical strictures of the prevailing Church-civilisation, elicited unease, suspicion and confusion on the other. For, after all, in being a Church-civilisation, mediaeval society was a spiritual organism, not an economic machine. It follows that there were limits, restrictions and warnings at every turn. Admonishments were issued against the prospect of economic and material interests detracting from the serious affairs and work of God. The ecclesiastical authorities re-asserted to their congregations that it was right that they sought enough wealth to

maintain livelihoods in keeping with their station, but to want more was avarice, a deadly sin. Additionally, trade was regarded as 'dangerous business' while finance, if not considered downright 'immoral', was 'sordid' and 'disreputable'. Meanwhile, usury was condemned outright. In line with the traditional system of ethics, ecclesiastical authorities reiterated that economic interests were to be subordinated to life's ultimate purpose, which was moral. And so it is that we see the flourishing of economic energies on the European continent in the 16th century engendering a fundamental conflict of values, pitting a traditional and essentially ethical scheme against a scale of values apparently and ominously replete with the potential to define the future of Western civilisation: between the religious and the secular, the inner and outer life, spirit and matter, social ethics and individual interests.

What happens next is of momentous significance, particularly given that the resolution of the abovementioned conflict would determine the course of the world for the next 400+ years. In what we now know eventuated in a life-and-death struggle not just to define the future of the West but also that of the Rest, the existential battle between the ancient Church-civilisation (Christian ethics) against (the incipient utilitarianism of) the rapidly ascending commercial order – a capitalist-civilisation in-the-making - was fought out between 1500 and 1700 (i.e. the 16th and 18th centuries). Seen at another level, it was but a battle between two value systems: a scheme of traditional Christian ethics against an emerging Modern alternative characterised by an amoral but rational system of cold, calculating utilitarianism. Hence, whereas in the early period post-Reformation, Luther was denouncing the merchant and financier by appealing to classical Christian moral doctrines, John Locke is by 1689 making the case for the unlimited individual ownership of property as a matter of 'natural right'. Further, almost a century later in 1776, the moral philosopher, Adam Smith, was endorsing the virtues of market society by arguing that selfish interests produce public benefits. And by 1787, in what was a clear repudiation of the values of erstwhile mediaeval society, Jeremy Bentham published an essay titled *Defence of Usury*, the latter unambiguously signaling that the *gemeinschaft* Church-civilisation had been transformed into a *gesellschaft* economic civilisation, Chesterton quite aptly noted it as a work marking the birth of the Modern world. Indeed, given the hallowed place of material and economic concerns in Modern life, it should be of little surprise to see the dishonour previously associated with trade and finance being compellingly dispensed with and

surpassed. Hence, in roughly the two centuries between 1500 and 1700, we witness the supposed spiritual character of the Church-civilisation of Europe surreptitiously giving way to the rank materialism and philistinism of Modernism. The accomplishment of European Modernity was a civilisational-switch, but it was one that was first made possible on the back of the cultural transformation just described. Such a transformation was, above all, spawned by a religious revolution, an experience we have come to know of as the Protestant Reformation.

Consequently, one could say that the Reformation provided the cultural and moral orientation that changed Western Europe from within and transformed it from a mediaeval to a modern society. The upshot is that the Reformation rendered Christianity more conducive for the world not just of modern economics but politics; that is, for Modernity writ large. This was accomplished with a loosening of the standards of morality to ply the erstwhile *gemeinschaft* into a social order more accommodating – nay, nourishing - of the acquisitiveness required for the emerging modern economic system. It should be noted, however, that all this was inadvertent. Hence, while early reformers such as Luther had in response to Church corruption sought to bypass the mediation of the latter by propounding salvation as a personal matter between an individual and God, it was late-Protestantism in the form of its Calvinist creed that gave this theological innovation its world-transforming importance as a spark that catalyses the emergence of the Modern West.

Born and headquartered in Geneva and nourished in the urban and commercial settings of Antwerp, Amsterdam and London, Calvinism was much more at ease with the burgeoning monetary economy than its Lutheran counterpart. Accordingly, it adopted Luther's theological innovation of personalized religion and tweaked it to render the Christian message more compatible with the imperatives of the emerging (economic) order. With the old social landmarks being submerged by the irrepressible tide of commerce and finance, Calvinism had little choice but to make peace with the realities of the day, acknowledging the practical necessity of the many features of modern economy: capital, credit, banking, and large-scale trade and industry. Whereas strict adherence to the ethical precepts of classical Christianity would have found most, if not all, of these worldly activities objectionable, the compromise forged by Calvinism during late-Protestantism would find hermeneutic leeway, ironically, in Luther's formulation of salvation as being one's private business with God. And so in the Calvinist conception, the idea that salvation was

