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1

Polemic: Before the Rise of the East

The argument is about changes in preeminence between the main centres of civilization and the reasons for them. What is argued for is an acceptance of both systemic and singular reasons for such changes and a recognition of their interdependence. Although the book opens with a polemic and concludes with a prognosis, the argument is pursued in a period: the rise of the East between 500 and 1000AD, in particular the reign in China of the T'ang emperor Hsüan-tsung 713–756. The T'ang period should be recognized as a significant part of everyone's history, for it provided not only one of the most illustrious epochs of Chinese and East Asian history – one of Hsüan-tsung's epithets was Ming Huang, the brilliant emperor – but it also supplied material for later borrowing by the West, which, more than renaissances of its own classical past, eventually restored it to global ascendancy. Under the T'ang, China, partly from foreign, even global, resources, notably Buddhist, remade itself and made possible the remaking of the West. Bacon's three Chinese contributions to civilization: print, gunpowder and magnetic navigation, all originated in late antiquity. So too did other significant physical technologies: successive basin solar evaporation for salt, co-fusion steel, proto-porcelain, chemical therapies and clockwork; paralleled in social technology by civil service examinations, fiscality based on indirect taxation, medical colleges and official pharmacopeias. China in the reign of Hsüan-tsung held a preeminence similar to that of the United States today. His capital Ch'ang-an, of which Sian is a shrunken remnant, was a Washington and a New York rolled into one, with a dash of West Coast too. It was a magnet alike for poli-

2 T'ang China

tics, economy, society and intellect. It was the centre of the world order.

The preeminence of China under the T'ang raises questions as to how it arose and whether it will return. Here the polemic and the prognosis are engaged. The polemic, hopefully respectful and certainly admiring, is directed against part of Andre Gunder Frank's *Re-Orient: Global Economy in the Asian Age* (University of California, Berkeley, 1998). Frank would not accept a rise of the East in the period 500–1000, because he believes that the East, China in particular, was always central to the world order, at least since 3000BC. Consequently, it could not rise. Moreover, he believes that centrality can be explained purely in systemic terms without regard to singularity, that is localized conditions, what he calls exceptionalism. My polemic therefore contends that in AD500, the East was in some senses inferior to the West and that its subsequent rise requires singular as well as systemic factors for its explanation. My middle chapters will then explore the rise and its reasons in politics, economy, society and intellect, placing the emphasis on the first and the last in the causal network. Finally, following a survey of the return to the West after AD1000, the prognosis, from the standpoint of the analysis of the preceding rise, concurs with the opinion of another eminent authority, Chris Patten, in his *East and West: The last Governor of Hong Kong on Power, Freedom and the Future* (Macmillan, London, 1998). Patten argues that in the short and middle term, it is unlikely that the East, China in particular, will replace the West as the centre of civilization. His reasons are systemic rather than singular, which is appropriate since globalization is now more intense than it was in the world of late antiquity. He deflates Asian values, downplays the uniqueness of China, and emphasizes universal factors, such as plural politics, market economics and the rule of law, which, while they may have found their first expressions in the West, are not necessarily alien to the East, as Amartya Sen has also suggested. Indeed these factors are the basis of the embryonic world system of today. Nevertheless, even in the future, idiosyncrasy, exceptionalisms and the unique parameter will have their part to play in a world order which must always comprise both system and singularity. Such a duality, indeed, is a condition of the openness of the future, as it has been of the contingency of the past. Hilaire Belloc's Byzantine official who, at the beginning of the seventh century, weighed every factor but was

unaware of the imminent maturity of Muhammed, remains to mock our systemic calculations in prognosis.

The present chapter falls into three sections: first, an exposition of Frank's concept of the world order; second, a critique of that conception; third, from the standpoint of that critique, an account of the preponderance of the West in the prior half of the first Christian millennium. This forms the preamble to the examination of the rise of the East after AD500 in the subsequent chapters.

