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‘Labour Processes’ Across the Indo-Pacific: Towards a Comparative Analysis of Civilisational Necessities

Frederick H. Damon

This paper initiates a comparative analysis of the labour process in three different social systems in order to shed light on the singularities of East Asian social forms. The point of departure for the project highlights the place of substitution central to the labour process in the West. There time’s flow entails the replacement of human ingenuity by mechanical power and so distils into Western culture a fascination with the possibilities of substitution that governs much private and public life. It suggests the problem of ‘Civilisation’ derives from this process. By contrast, social life in the South Pacific, amidst cultures historically contiguous with those in East Asia, focuses on flows from original conditions. In this context social life follows organising sequences, not substitution. There follows and features a mimetic singularity of ascribed, ranked socially appropriate and chained action and reaction. East Asia shares with the South Pacific a mimetic aesthetic of sequence, rank and singularity, but there social process transforms into a centralising mass defined by epochal discontinuities organising the flows of life: Understanding that result is the ‘problem’ of East Asian sociality.

Keywords: Labour; Social Systems; East Asia; South Pacific; West

Introduction—Delimitation by Means of Native Categories

This experimental essay defines an approach for thinking about the problem the eastern end of the Euro-Asia landmass presents as a unique ordering of human sociality. The overt context for the paper is the attempt by Stephan Feuchtwang and Michael Rowlands to revise a problematic for anthropology, one that captures ideas about ‘culture’ linked to national anthropological traditions, and an historical sensibility transformed, sometimes excluded sometimes included, since the eighteenth century (Feuchtwang & Rowlands 2010). They attempt to create ‘a notion of
history that seems genuinely attentive to the significance of long term pasts and their singularity' (Feuchtwang & Rowlands 2010, p. 118). Combining Braudel and Mauss, they put at the centre of their project the category ‘civilisation’. They mean by this an infrastructure of practices and ideas from which larger totalities, as centres or regional systems, take unique shape however temporary. For me this implies a comparative understanding, for it is only through contrast that singularities can be identified and studied. Hence I frame this contribution by juxtaposing the ends of Euro-Asia super-continent. This contrast takes on a special pertinence since these two ends are meeting in new ways. East Asia is coming ever closer to assuming the hegemonic position in a system of relations Western Europe created (partly from its relations to the East). My contribution adds to this comparative context a third portion of the globe, the Kula Ring in Papua New Guinea, the area of my regional expertise. The Kula Ring is part of the Austronesian expansion out of East Asia into the South Pacific beginning some 6000 years ago. I view it in relation to my understanding of East Asia just as I examine this latter area partially through the lens of the former. For the last 200 years it has experienced being subsumed by social forces emanating from either end of the Euro-Asia landmass.

For the consideration of things East Asian I have the vantage point of a doubly defined outsider, as a member of a culture (the United States) which has falsely conceived itself to be isolated and uniquely created by its own landscape; and as a student of a much smaller social system than most that have crossed Euro-Asian over the last 6000 years. Scale counts. Large is not a new feature of the life being constructed out of the eastern third of Euro-Asia.

The use of the word ‘Civilisation’ in my own culture helps define what I think some of our issues should be. But outsider notwithstanding, I not only struggle with the basic facts of this issue’s focus, East Asia, but, like other members of the assembly that gathered in the Singapore group from which this essay originates, puzzle over the meanings to be given to the analytical concepts we query, ‘empire’ and ‘civilisation’. The first of these may no longer carry significant weight. Arguably it was made irrelevant by recent advances in our knowledge of social formations through the centuries and across space. Regional systems, ‘world-systems’ of varying size, were everywhere, and nowhere were any of their components as autonomous or as isolated as believed. Yet these are ‘high range’ concepts; my contribution results from middle-range considerations, sketches about labour processes in these areas. What does the idea ‘civilisation’ mean when viewed through the lens of the labour process?

I locate my reflections first by an attempt to place what some of the workshop contributors said about our concepts, most especially the orienting statements submitted and delivered by David Gibeault (conference draft) and Stephan Feuchtwang (conference draft). Both long-term students of China, Gibeault and Feuchtwang build their reworking of the ‘civilisation’ concept from Mauss’s writings in the decades after World War I. That war, as experienced then as conceived, was a major pivot in the West. For World War I made it difficult to sustain the glorious
contrasts ideas about Progress and Civilisation had been assuming since ‘civilisation’ initially appeared in England and France in the eighteenth century. A time of intensifying Western hubris, this was also the time of a re-organisation of the West by the so-called Industrial Revolution and by a re-organisation of Christianity that by the nineteenth century realises a universalising missionary impulse. World War I deflated much of that, and for the word to be of any use, especially to the newly forming social sciences, it had to be reformatted. But before that attempt it is clear the idea connoted the replacement or superimposition of one moral and aesthetic order over another such that the previous one became either irrelevant or radically devalued. Following the anthropological practice of taking the native categories seriously I suggest that the indigenous category provides us useful connotations for grappling with the social and historical realities before us.

Gibeault notes that the correlative Chinese concept is *wenming* (文明). In the literalist phase of understanding Chinese that I am in, I suggest we look carefully at the constituent characters, 文 (wen), 日 (ri), and 月 (yue), more or less ‘writing’, ‘sun’ and ‘moon’. Given calligraphy’s place in Chinese culture, the very underpinning of sociality, this concept is revealing. The ‘sun’ and ‘moon’ combination that produces *ming* illuminates, so to speak, writing. The artist and poet Zhang Bin tells me that 日 in the form may actually be an abbreviation from the idea of a window. Hence the allied and literal understanding may be of moonlight coming through a window (enabling writing amidst darkness?). Might we suggest that *wenming* connotes something like ‘making apparent’, ‘revealing’, ‘bringing to light’ or ‘knowledge/knowing’? And perhaps by means of writing? I shall return to what is implied in the concentrated elaboration that is Chinese writing. The Chinese concept, while having family resemblances to the European notion, has a different cast. It is more process than revelation (See note 27).

In my attempt to outline an approach for our consideration I focus on an analysis of the labour process, the conditions and qualities of work. Although my approach is influenced by a revived interest in ‘materiality’ (e.g. Lemonnier 1986, 1993; Pfaffenberger 1992; Bray 1997), what I mean by the labour process is culturally determined. The labour process is first of all a contextualised practice in accordance with the structures defining culturally defined purposes of production and their correlative exchange processes. The only route to understanding it is through ethnographic analysis. For such analysis I draw on my own materials from the South Pacific. For the cultural systems representative of what I call the Western end of the Euro-Asia landmass I select two ethnographic analyses of the United States—Anthony Wallace’s account of the coming of the ‘Industrial Revolution’ to nineteenth-century America (Wallace 1978[2005]) and Paul Rabinow’s *Making PCR: A Story of Biotechnology* (1997). Coming from the very beginning of the US’s assumption of a major position in the current world order and a more recent transformation, these two studies highlight a common feature in the modern world system. Put crudely, this is the dislike, almost rejection of labour in the productive process. For China I draw from Francesca Bray’s analysis in *The Rice Economies*: 
Technology and Development in Asian Societies (1986), a study originally designed to throw into relief differences between the productive processes witnessed in the East and West. I add to Bray initial visits and study of things Chinese extending over the last decade. These new observations parallel the completion of major research I have been carrying out in the South Pacific. Although my knowledge of China remains preliminary, I believe the three part contrast I create poses questions and defines parameters of considerable significance. I return to the rationale for this material briefly in my Conclusion.