contingent on a person's direct relationship with God took to mean a devotion to one's calling in worldly affairs, irrespective of its content, and the dedication of its fruits to the glory of God. Naturally, the personal freedoms afforded by such an open theological interpretation are virtually unlimited, hence, underscoring Calvinism's socially radical character. It follows, not surprisingly, that it was not long before greed became socially tolerable. Similarly, a new respectability was granted to the merchant and financier, as profit and interest came to be recognised as being as legitimate as wages. But that was not all: since it was also believed that worldly success was proof of God's blessing and salvation, the previously-existing tension between material interests and spiritual concerns was promptly laid to rest. This clearly attested to Calvinism's revolutionary character, for it resolved in classical Christianity the perennial tension between morality and acquisitiveness, between the eternal spiritual affairs of God and the ephemeral material distractions of the world. What is more, it accomplished this feat not by reining in the acquisitive appetites but by giving them religious and moral sanction: as service to God, blessing from God, and proof of God's salvation! Economic success was no longer seen as detracting from God's work but, verily, central to it and a sign of one's devotion to God. Happily, economic pragmatism now coincided with moral action. In the meantime, the ethical pronouncements of the Old Testament could be and were dismissed as passé, anachronisms that referred to an age and to conditions that no longer existed. Although much of this was unintended, it was nonetheless how the Reformation played out, revolutionising the traditional system of social morality in mediaeval Europe by breaking down, decisively, the time-honoured cultural norms that had hitherto kept the acquisitive appetites of Europe's denizens in check. It is in virtue of such a historical cultural transformation that the Reformation should be appreciated as an epochal event that shaped, *en masse*, the cosmological form, content and orientation of the Modern West.

In effect, Chapter Two has positioned us to better understand how the predominant social formations of mediaeval Europe evolved from being constituted by organic, God-centred communities (*gemeinschaft*) to the market-centred, secular societies (*gessellschaft*) of the modern era. Correspondingly, we are also better placed now to appreciate how the preponderant cultural concerns of mediaeval Europe, such as the ethical pronouncements expressed by Luther, lost their moral

force and were passed over in favour of the more rational, pragmatic and utilitarian social principles articulated by the likes of Hobbes, Locke, Smith and Bentham, among others. There had been no *secular* social theory as such before the emergence of these thinkers, for as was expected with life in a religious civilisation, all directives for social organisation and order came under the ambit of the Church and were promulgated by way of ecclesiastical teachings. That is, all human enterprise - and life itself – had a moral end. It seems reasonable to argue that just as Church authority provided for social order in the mediaeval age, social theory *was* moral theory, and that social speculation had an ineradicable moral character befitting the moral economy of the day. What transpired in the historical evolution of Western religious and social thought as it progressed from Luther (1483-1546) to Bentham (1748-1832), therefore, was an internal revolution along religious, cultural and moral dimensions. Waging on for roughly a couple of centuries, this revolution entailed a *cosmological* battle of attrition, pitting the traditional ideas of morality against the iconoclasm that opposed the strictures of just such a moral scheme. As can be evinced by the titles and dates of the works of thinkers such as Smith (1776) and Bentham (1789), this revolution was apparently over by the late 1700s, resolved decisively in favour of the radical forces whose ideas would come to define the new civilisation. In the process, the social teachings of classical Christianity had undergone substantial modification, leading to a re-configuration of what it meant to live a godly life. To be sure, this re-configuration or revolution of social morality was meant to render the mainstream culture of the West, heretofore encumbered by Christian ethical restrictions, more conducive to the capitalization of the prodigious economic currents that had flowed unto its shores.

It goes without saying that the consequences of any such revolution of ideas about morality and godliness would be profound on many levels. I have sought to show that it has resulted in no less than a civilisational transformation from which mediaeval Europe emerged as 'Modern'. I believe to have also demonstrated that this deployment of 'Modern' was not intended only discursively but implied in the deepest sense of the term: cosmologically, culturally and ontologically. It is contingent on such an ontology that I claim Modernity to be unique, and in virtue of the cultural conditions of its emergence, inextricable from either the West or from Eurocentrism. This is what is meant by the assertion that one cannot speak of Modernity without implicating Eurocentrism, a truism that also applies in converse. I

commend that this conception of Modernity noted and be sustained in dialogue with and contrasted to those that posit 'other', 'alternative', or 'multiple' modernities.

To substantiate my thesis about the uniqueness and meaning of the Modern, I have argued that its accompanying cosmology was unique by being predicated on a cultural ontology of *individualism* and *materialism*. So much seems apparent, but let me elaborate.

Luther's idea of personalised salvation did not simply 'empower' the individual vis-à-vis the Church. Improvised and taken to its logical conclusion in late-Protestantism, it also 'exalted' the individual to the detriment of the community. As the Church had in the mediaeval order been the backbone of community life, its diminishment also meant that the entire mediaeval organism – the *gemeinschaft* – with its unifying system of mutual obligations and spiritual purpose, was ruptured. To make the same point but differently, I noted, matter-of-factly, that in a theology where salvation was dependent on one's personal relationship with God, social commitments simply became superfluous. And, hence, whereas economic concerns had previously been tied to a common social and moral end, the individuation of salvation that was initiated by Luther and improvised by the Calvinists, effectively disconnected economic activities from their larger common social purpose. Naturally, as the 'social' shrinks to the realm of the 'individual' and 'private', purposes cease to be 'common'. In like fashion, an individualist theology of salvation transforms 'communities of necessity' into 'communities of choice'; and while we may in the latter option have the freedom to *choose* communities as we like, it must surely also sound the death-knell for *gemeinschaft* in any meaningful sense of the term. In other words, the individual-centred practices of late-Protestantism might have engendered a sense of moral self-sufficiency but it tended as a consequence to liquidate common purpose, social solidarity and community. As observed, there was no longer a Church-civilisation by the time the ramifications of the Reformation worked themselves out. Rather, a Modern civilisation had emerged, and it was constituted by autonomous, freely associating individuals.