Frank's concept of the world order

Although Frank does not do this, it will be convenient in what follows to distinguish world order, world interconnections, world institutions, world network, and world system. World order is least precise and most inclusive. It denotes any set of global contacts, however tenuous, whether arising from geology, climate, genetics or human activity. Thus conceived, it exists, like God in Anselm's ontological argument, almost necessarily. It is at least a reasonable assumption if there is a world at all. World interconnections are less presumptive and more specific. They refer to the minimum constituents of a world order, as, for example, the genetic unity of humankind, dating back to 100,000BC, described recently by Luigi Luca Cavalli-Sforza.¹ World institutions are more specific again and less abstract. In two earlier books I have described their emergence since the thirteenth century and given them functional names: the basic information circuit, the microbial common market, the global arsenal, the republic of letters, the religious international, the world market, the higher polytechnic and the common consensus. To these might be added an Anglophone overlay and further superordinates await identification by experts in sport, youth culture and consumerism. Other world institutions existed once but no longer: the Indo-European expansion, the Zoroastrian revelation, the Achaemenid and Macedonian world empire, the Buddhist ecumene, T'ang cosmopolitanism, the Universal Caliphate and the Nestorian connection; though the Buddhist ecumene may only be in eclipse. A world network is the coexistence of several world institutions and, depending on their strength, some interaction between them. Finally, a world system is a full panoply of strong world institutions

integrated to greater or less extent to produce further convergence and coalescence, even though such globalization need not be regarded as all-powerful or irreversible. If a world order may be presumed, it is not clear that a world system in this strong sense – as opposed to interconnections, institutions, network – does yet exist. With these distinctions in mind, we may now approach Frank's concept of the world order. It may be summarized in six propositions:

First, using the above distinctions, for Frank, the world order is systemic. It is more than interconnections or a network. Both now and far into the past, it is a system in a strong sense: integrated, autonomous, not depending on anything outside itself, almost an absolute. Though a product of human activity, it has escaped the control of its creators. Nothing falls outside it, nothing falls through its mesh, so that at times its author seem less Frank than Frankenstein!

Second, the system is holistic. Frank is insistent on this. He refers to 'the canon of holism', for the principle is both methodological and thematic.² Thus in his introduction he writes:

To find the really germane factors in economic, social, and cultural 'development', we must look holistically at the whole global sociocultural, ecological-economic, and cultural system, which itself both offers and limits the 'possibilities' of all of us. Since the whole is more than the sum of its parts and itself shapes its constituent parts, no amount of study and/or assemblage of the parts can ever lay bare the structure, functioning and transformation of the whole world economy/system.³

By holistic is meant that the system is not only all-encompassing, but is the universal cause of everything else. Unlike other world-order theorists, such as Fernand Braudel and Immanuel Wallerstein for whom the world order is one agent among many, and not necessarily the most commanding, for Frank it is the sole agent. Consider the following passage from the Introduction where the brackets are Frank's: 'There is no way we can understand and account for what happened in Europe or the Americas without taking account of what

happened in Asia and Africa – and vice versa – nor what happened anywhere without identifying the structure and dynamic of the whole world (system) itself.¹⁴ Subsequently, in an account of global trade from 1400 to 1800, he insists: ‘As cannot be repeated often enough, it is the whole (which is more than the sum of its parts) that more than anything else determines the “internal” nature of its parts and their “external” relations with each other.’¹⁵ Finally, he writes: ‘For only the study of the continuing structure of the one and only world (system) can illuminate the hows, whys and wherefores of the “development”, “rise” or “fall” of any part of the world (system), be it in Europe, America, Africa, Asia, Oceania, and/or any part thereof.’¹⁶

Holism, as method and thesis, is important to Frank because it enables him to deny singularity or exceptionalism. European exceptionalism in the first place, the attempt to find special features in European history which might explain Europe’s apparent dominance, but logically, any exceptionalism – Chinese, Asian, Islamic or African. Frank argues:

There is no way to see what happens at a distance anywhere else in – let alone in all – the world by using a European or Chinese or any other microscopic perspective. On the contrary, any of these views is possible only with a telescopic perspective capable of encompassing the whole world and all its parts, even if the details of the latter may remain unclear from afar. Not only are all perspectives in terms of European or any other ‘exceptionalism’ doomed to blindness. So are those using the perspective of a European-based world-economy/system (or any Sino-, Islamic-, or Afrocentric analogues thereof) . . . In conclusion, what we need is a much more global, holistic world economic/ systemic perspective and theory.⁷