I begin by discussing a problem in thinking about the ‘labour process’ drawing on recent themes in social anthropology in general and Austronesian studies in particular—hence my reading of ‘China’ through a Melanesianist’s eyes.

Positioning ‘The Labour Process’

A given to my probing is an assumption about the redundant nature of social order. As a product of modern Western culture, in the twentieth century this quality was revealed first by the insights of structuralism and second by the idea of fractals generated over the last thirty years as a development from chaos theory. It may be suggested that for other societies, especially those in the Indo-Pacific, this insight is a confirmation of the mimetic nature of social life.

The Western realisation of this quality in the Indo-Pacific arena ‘first’ makes its academic appearance in an essay by Robert Heine-Geldern (1942); Clifford Geertz popularises it in his thesis (1980) about the ‘theater-state’ for Bali; and Wang Mingming gives it very complex treatment in his temporal account of a centre on the margins in Empire and Local Worlds (2009).

I begin with this consideration of the crystal-like, fractal or mimetic quality of social life because the idea allows me to overcome one apparent problem with my analysis and highlights another feature the strategy of the paper reveals.

In arguing that many of the essential qualities we need to examine can be witnessed relatively easily by examining the labour process I run the risk of creating a kind of economic determinism. But if there is causality suggested here it is of a structural kind, that is, a condition that follows from a pre-existing order of relations. This problem is most evident in one of the social systems I discuss, the capitalist order. For there I am concerned with social relations in the sphere of capital, formally defined by Marx through the metamorphoses of value in the exchange sphere M-C-M°5. Although economists might think these are human-derived conditions, every serious sociologist, historian and anthropologist knows these relationships depend upon a set of cultural, cosmological and certainly historical developments and transformations. The requirements of this circulation form define the labour process.

The care with which Marx elaborated his position on these relations was all too quickly lost on anthropology when Capital briefly re-emerged in the discipline several decades ago. So Appadurai’s work (1986) universalised both commodities and money, as if they are not first and foremost part of a social order. In their putative
natural state they have the capacity to penetrate other social orders. Yet neither commodities nor money are natural conditions of human existence; to talk about them means to operate within a presupposed cultural order. I want to emphasise this by taking a quote from James Watson where, I think, he writes from a contrary perspective, reflecting the Western conceit Appadurai reproduced.

In his list of the sequential order of Chinese funeral rites Watson includes:

6). The ritualised use of money and employment of professionals ... The payment of money to specialists was more than a simple monetary exchange; it was a required feature of the rites (see chapter 5). Someone, in other words, had to accept money from the mourners (of the deceased’s estate or a public charity) before the corpse could be safely expelled from the community. The implications of this exchange have yet to be thoroughly analyzed, but it is evident that monetary exchange, in numerous forms, permeates Chinese funerary ritual.[fn 37 excluded, a reference to Gates (1987)]. This is testimony, perhaps, to the extent that money—as a universal medium of exchange—had penetrated into the cultural domain of late Imperial China. Even in death one continued to engage in monetary exchange.’ (Watson 1988, p. 14 in Watson, James L and Evelyn S. Rawski (1988)

Although he gives himself room for further reflection, Watson draws on the line of thought that once clustered around Paul Bohannan’s writings (e.g. 1955) on exchange spheres. In modern or large scale societies, in this point of view, money went everywhere and so, effectively, there were no exchange spheres; and so one can write about money as a ‘universal equivalent’. That expression derives from Marx (Capital, Vol. I, 1.3). But there it is elaborated by means of a plausible cultural analysis. Marx’s kind of analysis is usually assumed (or ignored) rather than carried out, and this mistake prevents us from understanding the relevant social forms in this or that social system.

Context markers with currency-like things perhaps similar to those Watson draws on are phenomena very common throughout the Indo-Pacific. For the northern Kula Ring region the comparable exchange form concerns a sphere called takon (in Muyuw, the northeastern Kula Ring, takola in the Trobriands, northwestern Kula Ring). Prototypically vegetable food and sometimes pork exchange for shell wealth. The transactions course a life cycle from the formalisation of a marriage through its consequent births, ending at the deaths of those children born from the marriage. That last exchange ends the initial marriage by reproducing the possibility of its repetition. The transactions, varying from tokens to large quantities, are context markers for, determinants in and sometimes major components of a set of transformations that interweave gender capacities and product differentiation across communities, a differentiation often embodied or represented in complementary gender identities. The most abstract expression of this complementarity finds itself in the male/female contrast realised in the exchange of male and female shells in the Kula. I suspect similar points of articulation are the case in the exchanges to which Watson alludes, and invoking our forms about money, as if they were culturally neutral, provides little insight about them.
The comparison of forms here is analogical and might lead to new insights about the Chinese materials derived from a Melanesian pattern. Yet there may indeed be deep history connecting these forms. Shell wealth or its references figure explicitly in the Melanesian case; in China the reference is implicit, realised in the character for cowries or shells in the characters used for ‘money’, things that are precious, or standing for what we call ‘tribute’ (e.g. 錢), a word composed of the character for ‘work’, gong 工 and ‘shell’ or ‘cowry shell’, bei 獄.

Using recent Western theory—the structuralist/fractal orientation—to delimit my field of inquiry, the labour process, raises two further issues I must discuss. First, if the mimetic or fractal nature of social reality is a feature Western theory had to discover (while being a given in many other social systems), where does this problem come from in the West? And second, if self-similarity is a condition of human existence how do we account for variation that is obviously a condition of human social organisation? This question leads to the consideration of the differences between East Asia and the South Pacific since it is part of my thesis that they share, at a qualitative level, similar if not identical labour processes. If there is some truth to this how do we deal with the fact that over their roughly 6000 year history they have created substantively different social systems? How do we simultaneously deal with identify and transformation?