We will see that this notion of the free, autonomous individual would hereafter be central to Western cosmology and inform the construction of virtually all its basic institutions: legal, cultural, political and economic. Hence, in contrast to the *gemeinschaft* organized around unequal but mutually obligatory relations united around a common purpose, we saw the emergence of *gesellschaft* that was built upon

the invariably conflicting aims and interests of putatively free, equal, and rational individuals. Instead of a Church-civilisation, we witnessed the appearance of a system of sovereign States. Instead of a mode of social organisation that was relational in its being predicated on acts of reciprocity and obligations, we witnessed the emergence of a societal formation centred upon the individual and that revolved around the notion of rights. All this was understandable, for a milieu dominated by commerce and trade required the minimization of uncertainty through rational and well-defined (property) rights and contracts. Still, as sovereign States replaced the Church as society's ultimate social institution, Divine Law gave way to a *secular* Natural Law based on human reason. Such Natural Law was not only independent of the Church, it subordinated the latter as well, which was an affirmation of the superior status of Reason vis-à-vis Revelation. The independence of Natural Law from the Church in turn highlighted the supposed separation of State from Church and underscored the Modern State's secular nature. It is owing to such arrangements that Statecraft came to be regarded as involving the political arithmetic of balancing the 'equally' legitimate *interests* of one faction of society against those of another.

You will observe that the talk is of 'interests' - no more of 'obligations' – and these were conceived of in terms of the 'individual' being the fundamental social unit of analysis. It is because of this epistemological prioritization of the individual - following from its ontological elevation - that Smith (1776) gushed about 'private vices producing public benefits', Pope (1734) spoke of 'self-love and (the) social' being the same, while Locke (1689), of unlimited property as the natural right of individuals. This zealous commitment to the liberty and freedom of the individual in post-Reformed Europe is distinct to the Modern West, and is what I refer to when speaking of individualism as being key to the ontology of Modernity.

And what about materialism, which I also argue, was central to Eurocentric cosmology? One could locate the origins of 'materialism' in Modern Western cosmology by considering the key impetus for and the consequences of the Reformation. Bearing in mind that it was a 'material' factor; namely, the expansion of world trade into the North Atlantic at the end of the 15th century that brought to the fore the moral dilemmas associated with a life of trade and commerce, the Reformation may be seen as being the event necessary to resolve them. Indeed, it was in the process of European society confronting the ethical conundrums posed by commerce that the moral revolution (aka the Reformation) in the West began and

was carried to its completion. And as has been shown, the dilemma was resolved, inadvertently, in favour of the rising economic interests by reconciling worldy material affairs with godly ones. In fact, with the conscientious pursuit of worldly affairs being deemed a sign of one's godliness, the acquisitiveness associated with economic growth became sanctified as religious duty. One could say that the Spiritual realm had been Secularised. The individual was, as such, liberated from the ethical cloisters of the traditional order to pursue his material interests for gain. Moreover, with the displacement of the Church by the State, Community by Society, Obligation by Interest, Morality by Rights, Need by Greed, Divine Law by Natural Law, Reveled Truth by Scientific Reason, all as unwitting consequences of the Reformation, it was evident that a wholesale cosmological shift had occurred. And it was a shift that elevated the solid things of Matter above the ineffable non-things of Spirit, a process that Max Weber famously called the 'disenchantment of the world'. Although undeclared, this post-Reformation Materialism effectively amounted to a tacit acknowledgement of Matter being the basis of reality, a view that has subsequently become central to the cosmology of the Modern West.

I contend that it is on the back of this unique cosmology of materialism and individualism that Europe was able to act upon, dominate, and transform the world in the course of becoming Modern. Whereas individualism suggested that human beings existed innately as atomistic, asocial and self-seeking (individual) units, thereby shaping conceptions of Self and Subjectivity and, consequently, determining Self-Other as well as Human-Nonhuman relations, materialism would take heed only of the material world to the neglect of its non-material dimensions (i.e. those aspects not reducible to a naïve empiricism). Taken together, I contend that this cosmology that potently blends individualism and materialism[27], allowed the West to literally carve up the world spatially and temporally as it pursued its goals of global economic and political domination. Whereas the materialism of this cosmology permitted the West to conceive of the natural world - which sometimes included Human (i.e. especially racialised and feminised) Others - as 'dead' matter (Merchant op. cit.: 1980) to be exploited, raped and plundered, its individualism furnished the requisite sense of self-righteous hubris to accomplish the task without being unduly burdened

[27] Shall we call it 'materialistic individualism' or 'individualistic materialism'?

by ethical concerns[28]. The moral revolution that had transpired in the course of the Reformation, in other words, appeared to nourish a cultural orientation that was compatible and coherent with the Faustian, Machiavellian and Hobbesian nature of the Modern world. I submit that it is on the basis of such a cultural ontology - one that is conducive for the pragmatic yet blithely *amoral* exploitation of human and nonhuman Others - that the West became Modern and hegemonic.

Having established how Europe pulled ahead, we may now return to the question of what Eurocentrism is. I previously said that, at one level, Eurocentrism was simply the belief in the superiority of Western historical experience and the conviction that all of humanity should follow in its trajectory. This definition is fundamentally correct at a literal and commonsensical level. But probing deeper, we have noted that Eurocentrism was contingent on a cultural ontology of materialism and individualism. I therefore offered a more precise, ontologically-based definition, conceiving of *Eurocentrism* as *a mode of being that privileges economic/material life as the r'aison d'etre of human existence and that insists on the liberty of the individual to its pursuit, free from the burden of any collective ethical or moral restraints*. It is this reductionist mode of human being - in the sense of reducing social reality exclusively to its materialist and individualist dimensions - that is being pronounced as the fate of all humanity.