Third, the holism is economic, mercantilist and bullionist. For Frank the world system is virtually synonymous with the global economy. It is a case Frank does not so much argue as assume. Not that he is a Marxist. He dismisses modes of production, in particular the Asiatic mode of production, as vigorously as Eurocentric exceptionalism, and for the same reason: both offer internal particular, not external universal explanations. Rather, he might be called a post-Marxist. His prejudice is materialist, his mindset reductionist. He does not

consider whether the world system, even if its overarching holism is admitted, might not operate through a reticulation of causes set in different registers – biological, environmental, political, intellectual and so on. For him, reality is unproblematic. It is basically economic. Moreover, it is economic of a limited kind. While Frank is sometimes attracted to the demographic and agricultural theories associated with Jack A. Goldstein, generally he rejects physiocracy for mercantilism.⁸ His emphasis is on trade and, in particular, the flows of precious metals generated by trade: ‘These significant increases in world population growth were supported by concomitant increases in production, which were fuelled by increases in the world supply and distribution of money.’⁹ Again, though Frank pays lipservice to the monetary component of these flows, particularly important in China, as has been shown by Richard von Glahn (1996), it is the commercial component which most interests him.¹⁰ Commercial bullion constituted the world economy. Frank writes: ‘For, contrary to Wallerstein, the world-wide flood of money to Asia and Russia is evidence precisely that they were parts of the same world economy as Europe and the Americas.’¹¹ Frank boldly entitles his chapter ‘Money went round the world and made the world go round.’

Fourth, the world system is centred. Under the umbrella of its economic holism, it is layered, structured, and orbital. Here, it would seem, Frank has been influenced by Immanuel Wallerstein with his theory of core, semi-periphery and periphery in an evolving world-system.¹² Where Frank differs from Wallerstein is that whereas for Wallerstein the core successively creates itself, its semi-periphery and periphery before extending its system to zones external to it, which may have constituted worlds of their own, for Frank the roles are distributed by the system itself, which is always global, in accordance with the canon of holism and the absence of exceptionalism. Regional differences exist in Frank’s system, sharp ones even, as between Europe and Asia for most of history, but they are properties of the system rather than contributions by its components. The actors do not improvise their roles, they are assigned them by the play which demands central and supporting characters. Nevertheless, performatively, Frank’s centre is the functional equivalent of Wallerstein’s core in providing the final pull and push, though it is defined in more mercantilist and bullionist terms as the ultimate

depository of precious metals. His concept of the world system gives it a comet-like appearance: a rarefied tail, where precious metals are produced and exported; a more solid body through which they pass, where precious metals are both imported and exported; and a concentrated head which imports but does not export, where precious metals come to rest or, more accurately, to circulate and fructify. For, using the Keynesian identification of saving and investment, Frank rejects the notion of thesaurization as the Achilles heel of such economic centres. Bullion inflow will automatically increase population, production and productivity and production will lead to more inflow and set the rhythm of the system. In this way, as a sort of vortex, the sump is central.

Fifth, the system is China-centred. Through an analysis of bullion flows in the period 1400 to 1800, when silver was the principal international currency, Frank identifies China as the centre of the world system, though with India as a subsidiary centre for gold. China's centrality was based on its preeminence in the export of goods and services and in the import of silver both commercially, in the balance of payments, and as a monetary resource. China seized the silver string of the world and wound it into a ball. With respect to global trade 1400–1800, paradigmatic for a longer period, Frank writes:

Two related factors, already mentioned in the discussion of the trade patterns above, were perhaps of the greatest significance for the world economy. One was China's world economic preeminence in production and export. China was unrivaled in porcelain ceramics and had few rivals in silk, which was China's largest export product mainly to other Asian buyers and secondarily for the Manila-Americas trade. The other important factor . . . was China's position and function as the final 'sink' for the world's production of silver. Of course, the two were related in that China's perennial export surplus (until the mid-nineteenth century) was settled primarily through foreigners' payment in silver. However, the Chinese magnet for silver also had another source: the Ming, abandoned the previous Yuan and even earlier Song dynasties' partial reliance on paper money . . . The Chinese public demand for silver and the large size and

productivity of the Chinese economy and its consequent export surplus generated a huge demand for and increase in the price of, silver worldwide.¹³