Redundancy, self-similarity became problematical in the West for several principle reasons. In part, of course, the problem, and the need for ‘discovery’, follows from the contractual nature of Western social organisation—that is, the assertion in Western cosmology (philosophy) that it does not have a social system unless and until it decides it must by virtue of a crisis. Such crises are usually understood to be external to the society itself. If the central orientation in a social system is that it isn’t one then there can be no intrinsic understanding of that very system built according to some understanding of redundancy or self-similarity. Hence the quality had to be discovered. Yet I believe a more interesting understanding of this situation follows from the regular substitution of ever higher levels of power-driven machinery for human labour in the sphere of capital, m-c-m’. These substitutions regularly make previous conditions obsolete, then of no importance. Furthermore, these substitutions became designed around the idea that morality, religion or education—in short, ‘Civilisation’—would be enabled by the reduction in necessary labour time the transformations effected. I shall return to this substitution in my section devoted to the West. Yet the voids this process regularly creates are just as commonly filled up by Western historical consciousness. This is a consciousness of one, usually irrelevant, damn thing after another. As we continuously demystify the sources of our conditions yet we rarely reveal—and usually resist the revelation of—the collective nature of our social forms. The condition is of interest to historians but not to the operant conditions of society. It is no accident that the most creative forces in our society are so-often naïve ‘about history’. And as we shall see when I turn to Paul Rabinow’s book Making PCR, the author feels compelled to emphasise the uniqueness of a process described as an event that happens over and over again.
The language of fractals and chaos theory was arguably first suggestively and successfully introduced to anthropological studies with Roy Wagner’s 1991 essay ‘The Fractal Person’. Variations on the idea were taken up by others (e.g. Strathern 1991; Mosko & Damon 2005). But if this idea leads to analytical insights when analysing what is understood to be one social system, where is its contribution when relations between these kinds of—small scale—social systems are featured? For we have known them to be regional systems, similar to a ‘world-system’ in Wallerstein’s sense (Wallerstein 1974), since early in the nineteenth century. Throughout (Island) Melanesia actors are aware of significant differences in custom across contiguous places. The same question may be stated when we deal with significant time spans although our data leave us all but incompetent to pose that question with regard to the South Pacific. Yet that is not the case with East Asia. If time began anew with each Chinese emperor part of the very responsibilities of such persons was celebrating the continuities among the discontinuities its line of predecessors created. Rawski reminds us that ‘[t]he deified ancestors were thus important pillars of the state religious system, to be worshipped exclusively by the emperor or his designated representative. “Nor were the deified ancestors of previous dynasties ignored,” she writes. “The emperors of earlier dynasties were worshipped in the Temple of the Emperors and Kings of Successive Eras (Li-tai ti-wang Miao) . . .’ (Rawski 1988, p. 251). Here clearly the discontinuity of the line has for its very condition the continuity of the position. And, of course, the encompassing state rituals stand as memos or mementoes of the countryside, which, throughout China bear testimony to originating conditions. Like Lévi-Strauss’ archives (1966, p. 242), these etchings embody the essence of the orders of existence. This allows us to bring our introductory comments to a close by picking up on an observation, if not the analysis, Mark Elvin provides us concerning the transformed landscapes of China:

Jiaxing in medieval times was still environmentally rich, though more domesticated and decorated by human art than it had been under the early empire. It had become a domain shaped by water control, by seawalls, canals, and locks and levees and pinned down by roads and bridges. Its natural visage was now set off, like a face by beauty spots, with inscribed stone steles bestowing their stories, and hence their meanings, on particular places, and by Buddhist and Daoist temples that both enhanced and also spiritually subdued the once wild slopes and summits. Magic still lingered in the landscape, the memories of Daoist immortals and the illustrious dead, of the rain-bringing dragons that haunted the wells and springs, and of local deities with dominion over epidemics, locusts, and other disasters. (Elvin 2004, p. 168)

This is not just Jiaxing, of course. Overlooking Quanzhou in Fujian Province, on the border between East Asia and the cultural forms created to the south, is a mountain cliff facing the city. It is called Qingyuan Shan, 清源山 ‘Clear’, ‘root/source/origin’, ‘mountain’. My Quanzhou hosts date the calligraphy etched into the cliff from the Song, Ming and Qing dynasties. I would suggest this is not, or was not, just magic.
The Melanesian Case—Muyuw in the Northeast Kula Ring, Milne Bay Province

The Australian National University-based anthropologist James Fox has repeatedly pointed out that one of the common features across the Austronesian diaspora is a notion of origin or precedence (e.g. Fox 1995, 2009). One consequence of this structural orientation is the differentiation that so typifies the cultures of this vast region. In this section I illustrate the points I wish to make about the labour process in the South Pacific by focusing on details pertaining to the making of several parts of the largest class of outrigger canoe that plied the eastern half of the Kula Ring in Papua New Guinea. These parts not only encompass the whole by defining the uniqueness of every boat, they become an enactment of the features Fox suggests is a common characteristic found in this region, the conceived defining quality of originating conditions and the courses and quality of the action they inscribe.

These boats are part of a heritage that began some 6000 years ago as a group of people, or the cultural influences they created, moved from what is now southeastern China to Taiwan; and who, over the course of the last 4–5000 years came to influence or occupy every island between Madagascar in the Indian Ocean and Easter Island, and from Taiwan to New Zealand. Although most of it is water, this is roughly two-thirds of the globe. Until the sixteenth century the only human creation that compares to this creative achievement is the concentration of humanity generated by South and East Asia—a few people across a great stretch versus a lot of people on a relatively small portion of the globe.

The craft I am concerned with are outrigger canoes which share features with every other kind of craft formerly built between Sri Lanka in the northwest and New Zealand in the southeast. Most scholars argue that these craft have little in common with the sailing vessels produced in China. I am not persuaded by that conclusion. An analysis of transformations, rather than similarities, might reveal possible continuities in these traditions that, sooner or later have to be organised around differences rather than similarities. Chinese sailors/scholars, in fact, noticed interesting structural contrasts as they encountered Philippines vessels originating from this tradition (Scott 1982). These differences—having to do with the pliability of the Philippine craft—are consistent with transformations one may posit between East Asia and the conditions of the southern latitudes. Nevertheless there is a continuity in form between the visible arcs on practically every traditional roof structure on every building in China, and the sweep of roof ridges in virtually every traditional building from Southeast Asia into (Island) Melanesia and beyond (Waterson 1990). In most of Southeast Asia and Melanesia these arcs are equated with boat keels. There are formal similarities between them and the complex imagery dragons generate in China.11

Throughout the Austronesian world boats, as real and ideal forms, tend to have immense ‘symbolic’ significance. In the eastern Kula Ring the Creator is thought to have arrived on the island by means of one. He/she created the island’s various forms and productive practices, including the boat itself, and departed the island by means
of the same boat. Islands, fields, villages and houses can be or are discussed in terms of boat forms. Various cultural discontinuities on the islands that use them serve to produce the parts needed for them, either as replacements for originals or as better functioning pieces given the wood available at the initial site of production. There is a mutual mapping between a boat and its parts and the portion of the Kula Ring that employs them. People often use boat dynamics to discuss appropriate behaviour between people. As produced, reproduced, sailed and imagined these forms are complex standards, a major lens through which that social system creates and understands itself (See Dumont 1977, p. 162). As a field of practices, I suggest writing offers a similar sort of lens for East Asia.

A quick description of basic boat facts: These canoes are about 10 metres long. The hull is constructed by tying three planks of wood—strakes—to each side of the boat’s keel. The outrigger float is about two metres out from the keel and although composed by light wood it is heavy. In a mid-ranked class of outrigger the float might hydroplane with fast paddling or a stiff wind, something that never happens with this larger class of boat. The craft have one rectangular-shaped sail constructed from pandanus leaves sewn together. The boats do not have bulkheads, but while the front and back ends of the keel extend up to break waves, the strakes come together a metre or so behind the keel ends. The strakes are then tied in place with prowboards that form shapes very similar to those on all Chinese river and sea-craft.