II. History

In Chapter Three, I seek to account for the historical origins and nature of Eurocentrism in China. To do this, I examined why and when the Chinese ruling elites and literati felt compelled to transform their society in the direction of the West, a project one could refer to as 'Westernisation'. Evidently, this project was Eurocentric in the literal sense, for it was motivated by the perceived need to adopt modern Western institutions in all areas of life. As these institutions were considered Modern because they were associated with the West, Modernisation (or Modernity)

[28] It should be noted that the plausibility of the Earth as 'inert' and 'dead' was facilitated by the deployment of a mechanical metaphor to represent it. This metaphor of the world/Earth as a machine corresponded with the metaphysics of materialism, replacing the erstwhile organic metaphor that existed during the mediaeval era.

was taken to be synonymous with Westernisation.

Chapter Three was organised around the trope of *ti-yong* (*zhongxue weiti xixue weiyoung* 中学为体, 西学为用), a slogan attributable to the reformist Qing bureaucrat, Zhang Zhidong, who coined it to suggest the possibility of reforming China from within, of Modernising without becoming Western. More literally, the slogan propounds the use of Western learning as 'means' and Chinese learning as 'ends'. As I argued in the chapter, such a slogan was coined to assuage the psychological anxieties of the Chinese who, while recognising the imperative of Modernisation (i.e. Westernisation), knew implicitly that it would and could only occur to the attenuation of their self-identity (Chineseness). Hence, Zhang Zhidong's *ti-yong* (means-ends) rhetoric articulated a way to Modernise without violating the holistic integrity of Chinese culture. But I argue that it should be interpreted as no more than "face-saving" rhetoric, a form of ideological self-deception. Karl Mannheim (1936) spoke of the oppressed perpetuating 'utopias' to render their oppression manageable/livable; Zhang's maintenance of Chinese parity, if not supremacy, vis-à-vis the West in the face of Western colonial dominance is verily a species of this. Shakespeare's Hamlet might have asked, "To be or not to be?" but, alas, such could not be the Chinese question with regards to becoming Modern. After incessantly suffering the ignominy of Western colonial subjugation, the question had to be reformulated into the impossible plea of, "How to be and not to be?"; that is, to be Modern without being Western. This same plea thus found expression in Zhang's *ti-yong* formulation.

The impossibility of Zhang's project is highlighted by the fact that the Chinese are today, over a century later, dealing with the same conundrum. Admittedly, they have long recognized the scientific, technological and economic dimensions of Modernity to be a material necessity. Yet the fact that there remains a psychological yearning to identify Chineseness with Modernity is revealed by the regularity of Chinese ideological appropriations centred around the re-labelling of old win in new wineskins: hence, 'Socialism with Chinese characteristics', 'China Dream' etcetera. I would propose that these attempts to Sinicize Modernity underline a deep Chinese awareness of Modernity as a de facto alien culture. Indeed, the longing to reconcile Modernity with Chinese identity is very likely spawned of a subconscious awareness that Modernity in China – or alternatively, Chinese Modernity – was hatched in the throes of foreign colonial domination and corresponding Chinese humiliation. I

submit that the source of pride generated by contemporary Chinese Modernity is today still viscerally accompanied by shame about the colonial humiliation that was involved in its initiation, especially among the ruling establishment; hence, the need for the abovementioned identity re-labelling exercises. It is plausible – and Freud would have probably concurred here – that the psychological burden of colonial ignominies has to be relieved by way of overt expression. That is, self-identities that have been destroyed have to be somehow reclaimed and restored. This was apparently the case at the time of Zhang Zhidong in the late 19th century. And it appears to be the case today.

We observe that because it was an ideological manoeuvre to appease the discomfitures of the Chinese mind, Zhang's *ti-yong* formula for Chinese cultural reform merely operated on an ideological and discursive level but proved effete when it came to praxis. Operationally, the idea of 'Chinese learning as ends' and 'Western learning as means' was predicated on a positivist notion that *ti* (ends) and *yong* (means) could be separated from each other and controlled as such. Yet such a piecemeal conception of means and ends did not in many instances of reform make any sense, for putative means were sometimes ends in themselves. For example, Western clothing was either adopted or it wasn't. Similarly, classical Chinese was either retained or it was not. There was seldom *ti* or *yong* piecemeal but, invariably, the deployment of Western techniques (*yong*) ultimately contributed an end (*ti*) that bore the marks of the technology that shaped it. In this fashion, Western means (*yong*) infected Chinese essence (*ti*) and in the process, changed it. According to Joseph Levenson (1968), reform as per Zhang's recipe of *ti-yong* syncretism failed because Chinese learning had hitherto been prized for its function; when this function was subverted, the learning simply became obsolete.

By the beginning of the first quarter of the 20th century, many considered Zhang's proposal for Chinese internal reform a failure. Just as the traditional Judeo-Christian values of Western culture became an impediment to the development of Western market society between the 16th and 18th centuries, the rich and supposedly continuous cultural traditions of China in the early 20th century were deemed excessive, a liability that was believed to be best purged. And just like early Christian Reformers failed in their efforts to restore primitive Christianity, Zhang's attempts to advocate on behalf of a reformed Chinese sensibility similarly failed. And for the similar reason that such sensibilities were no longer compatible with the

times. The dominant social tendency in early 20th century China gravitated in favour of further Westernisation.