If China dominated as the sump of silver, India held similar if lesser magnetism in gold. What China drew from Mexico, Peru and Japan, India, especially Dravidian India, drew from Minas Gerais, the realm of the Monomotapa, Sumatra, Tibet, even Siberia and West Africa. In early modernity, Frank observes:

As has been the case for millennia, gold predominantly moved through central Asia and to and around South Asia from east to west, in the direction opposite to that of silver, which moved from west to east. On the Indian subcontinent, gold moved to the south and silver to the north. Both were exchanged not only for each other but of course also for other commodities, as well as for local and especially imported foreign coins and other forms of currency.¹⁴

Frank elaborated: 'The British EIC also brought gold from the east to India and paid for it with silver. Gold also flowed into India, especially the south of the subcontinent, both from West Asia and from Japan and China in East Asia and especially from southeast Asia. However, India was only the penultimate "sink" for the world's silver, since India itself had to re-export some silver further eastward to remit it especially to China'.¹⁵ India's magnetism therefore was less than China's. Frank concludes: 'the entire world economic order was – literally – sinocentric'.¹⁶ Between 1400 and 1800,

The two major regions that were most 'central' to the world economy were India and China . . . The other, and even more 'central' economy was China. Its even greater centrality was based on its greater absolute and relative productivity in industry, agriculture, [water] transport, and trade, China's even greater, indeed and the world economy's greatest, productivity. Competitiveness, and centrality were reflected in its most favourable balance of trade. This was based primarily on its world economic export leadership in silks and ceramics and its exports also of gold, copper-cash, and later of tea. These exports in turn made China the

‘ultimate sink’ of the world’s silver, which flowed there to balance China’s almost perpetual export surplus.¹⁷

China’s centrality was also indicated by the fact that its economy did not suffer from either inflation through too much money chasing too few goods, or deflation through hoarding. On inflation in the early modern period, Frank argues that ‘throughout most of Asia the increased arrival of money from the Americas and Japan did not substantially raise prices, as it did in Europe. In Asia instead, the infusion of additional new money generated increased production and transactions, as well as raising the velocity of money circulation through more extensive commercialization of the economy.’¹⁸ Again: ‘In summary, the evidence suggests that the growing supply of new money especially from the Americas and Japan stimulated production and supported population growth in many parts of Asia.’¹⁹ On deflation, Frank argues there was none. He refers to ‘the Eurocentric myth that Asians just hoarded the money they received. On the contrary, Asians *earned* this money first because they were *more* industrious and productive to begin with; the additional money then generated still more Asian demand and production.’²⁰ The result was a China-centred world system: ‘If the world economy had any regional and commercial basis at all, that was in Asia and it was centered if at all in China. Europe was to all intents and purposes entirely marginal.’²¹

Sixth, the world system is cyclical. Frank traces the system back to 3000BC: the beginning of the Bronze age which provided the initial materials on which the monetary functions of store of wealth, measure of value and means of exchange were based. Since then, though its scale in terms of what is produced and for how many has increased, its essential character has remained unchanged. Because the system is holistic, and anything can only be explained in terms of everything, change can only be endogenous, not exogenous, Frank writes: ‘By and large however, the pattern of world trade and division of labour remained remarkably stable and displayed a substantially continuous, albeit cyclical, development over the centuries if not millennia.’²² Subsequently, in a discussion of Hamashita Takeshi’s theory of Chinese tribute trade, he remarks: ‘Moreover, the Chinese “tribute trade network” in East and Southeast Asia was – and for two millennia already had been – an integral part of this wider

Afro-Eurasian world economic network. What the Europeans did was to plug the Americas into it as well.²³ Continuity is the hallmark of the system: 'Once we look upon the whole world more holistically, historical continuity looms much larger than discontinuity, especially in Asia. Indeed as suggested in the preceding chapters, the very "Rise of the West" and the renewed "Rise of the East" then appear derived from this global historical continuity.'²⁴ Consequently the only change within the system is cyclical: 'The findings about parallel horizontal simultaneities and our review of the early modern world economy imply and suggest that we would do well, however, to return to a more cyclical perspective of early modern economic history and probably of all history.'²⁵

