
Preface

Though seemingly a humanities subject matter, this book is intended to be a critique of the social sciences, targeting in particular the discipline of anthropology. It brings forth a sequence of the “old ways” of the other and self-other relations, especially those to do with cosmo-geographic positionings of the West, so as to make a general proposition: systematic studies of non-Western perspectives of the other and self-other relations are urgently needed; yet, paradoxically, they have often been neglected by anthropologists, who have taken this task as their own responsibility or burden.

To place these other conceptions of alterity in their historical settings, I consider the cosmo-geographic topographies and “ethno-directionologies” as found in one of the related variations of Eurasian civilization.

I draw from, and in turn bear on, Marcel Granet’s theory of “Chinese civilization” and extend a comparative cosmology to history.

I apply the cosmology of “All under Heaven”—*Tianxia*, or a grouping of certain Chinese world conceptions, activities, and institutions—so as to both contextualize Chinese “counterparts” of Orientalism (Said, 1978) and compare and relate them with Indo-European perspectives.

Deriving its key concepts from the character for “it” (*ta*), instead of the engendered “he” or “she,” a “sub-tradition” of Chinese cosmology defined speculations about the level beyond the planes of human ontology as philosophies superior to Confucian “sociologics.” This

“sub-tradition,” immersed in the classical Chinese cosmo-geographies, left important imprints on pre-modern Chinese political ontologies of being “among the others”—in this case, other humans, other divinities, and other things. Conveying a different kind of universal understanding, it constitutes what may be called “organic materialism”—the “organic conception in which every phenomenon was connected with every other according to a hierarchical order” (Needham, 1981a, p. 14).

Historians of science have attributed the reason Chinese advanced sciences earlier than Europeans and yet were later left behind by them to this kind of organic materialist “confusion,” and they have left us in an extensive space, imagining whether such a worldview, apart from making a “paradox” of the world, also produced different ontological and social formations from that of the “holy,” whose mytho-religious profoundness has been revealed by such great scholars as Émile Durkheim, Mircea Eliade, and Georges Dumézil.

The “native” concept of the other, together with the issue of organic materialism, has also left important imprints upon the present work.

However, to contrast East and West is not to separate one from the other. With the genealogy of Chinese Occidentalism, I intend to reflect on the “art of war” kind of interpretation of inter-cultural politics, prevalent in a large part of anthropology in the past few decades, and to re-cherish and re-offer a certain romance of opening different worlds to each other.

I relate history to a wide range of theoretical debates in anthropology, and I consider the ideas of a great number of modern anthropologists—to name just a few, Marcel Mauss, Franz Boas, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Clifford Geertz, Radcliffe-Brown, Edmund Leach, Louis Dumont, Mary Douglas, Marshall Sahlins, Eric Wolf, and Frederik Barth—who have produced works so fundamental to the discipline.

I thus seem to confine myself to certain “structural analyses.”

Presently, many colleagues in anthropology have come to believe that “structuralism” is no longer necessary. I have partly agreed with this reaction, but also thought about the issue differently. In my view, especially since we mostly live as “participant observers” of the “hot societies,” social scientists still need to take up the challenge “from afar”—even if it was an outcome of an “adventure romance”—while trying our best to prevent the potential danger of excluding the other

from our common humanity. If the so-called structuralism is about anything, then, it is chiefly about the “dual attitudes” of anthropologists toward the other, which, I strongly felt, are relevant to our time.

Meanwhile, regarding the “structural” anthropological perspectives to which I refer, I must explain that these comprise in fact a great range of different views, on the horizons of which I seek an altered expression. Roughly speaking, while I am critical of the “representations” of enclosed social or cultural systems in the works by such authors as Radcliffe-Brown and Clifford Geertz (whose theoretical “ancestries” could in turn be traced back to the writings of Émile Durkheim and Max Weber), I seek to draw new inspirations from the insights presented by Mauss and Boas as well as Lévi-Strauss on inter-societal and cross-cultural relatedness; by Leach and Douglas on process, cosmology, and worldview; by Sahlins on historicity; by Wolf on “world systems”; and by Barth on regional “sub-traditions.” If my inclusion of all the different anthropological theories has turned out to be quite restricted, then, I must admit that, sadly, it has stemmed either from the limits of my reading in Western anthropology or from my problematic “bias” toward the contemporary anthropological repetitions of culture/cultures of power.¹

To bring an altered phenomenon of presence in the world into our consciousness, I have had to cover too broad a scope and too long a history. The scope is the hugely complex “civilization” of the Central Kingdom (Zhongguo), and the era is one that basically corresponds to the entire progress that has occurred since the invention of Chinese writing over three thousand years ago. Yet, I am not a historian but merely an anthropologist with a strong interest in history. In presenting this big picture of the Chinese world, of its patterns of cosmo-geography, philosophy, religiosity, trade, and so forth, I have tried to quote from primary sources, but I have ended up relying very heavily upon secondary sources. An excuse for my writing a book when the “originality of material” remains an issue has been that the data for such a history have been much used in the historiographies that I reconsider and reevaluate.

I depend heavily on certain “dialogues with the ancestors,” or re-interpretations and syntheses of different “native” and “foreign” interpretations of Chinese pasts. In particular, on the “native” side, I try to derive certain points of reference from a number of pioneers in

Chinese history, ethnology, archaeology, geography, and philosophy: Wang Guowei, Li Ji, Fu Sinian, Gu Jiegang, Qian Mu, Tang Yongtong, Feng Chengjun, Zhang Xinglang, Wu Wenzao, and many others. These “ancestors” of Chinese academia were specialized in studying different historical phases (Wang, Li, and Fu in classical periods; Gu in the transition from the age of mythology to that of historiography; Tang in the “age of chaos” and Buddhism; Feng and Zhang in world history; Qian in history of political ideas; Wu in sociology and anthropology), developing different disciplines, defining different subjects of research. Belonging to different and even rival “schools” of thought, these works have greatly diverse perspectives. To put their works in one study requires some academic labor. Understanding their differences and commonalities, and on top of that, building our own theory out of our critical engagements with such earlier interpretations complicates our endeavor. Yet, precisely because this kind of labor is challenging and never ending, what is to be presented can only be described as an assortment of synopses with its own order, value, and simplifications.