Hence, spearheaded by a key group of iconoclastic intellectuals and motivated by nothing less than the lofty ambition to save China, a revolution to sunder Chinese culture from the hefty legacy of its past would begin, signaled particularly by the May Fourth movement of 1919. This revolution would involve the wholesale Westernisation of Chinese thinking, language, morality, and consciousness. No domain of life would go untouched as Confucian exegesis would give way to scientific reason, Chinese robes to Western suits, classical Chinese to vernacular Chinese, while ideas of individualism emerged to challenge the supposedly stifling decorum of the erstwhile traditional Confucian order. But, still, the process of Westernisation would have been more insidious and far-reaching than I have been able to allow for here. Hence, Roger Ames (2014) notes Chinese intellectuals speaking "a vernacular language transformed by its encounter with the cultural imperialism of a dominating Western modernity, and thus deploying a largely Western conceptual structure even while speaking their own Chinese languages. During the second half of the nineteenth and first part of the twentieth century, Japanese and then Chinese intellectuals, at once enamoured of and overwhelmed by Western modernity, created a sinitic vocabulary to appropriate and give voice to the conceptual and theoretical language of Western academic culture."[29] At any rate, such wholesale Westernisation was a watershed moment, revolutionary because it marked the first time in China's long history that its ruling elites and intellectuals would come to view the many dimensions of Chinese life entirely from the perspective of the West. Chinese politics, knowledge, culture, economy, language, hygiene and society: all were disparaged and deemed to be 'inadequate' from the pseudo-universalist perspective of the West. It was widely held that Chinese culture in its totality had to be re-made in the image of the West. If Zhang Zhidong's now outdated metaphor could somehow be revived and put back into circulation, it should be reformulated to now read: Western learning as essence (*xixueweizhu* 西学为主). It was thus that Modernisation, Westernisation and Eurocentrism – which I have by now shown to be ontologically homologous[30] - became systematically

[29] Personal communication, May 2014.

[30] Accordingly, I will use these terms interchangeably henceforth. What is important to note is that they are more or less synonymous and that one necessarily implies the other.

institutionalized in China.

There are two further insights about Eurocentrism that the discussion of the *ti-yong* trope in Chapter Three yields. The first is that because means and ends, technique and spirit, cannot be separated owing to the dialectical relation existing between the two, that which might have been thought of as mere technique could end up becoming integral to the nature of the end in itself. One could think about industrial technology such as the automobile, for instance: the car may be a means/mode of transportation, but in its dependence on roads to function, it gives rise to the specific social engineering of space, practices and culture, in the process spawning an entire (industrial) civilisation that gives support to its operation. Far from means being separated from ends, techniques from essence, we observe that the techniques very well determine the nature of the ends. That is, not only the ends but their very nature. Hence, Western men's suits in the new Chinese republic did not merely give Chinese men Western profiles; rather, in outlining the movement of limbs to project speed, vigour and energy, they constructed a desirable Chinese masculinity predicated on exactly such qualities. In consequence, we see Eurocentric techniques determining and constituting the form and content of Chinese-ness itself.

This discussion of means (*yong*) and ends (*ti*) *en general*e furnishes us with an additional insight into the nature of the phenomenon of Eurocentrism. In particular, our attention is drawn to the multiplicity of forms it can take. Hence, just as what is said to constitute Westernisation can take many figurations across the gamut of life, so it is also the case with Eurocentrism: in ways of housing, diet, fashion, forms of leisure, nature of work, knowledge, etcetera. In Chapter One, I sought to distinguish Eurocentrism-as-epistemology, a 'way of seeing', from Eurocentrism-as-ontology, a 'way of being'. Here, I wish to stress that even when considered ontologically, Eurocentrism is stratified into different phenomenal layers that plumb different depths of reality. I have elsewhere attempted to get at these varying depths and different layers by distinguishing between 'deep' and 'surface' reality/culture (see Kho 2009). In this dissertation, I have attempted to show that Eurocentrism is contingent on a specific cosmology given by an ontology of materialism and individualism. This is the 'deep' ontological basis on which Eurocentrism is contingent: it is constituent of its 'implicate order', to use Bohm's (2005) term. But it

manifests in 'surface' appearances too - as per an 'explicate order' (ibid) - and in a multiplicity of forms. This is an important point and should not be missed, for it ultimately highlights the stratified and complex nature of reality. This conception of reality thus allows for the possibility of Eurocentrism to exist – and co-exist - at different levels, 'surface' as well as 'deep', without calling into question one at the expense of the other, or vice versa. Once again, this is an important point to note as we bring to a conclusion the dissertation's theoretical and historical sections, and move towards dealing with empirical and ethnographic 'real-world data' in all its messy, multifarious, and irrepressible complexities.

III. Ethnography

Having dealt theoretically with Eurocentrism/Modernity and traced their historical origins in China to the late 19th and early 20th century colonial encounters, I then proceeded to the third component of the project, which was empirical and ethnographic. This component of the project sought to examine the contemporary situation of Chinese cultural change as a result of its continuing Modernisation. To recall, the interest in this empirical undertaking derives from the fact that the viability/sustainability of the 500-year old Western (Euro-American) world-system is now being called into question with the multiple crises of society, economy, and ecology. Significantly, many have argued that these crises have been brought about by the contradictory logic of the system itself. This naturally raises the question of whether there are viable alternatives to Westernisation/Modernisation and its underlying cosmology. Since much has been made about China's growth, modernization, and corresponding ascendancy, I wish to examine and evaluate the prospect of Chinese culture being one such alternative.