These boats are designed for sailing—only the Creator could paddle one—with, for these people, heavy loads of items like sleeping mats, coconut leaf skirts and clay pots, vegetable food, pigs, and shell-wealth in voyages that may extend over the horizon. That they contain shell-wealth, *kula* valuables, is not an incidental part of their form. Held into the top of the mast by means of a peg and mortar joint is a contraption used for lifting the sail. It is shaped like a rooster. When I asked the reason for that shape I was told it follows because roosters keep time in villages and *kula* valuables, the most important items the boat carries, function by means of creating time, by which is meant the ranks of the people who exchange them. The boats couple particular places’ unique labours and the movement of shell-wealth whose passage through the region totalises it. This is the same coupling one sees in the Chinese character, 貢, translated as “tribute.” Might that suggest the ideas are part of the same constellation of intentions?

The arcing keel is cut from a single tree (species) that itself is an intentional product of the relationships between forests and fields. It may be noted that a different species in the same genus habituated to a slightly different ecology—soggy ground rather than dry, limestone strewn soil—is the prototypical keel for the canoes that ply the western side of the Kula Ring; so these slightly different initial conditions lead to radically different canoe structures. In any case, from the moment a seedling turns into a sapling people watch for the degree of arching; trees that arc more become keels; those that arc less are carved into strakes. Trees may be watched for at least thirty years, probably closer to sixty: this means that a tree’s growth is watched
and studied—and thus the boat to be made from it contemplated—for longer than it will likely last as a boat form (probably no more than twenty years).

Keel length is loosely measured by means of outstretched arms. These are counted so that the smallest keel/boat is $3 + 1$; the largest is $5 + 1$. The `$ + 1$' is any distance smaller than the outstretched arms. I was told there could not be a boat with the dimensions of $6 + 1$ because that would be so big it would tumble into chaos.

The keel is the initial or initiating condition that defines the uniqueness of every craft and so conforms to the features Fox defines in terms of 'origins' and 'precedence'. So although the keel length is not specified, its length becomes the standard for every other boat part. The outrigger float is the length of the keel, the strakes cut to fit a metre of more inside each end point, and the sail the length of the interval between the prow and stern boards (upwards of eight metres). The length and width of the sail determine the force of the harnessed wind. And this goes back to why $6 + 1$ is too big: the combination of materials and human muscle needed to manage that size exceeds material and human capacities. The kinds of decisions this structuring enforces may be seen with the mast. Two species of trees may be used for a mast but most of my sources refused to stipulate which was best. This follows because one tree is denser, therefore heavier than the other. Consequently it may be cut with a smaller diameter; the other tree would then generate a mast with a larger diameter. A mast is a spring fixed at its bottom where it is conjoined with the keel. Yet it is relatively free-floating at the top, where it must sway from the effect of the wind on the sail thus enabling wind to spill out of the sail. People readily illustrate this swaying with one extended finger clasped in the palm of another hand. Density and diameter determine the rate of vibration and the preferred rate cannot be determined in advance, only as it meshes with the performance of the rest of the boat. The requirements of the structure absorb the attentions of the people who manage and sail these boats.

The mast rests in a cup at the centre of the keel, a mast mount that holds the mast. People ascribe male/female imagery to the arcing and driving mast set into the vagina-like form of the cup. The sexual imagery here, which is not confined to this part of the boat, is part of the complex aesthetic ensemble these craft constitute. It would be a mistake, however, to argue that sexual imagery is what these forms are about or mean; they are about the establishment of effective complementarity, the conjoining of differences, a mimetic of the encompassing purposes these craft enable; and that is why these forms absorb peoples' attention.

This is best illustrated with the last pieces finally fit for each boat, forms considered its most important parts, equated to a body's lungs or heart. This structure is contained in the keel's very centre (See Photo 1a/1b). It consists of six pieces of wood carved from a very dense tree. Two of the pieces are approximately sixty centimetres long, tapered so that their diameters are about nine centimetres in diameter in their middle, perhaps three centimetres at each end. They rest over four shorter pieces, two towards their middle, and one at each end. These four pieces go across a hollow forming the inside of the keel (designed so that water can be easily bailed from
the boat). These four pieces may be either rounded or squared, but the two centre ones stand higher than the two ends. When the two longer tapered pieces are tied down over the four shorter ones they are doubly bowed, once because of the effect of the tying on their tapered form, the other because the two central crosspieces are higher than the ends. This bowing exerts a tremendous force upwards. That force neutralises the downward force of the wind on the mast. The mast rests in the cup placed over the centre of the two long tapered pieces. The cup that holds the mast is the bottom part of a ladle-like structure upwards of three metres in length. It rests in the bottom of the boat but arcs up over the side and out over the platform connecting the craft’s main hull to the float. While one end of this structure is designed to hold the mast, the purpose of the other is to keep the float in place at a stipulated distance from the keel. This means this arcing piece holds the two most severe forces to which the boat is subjected, the wind on the mast and the waves on the outrigger float, pulling both onto the tapered spring that is considered the heart/lung of the boat. A contained contrary, these pieces condition and modulate all other parts of the boat. The boat-makers and sailors carefully cut them as they think they should be. But they then finely adjust them after initial sailing by means of pumice, used like fine sandpaper, to sand off imperceptible portions of the wood. The piece’s appropriate shapes are finally determined by the boats feel when sailing.

These boat structures are such that they focus and pull human attention into deliberative and individualised forms and processes. Although fashioned from a standardised form, by means of its specific measures and the fine details of the qualities of the wood used in construction each boat becomes a unique product produced, used and appreciated so that its best likeness is a piece of art. And indeed people think these craft are beautiful. With more space I would go into the place of string figures in this cultural region for in a way it is from those forms that people first learn a practice that simultaneously concentrates the mind on elaborated beauty, extreme dexterity, and geometrical and transformational precision.

These craft model much of the rest of the social system, so much so that it might be said that they are the form serving as the mimetic for the culture. I could describe virtually every domain of activity in much the same way I have provided in this abbreviated description of a boat. For example, not only are fields re-termed as if they are a boat, but many people take the kind of care in their fields that one sees in a boat. A good gardener might plant 6000 seeds in an annual cycle watching the growth of every one of them—because their micro-circumstances vary first and foremost by the kinds and sizes of trees that grew on the soil before the field was cut and burned. And without doubt many people take enormous pride in the attention they give to this productive activity. I presume a similar view of the Chinese farmer led to an analogous recognition there in the 1860s by Charles George Gordon. He wrote ‘whatever may be said of their ruler, no one can deny but that the Chinese peasantry are the most obedient, quiet and industrious people in the world’ (Spence 1980, p. 78). Here Gordon reflects on the ways people were pulled into their labouring processes. But this was a state that had to be achieved, qualities of practice that had to
Photo 1A The contained contrary spring looking lengthwise from the stern end. Note that the structure is offset from the centre.
be instilled in the populace. If his analysis is correct Elvin tells us that ‘Ordinary people had therefore to be held to agriculture by coercion and persuasion. Otherwise rulers and their armies went unfed’ (Elvin 2004, p. 91). A similar thing might be put forth for the Melanesia I know. Dominating patterns have to be created, then learned; not everyone likes the lessons.