My methodology section sought to deal with the meta-philosophical and meta-methodological issues related to ethnographic work. It dealt with the nitty-gritty questions of field-research surrounding concerns as mundane as where to be located, what to look at, and with whom to speak. I adopted a phenomenological-oriented approach as the phenomenological exhortation 'to return to the things themselves' was advice in keeping with my wish to give priority to Ontology, to Being. I felt this approach also to be conducive to guarding against the tendency of getting carried away with one's conceptual representations.

Accordingly, I intended for the Methodological section of Chapter Four to not

only be an explication of phenomenological principles or a justification for them – these are there too - but a living and evolving testament to the reflexive application of those very principles in the 'field': an account of methodology in practice, so to speak. It is in this way that I hope the Chapter may be a contribution to general discussions about methodology in ethnographic research. Hence, whereas information about the practical difficulties of locating one's fieldsite or of finding co-operative interlocutors are often omitted in published ethnographic work, perhaps for the sake of conceptual tidiness, I have left in such details here, warts and all. The purpose being none other than to convey ethnographic practice as emergent, messy, and generally unyielding to systematisation. And, of course, it was also to underscore the indispensable role of serendipity. The chapter proceeded to describe how I came upon my initial 'fieldsite' in the Nanshan district of Shenzhen, a middle-class apartment complex along with its surrounding *xiaoqu* (neighbourhood) that would be 'home' to me for fourteen months. As previously noted, the ethnographic requirement was that I be physically located in China. I was now in a position to discover the polysemy of Chinese life and to see the extent to which Eurocentrism played a role in it.

The goal of my ethnography was, therefore, threefold: to describe how I came upon my fieldsite and became acquainted with my interlocutors, to give a rich account of everyday Chinese life in Shenzhen and, finally, to observe whether and how in this flow of everyday life, Chinese culture - implicated especially in practices of sociality - was being influenced by Eurocentrism. I accomplished each of these goals using a phenomenological approach in which I tried as much as possible to allow for the 'looks of the world' to determine the course of my research. This was not only the means by which I came upon my 'field-site' in Shenzhen, it was also the way I came to know and befriended my interlocutors. It is in this somewhat serendipitous fashion of allowing the circumstances considerable latitude (an open-endedness?) to guide one's way that I believe a phenomenological approach enhances the role of discovery in the research process. It is by being conscientious about keeping open such avenues for discovery that our conceptual prejudices can be prevented from turning into self-referential certitudes. Needless to say, having to be reflexive and allowing for intersubjectivity was necessary throughout such a research process.

Given my conflation of 'culture' with 'sociality', a word about the relationship

between the two is appropriate. To recall, I have from the beginning been concerned with whether and to what extent Chinese culture has been transformed by the influence of Eurocentrism. I have in the meantime highlighted that Westernisation/Eurocentrism manifests in a multiplicity of forms across the gamut of Chinese cultural life, in its superficial as well as more in-depth guises. Yet since Eurocentrism was a cosmology that was predicated on an individualist cultural ontology, its manifestation necessarily implicated a specific vision of human being and, by extension, a vision of social being, of group-life involving the Self in relation to Others. In other words, Eurocentrism, as a cultural ontology of individualism, necessarily entails implications for how we relate to others. Hence, while it can have an impact on culture in different domains at various levels, from our choice of fashion to our forms of entertainment to our ways of thinking etcetera, *the cultural ontology of Eurocentrism is most potent in its ability to determine the content of our modes of sociation. The problem of Eurocentrism, in other words, is most serious in its consequences for sociality*. It is here that my concern with Chinese culture translates into a concern with everyday Chinese sociality. I submit, furthermore, that there is an additional reason for thinking about culture in terms of sociality. Since our ability to get along with others is the pre-requisite upon which more elaborate forms of culture may be cultivated, sociality is literally the basis for culture.

With this in mind, I set out to undertake an ethnography of everyday Chinese life around my neighbourhood using the abovementioned approach. Because of its phenomenological nature, my initial research forays were largely observational and impressionistic, and I focused especially on the sociality that governed the everyday life of my Shenzhen neighbourhood. The results of this were presented as Exhibits in Chapter Five. Naturally, my immersion in the social milieu of my neighbourhood increasingly allowed me to make many acquaintances, among them a group of Chinese of Hui ethnicities that owned and operated the neighbourhood noodle shop. They eventually became my interlocutors, allowing me to conduct in-depth research on their lives. Although their experience as Hui migrants in Shenzhen was unique and particular, I felt that the concerns from which it arose were commonplace enough across China to render such experience relevant for those wishing to understand the socio-economic and cultural forces prevailing in the country today. I felt, in other words, that their experience as rural migrants was not unduly exceptional and that one could via examining it get a good measure of the central

preoccupations of contemporary Chinese life. Hence, using the ethnographic materials from my field research alongside my theoretical formulations, I will now conclude with a discussion about Chinese Modernity and Eurocentrism, addressing in particular the queries that I raised at the beginning of this project.

I began the dissertation by drawing attention to the paradox apparent in what is widely believed to constitute China's contemporary success. Evidently, what is primarily being equated with the 'rise' of China by the mass media today is its sustained, scintillating economic development ostensibly attributed to Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms in the 1970s. Progress on this front is most apparent visually. One can see it in the almost-overnight transformation of the Chinese landscape and skyline as well as in Chinese lifestyles: sky-high buildings and endless highways are replacing farming plots as surely as former peasants are moving off the land to occupy them. Another conspicuous feature of Modern China is the proliferation of the automobile that has come to displace the bicycle as the popular mode of privatized transportation. Additionally, we saw in Chapter Three that when it comes to men's fashion, the traditional Chinese long gown (*changpao*) for men has long since given way to the Western suit. If these developments are to be interpreted through a cultural lens, they attest to an undeniable Westernisation, thus framing contemporary Chinese success on the world-stage as something of a paradox. *Indeed, if so-called Chinese success is the result of its now wholesale Westernisation, then what is 'Chinese' about contemporary China?* Posing the question differently using Zhang Zhidong's *ti-yong* slogan of 'Westernisation as means, Chineseness as ends', one could perhaps ask: has Westernisation become both the means and ends in today's China? What, in other words, is the extent of Eurocentrism in China? Has Chinese culture become wholly Western?

It is on these matters that I believe the Theoretical and Ethnographic sections of our project offer useful insights. Because of the pervasiveness of Westernisation in Chinese life, our ethnography has revealed Eurocentrism to manifest across Chinese society in a multiplicity of ways. This is most apparent visually in the ways described above: in landscapes and built environment as well as in deportment and dresscodes. Eurocentrism is therefore institutional and personal; it finds expression in social structure as well as in individual agency, in both the macro and micro domains of socio-cultural reality. I have referred to as 'surface' culture these more visual expressions of Eurocentrism; they are exemplified in lifestyle choices pertaining to

fashion, diet, media consumption, and the like. Perhaps unsurprisingly, my ethnographic research also revealed that emerging alongside the transformation of China to a market society was a conception of Others as self-seeking, rational, and adverserial. In other words, the Other was conceived of as a subject to be wary and suspicious of. And not unlike the dog-eat-dog world of capitalism everywhere else, the panacea to this absence of 'trust' in a Society of perennial 'strangers' seemed, invariably, to reside in a system of law, contract and rights. Indeed, although not conforming exactly to notions of western liberal individualism (see Li and Ong 2008: 11), one can witness in today's China the undoubtable influence of the latter. In line with this, one of my ethnographic exhibits alluded to the highly personalized and individuating experience of Chinese shopping-mall consumerism. Arguably, under a system of Modern Chinese Capitalism – as is the case under *any* Capitalism - the Rights of Man are incomplete without the right to consume. So, it is on the basis of these examples that one can say that the Chinese are culturally becoming Westernised and that Eurocentrism is a conspicuous phenomenon in China, for the symbols that mark its (Modern) success and development all appear to be of Euro-American provenance. Eurocentrism of this variety is evident in China and has been corroborated by my findings in the field.

These attempts to Westernise are of course unsurprising if Eurocentrism is to be understood as a general belief in the superiority of the West, thus giving rise to attempts to emulate it. As seen in Chapter Three, this conviction took hold especially among the Chinese literati from around the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. Our ethnography reveals that this belief in the supremacy of Western historical experience has now been internalized by much of the Chinese population, an outcome brought about in no small part by the systemic perpetuation of such a belief by the modern Chinese state. One can, as such, say that my ethnography reveals Eurocentrism in China to be ubiquitous in the form of a near-blind faith in the superiority of Modern and urban life. Conversely, there is the belief that the rural countryside is 'backward' and 'undeveloped'. Such views are widely expressed in today's China, to the point of becoming 'common sense'. Materially, these views have resulted in historically transformative social processes, not least China's internal rural-urban migration that is said to have involved the movement of some 400 million people since 1979 (Chan 2011). My ethnography reveals that while these dis-locations engender severe emotional and psychological strain as a result of

prolonged absences from 'home', a loss of community, and correspondingly, long-term separation from kith and kin, they are often justified as the inevitable consequence of necessary 'progress'. Such, perhaps, is the evident extent of Eurocentrism in China.

But as I argued in Chapter Three, reality is multi-dimensional and stratified, and 'deep' forms of culture also exist even if they may sometimes not be apparent to the eye. As discussed, I probed for a deeper understanding of Eurocentrism and uncovered a further dimension of it. Moving away from appearances, I revealed Eurocentrism to be structured by features of 'deep' culture, namely, by an ontology of materialism and individualism. I argued that it was, firstly, in conceiving of reality as the basis of an exploitable material world and, secondly, in conceiving of the individual as the basic social unit that the West, by liberating individuals from the erstwhile mores of their traditional ethical communities, could blithely and literally accomplish their transformation of the world to become Modern. Thus, Eurocentrism in a deep, ontological sense is a Mode of Being with implications for one's place in the social and natural worlds. Because this cosmology was and remains necessary for the material accomplishment of Modernity, I contend that Modernism everywhere – whether in the West or in the Rest - invariably invokes similar cultural and behavioural propensities and patterns. It is for this reason that I consider Modernity and Eurocentrism to be homologous, for both are undergirded by the same cultural ontology of 'materialism' and 'individualism'. To be sure, whereas 'materialism' effectively renders the world a resource for unfettered exploitation, 'individualism' sees to it that we conceive of *the* autonomous individual as the basic social unit mired in a Hobbesian war of one-against-all. This conception of the individual as the basic unit of society is well-captured by Margaret Thatcher's memorable quip that, 'There is no such thing as society.' In other words, becoming Modern requires an adoption of a posture of cold and callous individual indifference (amorality?) towards Human and Non-Human Others, the same posture - I argue - as that which facilitated Europe's 'take-off'. Indeed, it is owing to this rather exploitative and adversarial feature characterizing Modernity that I am ambivalent about the discourses of 'other' or 'multiple' modernities (as discussed above), for these discourses seem to be celebrating them as different genres of Modernity instead of recognising the common underlying features that they share as a species. I submit that Modernity is a problem precisely because of the cultural ontology it is built upon

and committed to.