The Labour Process in the CMP

The labour process in Melanesia pulls the agent into the conditioning details of the things—and persons—being produced. I turn now to what I think is a representative example illustrating a multifaceted repulsion from and of those details—aspects of the capitalist mode of production. Anthony Wallace’s rich nineteenth-century historical ethnography of the coming of the industrial revolution to the United States is full of descriptions revealing this kind of relationship. So, writing of textile machinery we learn that:

The goal of inventors . . . was to make the mule completely automatic so as to reduce to a minimum the manufacturer’s dependence on the highly skilled, highly paid, and often independent-minded adult male spinners . . . it was not until the brilliant English mechanician Richard Roberts . . . turned his attention to the problem that a fully effective solution came. The story is told that Roberts was solicited to undertake the task of developing an effective self-actor by a delegation of manufacturers intent on breaking the spinners strike in 1824 . . . (Wallace 1978, pp. 193–4)
By 1835 Adam Smith’s division of labour does not account for the wealth of nations, rather the substitution of mechanical for skilled labour creates such a circumstance. Wallace quotes the Scottish mathematician Andrew Ure:

In fact, the division, or rather adaptation of labour to the different talents of men, is little thought of in factory employment. On the contrary, wherever a process requires peculiar dexterity and steadiness of hand, it is withdrawn as soon as possible from the cunning workman, who is prone to irregularities of many kinds, and it is placed in charge of a peculiar mechanism, so self-regulating, that a child may superintend it.

The grand object therefore of the modern manufacturer is, through the union of capital and science, to reduce the task of his work-peoples to the exercise of vigilance and dexterity,—faculties, when concentrated to one process, speedily brought to perfection in the young . . . (Wallace 1978, p. 382).

Wallace closes this account writing ‘The tendency in the 1830’s and 1840’s, then, was for the cotton mill machinery to become progressively more specialized and intricate, while the cotton mill operative became progressively more standardised and indifferently skilled’ (Wallace 1978, pp. 382–3). One sees in other parts of this work mill owners struggling with the knowledge they needed to effect the substitutions necessary for this newly defined mode of being. And Wallace himself believes that a new kind of thought comes about in this time period, an orientation that emphasises mathematical and linguistic/symbolic thought over the more fluid forms of orientation that he thinks prevailed in other domains . . . and that I think prevailed in other places (See Damon 2007). Although the generalisation of this way of being is a well-known fact of modern life, it is interesting to point out that one centre of contemporary society inverts this emphasis on deskilling and homogenising—sports. In fact it makes its workers more and more skilled. I would suggest, however, that this is a displacement of considerable interest, for big time sports becomes a reality in Western culture precisely at the time when machines take over the skill-required tasks of Western existence. In a remarkable section of his study called ‘Workers as Objects of Pity: The Ten Hours Law (Wallace 1978, pp. 388–94) Wallace reviews employer resistance to agitation for reduced hours of employment. He concludes: ‘After a few years Crozer’—one of the principle owners in Wallace’s account—‘testified enthusiastically for it, pointing out that in the end both sides had gained: the workers had greater access to opportunities for moral and intellectual improvement’; and the manufactures ‘got more work done per hour, or at a less rate of expense, than ever before [fn. 7 omitted]’ (Damon 2007, p. 394). ‘Moral and intellectual improvement’, our ‘Civilisation’, becomes possible with the deskilling of labour. Some might suggest it becomes necessary with that deskilling, as do the other side attractions of life, including drugs, entertainments like books and movies and plays, and of course sports. In all these forms the fact of substitution becomes paramount, both as directly observed or vicariously mimicked.

Wallace deals with the making of this context in the United States. In the time period he discusses many of the cultural rubrics that were to make this order of
relations both possible and bearable were still being worked out. It is clear that the (American) actors he describes, people who are by the 1850s and 60s successful managers routinising their culture, did not know what they were getting into when they started in the 1820s. This is a very different situation than one recently described by the American anthropologist Paul Rabinow in *Making PCR: A Story of Biotechnology* (1996). Rabinow’s book is about one of the early biotech companies struggling to generate new procedures for simplifying, and therefore cheapening, various productive processes. PCR (polymerase chain reaction) became a method for isolating a strand of DNA then producing large numbers of the isolated element. A simple little technique, to echo Rabinow’s summative chapter, it became a method for doing new biochemical and biomedical research not really anticipated by its conditions of discovery. In seemingly dispensing with the past, it created a new future. The person credited with its discovery, Kary Mullis, received the 1993 Nobel Prize in Chemistry.

Although celebrated as an account of a unique event—Rabinow believes a goal we should have is the description of the ‘particularity of practices’ (Rabinow 1997, p. 17)—in fact the book is an account of a familiar process. Within the vast institutional train of biological and medical sciences created in the United States from the end of the nineteenth century, by the 1980s small firms break off from state sponsorship to try to move resources from public to private benefits. The book focuses on an early entrant in the biotech sphere, the Cetus Corporation. One sees all the familiar structures of capitalist production systematics. Conditions of production generate needs for new products to soak up creative capacities (Rabinow 1997, p. 71). Some productive conditions are so onerous, tedious and boring that workers themselves beg for machines. Meanwhile certain efforts create a dialectical opposite that becomes generative: ‘The Southern blotting method rapidly became an indispensable tool in molecular biology. It is directly relevant to PCR, not only because of its general methodological importance, but because Kary Mullis hated using it. He disliked the number of steps involved, the time required to perform them, and the radioactivity required . . .’ (Rabinow 1997, p. 82). Rather than pulled into, one is pushed away from productive activity. It would seem that life’s critical processes here do not so much require being imbedded in the details of work as they require a different zone of consciousness seeking escape. Mullis is reputed to have toyed with LSD in the 1960s; more or less at the time of his conceiving what was required for PCR we learn this:

Kary was playing around a lot with fractals at that time. He was working on a piece of paper with these patterns which were being generated by a very simple mathematical equation, just each time the results were put back in again and fed through. Maybe the concept of some discrete event occurring on the small scale and then being translated onto the larger scale prepared the way. (Rabinow 1997, p. 92)

What Mullis succeeded in doing was pull an element—a strand of DNA, for example—out of its context and develop a capacity to reproduce it mechanically so
that it would begin to appear in geometric proportions. He enabled new practices (Rabinow 1997, p. 168), if in a way derived from but not dependent upon previous realities, making many of them matters of mere historical interest. Here paradigmatic substitution on a grand scale repeats a process that has been occurring over and over again since, perhaps, the sixteenth century, but in so doing it makes past sequences irrelevant. Although the religious ferment that surrounded the activities and places described in Rabinow’s book are not part of his tale, a wider reading could easily describe a millenarian-like setting almost identical to the one Wallace brings into his account of nineteenth America. Some of this setting concerns the Pentecostalism central to Joel Robbins’ work as he follows his forays from Papua New Guinea into new social movements in the core (Robbins 2004, 2010. See also Crapanzano 2001).