At any rate, this Modernist or Eurocentric orientation has ramifications for 'deep' culture since it determines the nature of social life and the forms of sociality amongst a people. Eurocentrism has 'deep' cultural consequences precisely because in shaping the way people sociate, it gives form and substance to culture at a fundamental level. And, after all, it is sociality - or the ability of people to get along in the construction of their collective or group existence - that gives rise to the possibility of more 'elaborate' forms of culture.

On this understanding, I am relieved to say that my ethnography has revealed the existence of an alternative to the 'surface' Modern or Eurocentric reality that is immediately apparent in China. Hence, if one were to observe Chinese socio-cultural life more closely, one would see that the Chinese retain many social practices that emphasise relational ties, kinship, and community. It is significant to note that such practices provide social stability in a milieu otherwise given over to the uncertainties, ambivalences, and anxieties of Modern Capitalist life. It goes without saying that my interlocutors, Mahmud, Ali, and their wives would not have been able to set up shop in Shenzhen for a day, let alone eight years, if it were not for a form of kinship relations at home in Qinghai that assisted with the bringing up of their children. At the same time, their cultural marginality in Shenzhen would be even more acute if it were not for the presence of their fellow regionals working at the shop: the evident kinship-like relations they co-created clearly appeared to be a surrogate for 'family' away from home. Similarly, the life of everyone at my apartment complex would undeniably be worse-off if it were not for a cultural orientation that conceived of human well-being as an immersion of the Self in a dense web of relations with Others.

Based on my ethnographic research in Qinghai, I proposed at the end of Chapter Seven that the rich sociality I encountered was central to traditional Chinese culture. Additionally, I suggested that such a culture had deep roots in Chinese rural and agrarian life, alongside the claim that the forms of sociality I witnessed in urban Shenzhen were a legacy of traditional rural practices. Happily, I have discovered the work of Fei Xiaotong, China's pioneering sociologist and anthropologist, affirming my observations. In *Xiangtu Zhongguo* (*From the Soil*), a work originally written in 1947, Fei argued that Chinese society had grown out of its ties to the land. Chinese society, Fei noted, was fundamentally rural and that patterns in rural society provided

the foundation for all of Chinese society.

Additionally, Fei also observed that whereas Western society may be compared to straw aggregated to form a haystack, Chinese society could be represented by the ripples resulting from a rock being thrown into water. Using straw as a metaphor for the Western mode of association, he describes the latter as presupposing the autonomy of individuals. In contrast, he compares the Chinese mode of association to ripples of water extending outwards, arguing that Chinese modes of sociation are built upon multiple linkages of the self with others. Not unlike what I have discovered, therefore, Fei concludes that the Self in Chinese society is deeply embedded in social relationships and tied to personal obligations as defined by those relationships. Accordingly, he argues that to be a human in Chinese society is to be linked to others – to one's parents, siblings, children, and friends – and to fulfill the obligations accompanying those social linkages. In other words, the Chinese conception of being human is fundamentally social, a fact that was repeatedly affirmed throughout my field encounters.

Consequently, I have witnessed in my field-research that when it comes to 'deep' forms of culture such as modes of sociation, Chinese society is still very much sustained by traditional practices that find meaning in the affirmation of communal and kinship relations. These practices can be said to militate against the ontology of individualism and materialism that characterise Eurocentrism and Modernism.

As is the case with all ethnographic work, mine is limited by the specificity of time and place. Notwithstanding my attempts to generalize my findings, it is important to note that what I observed was particular to my fieldwork in both Shenzhen and Qinghai in the period 2011-2013. Like a photograph, my ethnography was able to capture only one moment in the evolution of contemporary Chinese society as represented by the life witnessed in these two locations. As such, there inheres in my attempts to speak of a 'Chinese sociality' the risk of overgeneralization, a risk that is implicated when one's time-and-place-specific observations are deployed to refer to spaces and peoples beyond one's immediate contact, in this case, to 'China' and the 'Chinese' *en generale*. I have already observed the nature of language and representation (see p.10, footnote 2) to reveal semantic slippages to be inevitable. At the same time, I have also noted that generalisations as conveyed by signifiers such as 'China' and 'Chinese' are necessary to allow us to think, communicate, and undertake cultural comparisons. Hence, while I am aware of the

risks of seeming to overgeneralize in the use of such signifiers, I would contend that such risks are simply unavoidable if thinking and communication are to proceed. Fortunately, the validity of my claims about Chinese sociality depends not upon further argumentation but continues to rest with their congruence with evolving Chinese empirical realities. Consequently, while my field-research was limited to Shenzhen and Qinghai - and, furthermore, to a sliver thereof - I submit (from my casual observations throughout greater China) that its findings apply more generally to allow us to speak of certain distinguishing features of 'Chinese sociality'. On that note, it is encouraging that the work of Fei Xiaotong (1947), which is from another historical era, has been largely affirmative of such notions. That said, it remains to be seen how far into the future such a thesis about Chinese sociality continuous to hold. This can be done only with a continued and conscientious observation of the evolution of Chinese societal realities.

At any rate, I would like to conclude by noting that the existence of such rich forms of sociality offer some hope for the Chinese future, for they will continue to serve as a vital cultural resource against the socially-eviscerating effects of ongoing Chinese modernization. It is, after all, in our practices of sociality - in the mutuality of our being - that life becomes meaningful.

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