China

If stunning decontextualisation followed by power-laden production centres the Western regime, what stands out in traditional East Asian social life is just about the opposite—embellished context bounding the elaboration if not celebration of a high level of skill verging on celebrated art. I was first exposed to this while being instructed in how to write Chinese characters several years ago. At some point I noticed that the ‘field’ in which you learned how to write was finely divided into eight parts but that actual strokes were always off-set from those geometrical divisions. I asked my instructor if that was intentional. She said yes recounting how her father taught her to observe how strokes were related to, but offset from, the ‘field’s’ divisions. Slightly before that explanation the first man who exposed me to Chinese calligraphy noted that the character for ‘rice’, 米, the most important character for calligraphy, effectively followed all of the divisions in the ‘field’. (See DIAGRAM 1: The ‘field’ and character for rice, 米.)

A short note here must suffice for a long excursion into matters of Chinese sociality that bring us back to one of my initial points about the mimetic nature of some social systems. In brief, the character I have translated as ‘field’, 天, is the same character used to reference the place where rice is planted. In a fascinating Dumont-inspired take on the place of land in China David Gibeault writes that ‘The fundamental principle at work throughout history is that land is understood as the counterpart of subordination to kingship’ (Gibeault ms., p. 3), or ‘emperorship’. The principle character he is drawing on is the very same one I am translating as field or rice field. It might then be suggested that the experience of writing becomes a subordination to form that is a mimetic replication of the way planting rice must be subordinated, not just to the conditions of this field where it is transplanted, but to a visualisation of the emperor, effectively the structure of a region’s watershed. This entails dragon imagery which includes mountains and their liquids, necessary foci for the continuous engagement that was rice production. At a certain level it would seem that writing and planting rice bear self-similar relations to one another. But these are not, of course, static associations. For if these written forms follow studious
practicing from originating models, the height of this practice was, and remains, throwing some new light on an old form, the calligrapher replicating the master by eventually inserting his or her own being. This is clearly part of the dynamic that was ‘China’. Bray describes this quality in the production of rice, though I do not think she captures its significance. 22

Another early teacher in my instruction in things Chinese explained why characters with only a few strokes were more difficult to write than those with many, a logic that seemed counter-intuitive to me. His point was that more strokes increase your ability to achieve the balance and aesthetic feel intrinsic to the inscription process. With more strokes it is easier to offset one relatively imprecise form with another that can make up for it. Hearing that I was immediately reminded of the stress on the last part made in the boats I described earlier. In sequence each additional stroke/

Diagram 1 The ‘field’ and character for rice, mi.
boat-part goes to create an ever more finely nuanced form. Those of us who have friends who are serious calligraphers understand another locus of this mindset—originals are followed until their coursings engender their own new creations.

The man who described this detailed ‘nuancing’ also noted the essential move of Chinese culture is to follow the rivers up, arguably if not obviously to the source and origin of the process of production of rice. The thought expressed here is not recent. Bray quotes a sixth-century scholar: ‘Whether the land be good or poor, if the water is clear then the rice will be good’ (Bray 1986, p. 28); the water of course comes not just from elsewhere, but from above. I do not believe this is magic, nor the use of dragons to reference mountains as sources of water. Rather, it is—was?—focusing attention on context, which minimally is a watershed. And a watershed is not only a physical space but necessitates relations to conceptualised wind and rain (See Hsu 2000). Much of ‘China’ seems designed to rivet subjectivities to these details, directly or metaphorically presented. So to the mound or hill created just to the north of the Forbidden City. In a course I taught a student—from Beijing working on an architecture degree in my university—wrote about the spatial models used to define Beijing’s placement (Yi Li ms). One of these appears in Diagram 2, the city clearly nestled amidst a set of mountains, 王山 (Wang Shan, literally ‘Kingly Mountain,’) directly to the north. In another (Diagram 3) she created a different kind of graphic, emphasising the appropriate 学, xue (‘hole’, ‘cave’, ‘concavity’, ‘acupuncture point’) that models images of productivity, perhaps best understood with Hocart’s ideas about ‘life’ (See Needham 1970, pp. xxviii–xxxv). These forms bear more than passing resemblance to the symbolism contained in the mast/mastmount I noted in the previous section. In his unpublished essay ‘Political Economy and Theology of Rice in Monsoon Asia’, Gregory notes that from Thailand east in Monsoon Asia the King or the Emperor conducted rites that functioned as a simulacrum of the broader conditioning of the realm. ‘In China, for example, the emperor performed elaborate and costly rituals whose origins go back to antiquity’ (Gregory ms, p. 16), that cost including the structures of the Forbidden City and its retinue of concubines drawn from across the land, partial tokens for plots of the Emperor’s land strewn throughout the reach of his light. For rice the central text in English is clearly Bray’s The Rice Economies (1986). Her book sets up both an implicit and explicit comparison with Western forms of agriculture. The difference between the two is the movement towards more mechanisation in the West and continuously higher degrees of skilled labour and highly sophisticated water management in the East. These processes result in transformations of soil qualities over the course of years as hillsides are turned into terraces and lowland or even seacoasts fill in. Gradually a mountain moves through the river’s silt to a fabricated landscape. These transformations, Bray writes, require years ‘of hard work, in return for decades if not centuries of stable yields. It is not surprising, then, that rice-farmers often prefer to work existing fields more intensively rather than opening up of new fields which, at least for the first few years, will produce less than long-established ones’. A few lines later she writes
‘[p]erhaps “build” is a more appropriate term than “open up,” when one considers the engineering skills which are often required’ (Bray 1986, p. 29). This substitution is pertinent since ‘open up’ implies the taking down of virgin soils, and because of the peculiarities of its geology and climate it can be suggested that the fundamental conditions of Western European productive forms, whether located in Western Europe or North America, came to the fore in gross energy-demanding conditions. In contrast East Asia went for subtly channelling the flows of wind and water.  

But I wish to go back to Bray’s years ‘of hard work, in return for decades if not centuries of stable yields’. I believe this is not quite accurate. Lansing’s work on Balinese rice practices allows for a more dynamic view of these processes. For in fact fields were constantly being made as materials came down from the mountains. Although one can intuit these processes in Bray’s work, Lansing’s very specific description of field management captures these processes’ essential truths:

Diagram 2  The situated Forbidden City (Reproduced with permission from Li 2009, pp. 6, 8); drawn from Yu 2005, p. 210).
We mapped the temple, the irrigation canals that flow out of it, and the fields that depend on this flow ... We found that before the advent of irrigated rice cultivation, the valley bottom was a swampy forest dominated by palms and bananas. Sedimentology indicated a very rapid build-up of sediments after the appearance of irrigation systems ... a radiocarbon date ... showed that nearly three metres of soil were deposited at this location in the past five hundred years ... Over a time scale of decades, directed flows of sediments could have been used to contour the landscape, enlarging the area suitable for terracing and facilitating the flow of water in small canals—a steady accretional expansion of convex surfaces ... We spoke with older farmers who recalled participating in the demolition of a weir and the construction of tunnels and canals leading out of the topmost fields about forty years ago. Altogether, these results suggested that small teams of farmers were
continuously engaged in carefully planned microengineering to maintain control of the flows of water and sediment. (Lansing 2006, p. 41)

The fields were, then, like the boats I described for Melanesia . . . in a constant state of adjustment and elaboration.

Work here deals not just with making and manicuring fields, but also refining seed structures to the ever-changing specific places. And the creativity derives not just from the focused attention on an individual paddy, but the necessary cooperation that must be created along the water’s fall-line. Details have to be arranged within definable totalities.

My original intent for this paper was to review data concerning dragon kilns as well as rice fields. Bringing these kilns into serious discussion here, however, lies beyond the limits of this work. Yet a point should be noted because it affords a final return to conditions in Melanesia. The issue stands out in the evolution from a kiln with a single opening at the bottom to designs with fires and stoking devices extending along the kiln’s incline (Needham 2004, p. 351). The activity pulls the person into continuous monitoring of heat from the bottom to the top of the structure as the work proceeds (See Photo 2).

The return to Melanesia is precisely on this point, concerning ceramics. In his examination of contemporary potters in southeastern Papua New Guinea Geoffrey

![Photo 2](image-url)

*Photo 2* Worker adjusting heat in dragon kiln in Dehua, Fujian Province, July 2008.
Irwin observes that their ability to control internal and external temperatures were as accurate as the instruments he was able to attach to various parts of the pots. Continuing:

Another issue is that temperature curves were different (faster, slower, higher or lower max temperature) in different parts of the pot (inside, outside, physically higher or lower in the fire). But at the point where the pot was removed from the fire, the potters had created a situation where, for the only time in firing, inside and outside temperatures were likely to be the same at the same location on the pot. More likely to survive the thermal shock. 26

Practices like this are not matters of intuition. They derive from focused experience, observation, and intelligent adjustment. If these processes share qualities with the attention and expertise exhibited in the Chinese dragon kilns there is nevertheless a major difference: The Melanesia firing process treats one pot at time. The scale is different.

Conclusion

What do we learn when we think about the category ‘civilisation’ viewed from the perspective of the labour process? A great deal, I think.

This paper conjoins three research thrusts in various stages of fruition. One of these, closing in on four decades in duration, derives from the Kula Ring and its Austronesian social system it has been my privilege to study. The most recent of the three involves early forays into East Asia, and it is by means of the people I have met in that project that I was asked to participate in a conference concerned with the category ‘civilisation’. The concept was foreign to me as an analytical classification, but because of the third domain of research this paper discusses the notion gained the kernel of a comparative problem. This third area was Western society, which for me, like many anthropologists of my generation, became a focus of major interest, if not for formal research and publishing. The reasons for this are clear. Dumont’s work on the one hand (e.g. 1977), and the import of Marx back into anthropology in the late 1960s and 1970s on the other, demanded intensive rather than casual analysis of the West to go along with the attention anthropologists had paid to non-western societies for nearly a century. If it was soon enough clear that questions Marx asked for Western society were relevant to non-western ones it was by no means clear that the answers he generated from his limited ethnographic encounter could be taken at face value. So a careful delineation of relationships became vital just as, for example, the historical ethnographies produced by the likes of Wallace became new sources for comparative inquiry.

Wallace’s discussion of the trade-off of learning, education, and religion, for labour-saving devices, along with the humorous treatment of that relationship in American literature, was one of the contexts for fathoming the category Feuchtwang and Gibeault were contemplating, especially as that started from Mauss’s post-World War I attempts to give the idea new currency. But that it had lost its value and had to
be redefined is part of the ethnographic context by which I think the notion may be evaluated. Gibeault’s invocation of the rough Chinese equivalent, *wenming*, then became for me the pivot around which I have attempted to create a set of contrasting portraits in this essay.

This partly leads to the question for why include Rabinow’s monograph in the data for this essay. There are biographical and ethnographic reasons for this selection. By lecturing in France over the last decade I was both re-introduced to the person and writing of Pierre Lemonnier. Partly through Lemonnier’s questioning of my inchoate descriptions of boat parts featured earlier in this paper I was led to further investigations of those boats, and the attentions people gave to them in return trips to Papua New Guinea in 2005, 2006 and 2009. That development occurred as I began ethnographic encounters with things Chinese. By accident I then used Rabinow’s book in a course designed to explore questions about the place of ‘materiality’ in social life only to discover an attitude toward the labouring process at a far remove from the Kula Ring and what I was learning of a ‘traditional’ China; but in keeping with the really thick descriptions Wallace had provided of the same social system in an earlier phase of its formulation. The practices Rabinow described were not, thus, so particular. Rather they were refractions across domains and times our culture prevents us from making part of the sense of a whole. It was this social quality that I sought to organise by putting its topic into spatial and comparative perspective while also trying to make our focus definable ethnographic realities, specifiable processes, parts, that can stand for holistic representations and instantiations of the social systems before us. In the case of both China and the boats from the eastern side of the Kula Ring the movement from these selected parts to the larger social configurations is relatively simple. Because, I think, the agents of this action see, or saw, themselves situated in totalising structures.

Such is not the case in the West, or is not now. Through Wallace’s ethnographic context, the middle decades of the nineteenth century, most social actors experienced themselves in situated hierarchies; the ‘Great Chain of Being’, implicitly tied to a Newtonian view of necessary connections, defined how many actors saw themselves in the United States. But that perspective gave way to an imagined continuous novelty that the labour process and the ideology that situated it incessantly came to foretell with millenarian fervour; and with Rabinow as our ethnographer of the present we see analysts espouse it as if it was a truth to be revealed—that goal of revealing the particularities of practices. This is dressing structures up in the illusion of events.

This brings me to my conclusion; which is not looking forward to the revision of our analytical categories as taking our subjects’ categories seriously to see what they tell us. The imposition of ‘civilisation’ reveals much in the West, arguably a making of and search for meaning because too much of it, not civilisation, but meaning, is regularly taken from daily life. Of this process Wallace writes, almost desperately:

> The manufacturer had to improve his old machines or buy new machines in order to increase productivity and reduce labour coast per unit of production; the
operative had to prepare himself for the day when a less skilled person (a young woman, a child perhaps) could take over his job at an improved machine, or even to see the machine operate by itself, almost like an automaton. (pp. 188–9)

By contrast, I suggest, ‘enlightened writing’ of East Asia was indeed a model for necessary and appropriate action there—in its bounds an ever unfolding creativity that both drew from its sources as it supplied models for new ones. ‘Kastom’, ‘custom’ in its various guises, would be, I think, the only word that might approximate something like ‘civilisation’ in Melanesia. However, I cannot recall any anthropologist using it quite in that sense. I think the reason for this is obvious. It is not that there is not, or are not, practices that transcend the region's cultural elaborations; certainly the symbolism of boats and almost universal complementarity of male/female relations come close to that kind of common denominator. It is, rather, that the conditions of sociality in the region, its socio-ecology, argue instead for the agglutination of social systematics by means of the attachment, the flow of complementarities, rather than encompassing hierarchies or fictitious automatons.

Acknowledgements

The central ideas for this paper came to me while reading and discussing Christopher A. Gregory’s unpublished essay ‘Political Economy and Theology of Rice in Monsoon Asia’, originally presented in Manchester in 2006; by continuing interaction with David Gibeault about the nature of Chinese society; by contemplating James J. Fox’s ideas about ‘precedence’ in Austronesian societies, a model about the configuration of hierarchy or ordination (Do we see it in China?); and by a dialogue with Stephan Feuchtwang and Michael Rowlands whose work, in the hand of Yongjia Liang, created the workshop Empire, Civilisation and the Anthropology of China, organised by Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore, 4–5 March 2010. Gregory draws on and elaborates Francesca Bray’s The Rice Economies (1986). Gibeault is a product of Dumont’s former Paris ERASME. Gregory, Gibeault, Fox and Feuchtwang read earlier drafts of this essay. I thank them for their interest, but relieve them of any responsibility for errors. This version of the paper also benefits from a reading by Yongjia Liang, and two anonymous reviewers, all of whom I thank. I also thank the American Philosophical Society for a Franklin Research Grant that enabled my 2009 research on the boats of the Eastern Kula Ring.

Notes

Zhang, an Assistant research fellow in the Chinese Academy of Arts in Beijing personal communication, 15 September 2010. Huang Yu-chien confirms this idea (personal communication, 10 August 2010) referring me to: http://www.chineseetymology.org/CharacterASP/CharacterEtymology.aspx?characterInput=%E6%98%8E&submitButton1=Etymology.

I follow questions about the nature of symbolism Lévi-Strauss (1945) charted out against the position subscribed by and to Durkheim.

I use without elaboration the anthropological idea of exchange sphere derived from Mauss, Malinowski and Firth, but not fixed in the discipline until Paul Bohannan’s work in the 1950s (e.g. Bohannan 1955). From that time it became part of a set of beliefs that assumed Western societies did not have exchange spheres. That understanding is mistaken. I have discussed ideas relevant to this problem in Damon 1993. Aspects of the argument I make here touch on kinds of analyses brokered by a discussion of ‘ideal types’. An anonymous reviewer of an earlier draft of this paper suggested this way of organising my data be considered, invoking Collier 1988 to do so. In some hands such an analysis might prove useful. For my purposes it would entail a degree of reification I do not find useful because the different social dynamics I describe are in conflict with one another across the ethnographic terrain this paper treads.

Marx wrote about this quality of Western organisation, i.e. the experiencing of ‘internal’ relations as if they were ‘external’. More ethnographic accounts are found in Anthony Wallace’s Rockdale, and Robert Jackall’s account of upper level corporate managers (Jackall 1988[2009]).

Michael Lewis may be the best contemporary journalist recording this aspect of culture in the United States. See his Liar’s Poker, about the re-organisation of debt in the US financial system in the 1980s; and The New, New Thing, about computers and the internet via Jim Clark’s creation of Netscape. New forms of communication tend to make the previous ones irrelevant. In the academic domain it is of interest that, proverbially, mathematicians and physicists make their signal contributions early, before their heads are too cluttered up with realities.

Shineberg’s (1967) study of the nineteenth-century sandalwood trade shows how European Australians were forced to move pigs from one island to another to get what they wanted. Though obviously not because of Shineberg’s work, this well-known quality accounts for Mauss’s criticising Malinowski, in essai sur le don, for overstating the uniqueness of the Kula Ring.

‘Archives are the embodied essence of the event’ (Lévi-Strauss 1966, p. 242). Although I have replaced Lévi-Strauss’s ‘event’ with orders to capture the didactic nature of China’s history-marked countryside, Stephan Feuchtwang’s Foreword to Wang Mingming’s book (op.cit.) makes me wonder if ‘pulse’ needs to be used here in place of event.

Zheng Miaoling, personal communication 31 August 2010.

For a rich discussion of Austronesian boat symbolism see Manguin (1986).


It has been identified by K. Damas as Manilkara fasciculata (Warb.) H.J. Lam. Sometimes another tree is substituted for it, also extremely dense: Ixora cf. asme Guill.

As evident from the Photos 1a/1b, two long pieces of wood run underneath these four. They cover close to 60 per cent of the boat’s length and help tie this pivotal spring into the entire keel structure. These two pieces are also very carefully constructed from just one type of tree. Although not usually perceptible to the eye, one piece is slightly larger than the other to offset the forces of the mast, which as can be seen from this shot, are not symmetrically positioned in the keel.

Sahlins (1972) captured some of this quality in his chapters (2&3) on The Domestic Mode of Production. I explored some of these features long ago in Damon 1980.

A slightly reworked version of the argument is presented in Damon 2008a, 2008b.
Here I refer to the fantasy sports, which in the United States are big business. One might also note the emphasis in novelty in the production of our music, movies, books, and so on. A new form should be substituted for an old one.

‘It was really uncomfortable to do thirty cycles of amplification and difficult to keep track . . . That went on for several months until me and another guy in the lab told Tom, “If you don’t get us a machine, we’re quitting”’ (Rabinow 1997, p. 141). See also p. 80.

In our event-way of thinking Mullis is credited with inventing PCR. Initially discounted as not significant PCR rapidly became a fundamental technique in many DNA health and research activities; hence the 1993 Nobel Prize.

In the Workshop for which this paper was first presented Joel Robbins delivered the keynote address, ‘Transcendence and the Anthropology of Christianity: Change, Language and Individualism’, which raised many issues pertinent to this paper and alerted me to the isomorphism between the orientation contained in Rabinow’s account, his ideals for anthropology, dominant forms of Christianity, and interesting speculations about Axial Age transformations. This is at least the second coming of these probings. See the papers in Daedalus, vol. 104, no. 2, (Spring, 1975), ‘Wisdom, Revelation, and Doubt: Perspectives on the First Millennium B.C.’

In our discussion of these points in 2008–9 Gibeault continued this way: ‘I am actually working on the relation between the king and the mountain, but I did not relate it with the fields and productivity. This is specially pertinent as not only water comes from the mountain, but rain as well, as Chinese believe that mountains produce clouds. Clouds and rain are the figure of fertility in China, and they call male-female intercourse ‘the plays of clouds and rain’.

With a Mauss-inspired sensitivity Billeter does capture these realities: ‘The Chinese calligrapher’s one concern is to endow the characters with life, to animate . . . the brush is not a tool like a pen but an instrument that registers every move of the hand . . . Chinese calligraphy is in essence an art of movement’ (Billeter 1990, p. 11).

Among the sources I have in mind for this claim is a lecture in April 2010 by James Wilkerson, Associate Professor of Anthropology, National TsingHua University, Taiwan. See Wilkerson, James n.d.

As a meeting point for South and East Asia and the Austronesian world Steve Lansing’s work on Balinese rice agriculture probably set a standard for studies that simultaneously take on the analysis of skilled labour and sophisticated management (Lansing 1991, 2006). Dean and Xheng Zhenman (2010) meets that standard showing how the religious forms along the coast line of Fujian Provence serve as intensifications of everyday life (p. 4) and so thus serve to make and monitor the dynamical, complex systems which are irrigated rice fields.

This summary derives not only from considering Bray’s account; Tim Flannery argues for the gross energy forms found amongst Europeans in both Australasia and North America (Flannery 1994, 2001).

Geoffrey Irwin, personal communication, 28 February 2010. See also Irwin 1985.

Perhaps not. In the eastern corner of the Kula Ring the word usually translated as ‘knowledge’, kakin, is the duplicated form of the verb ‘see’, kin. ‘Knowing’ is seeing continuously, which is also one of the outcomes of successful kula (kun in Muyuw) action. This idea is semantically cognate to the Chinese wenming. 文明

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