Cycles have long been a staple of economic history, and Frank gives them greater length in line with the theories of the Russian economist Nicolai Dimitrievitch Kondratieff (1892–1935). Indeed, he believes not only in 50-year Kondratieff cycles, but also in 500-year super Kondratieffs, each with an ascendant, expansionist phase A and a descendant, recessionary phase B. Frank is cautious:

any and all observed fluctuations and pulsations are not necessarily cyclical . . . To have more – indeed, any – confidence that a pulsation is truly cyclical, it is necessary to demonstrate why, or at least that, the upper and lower turning points of inflection of the curve that maps these pulsations are endogenous and not only exogenous to the system. That is, not only must what goes up come down and vice versa; but the going up itself must generate the subsequent downturn and the going down the subsequent upturn.²⁶

Nevertheless, Frank is convinced that this can be done and the point is important because it allows him to portray the temporary and in part illusory rise of the West between 1800 and 2000 as a consequence of the phase B of a super Kondratieff going back to 1500 or even earlier, and centred like all the previous ones on Asia and particularly China. The underlying structure has not been changed by the European mobilization of the Americas. The twenty-first century and its next two successors will belong to Asia and preeminently to China. By 2025, according to some estimates, China will again possess a third of the world's wealth as it did in 1800, and per capita preeminence will follow in due course in accordance with a world

order which remains systemic, holistic, economic, centred, sinocentric and cyclical.²⁷

A critique of Frank's concept of the world order

Frank's synthesis is radical, extreme and comprehensive. It calls for a thoroughgoing displacement of historical perspective and methods; it is a bold intellectual programme, a true *scienza nuova* like that of Vico. What follows is qualification rather than total rejection. Yet, in this case, because of the thoroughgoing character of the proposal, qualification is tantamount to rejection. Frank is right about many things, but wrong about everything. This may be seen if his six assertions are taken in order.

First, the world order is systemic. What is at issue here is the degree of unity of the world order. It may be conceded that there have always been points of contact between the components of what Teilhard de Chardin called the Human Phenomenon, but whether those contacts are best described as system, rather than interconnections, institutions or a network is more open to question. Frank's world system is both universal and ancient. In the first place it differs from Braudel's *économies-mondes* which are island universes in a global archipelago. Secondly, it differs from Wallerstein's view which puts the origin of the modern world system in the sixteenth century. To sustain both universality, true globality, and antiquity back to 3000BC, Frank needs to admit a degree of unity in the world order which is less than systemic in the ordinary sense of the word.

Interconnections, one may agree, are both old and wide. Initially there was the genetic connection. Although the new alliance between genetics and history is in its infancy, it has already established that, at least since *sapiens* replaced Neanderthal, *habilis* and *erectus*, there have been no true human races. The human genome is unitary and the genetic differences within it are not large. Cavalli-Sforza states: 'According to that first estimate, the woman from whom all modern human mitochondria descend lived about 190,000 years ago', adding 'this first attempt was not so bad'.²⁸ Subsequently, Bryan Sykes of the Oxford Institute of Molecular Medicine has concluded that 'almost all native Europeans belong to one of seven distinct clans each with a founding mother . . . But there is virtually no

consistent pattern to the way the clans are distributed in modern Europe: in the thousands of years of European history they have become thoroughly mixed.²⁹ Since Europe was originally populated from Asia, and to a lesser degree from Africa, similar continuities are likely to be traceable there. As Teilhard de Chardin saw, the absence of human branching is striking. The continued convergence rather than divergence is not easily explained by the first three principles of evolution – mutation, natural selection and drift – but only by the fourth, flow, especially the mobility of women, which in turn implies contact between groups.³⁰ Next, there was the linguistic connection. No truly primitive languages, in the sense of possessing only a rudimentary capacity to express a gamut of meaning, exist today. All existing languages appear to follow a similar deep structure. All are put into families which are then traced to super families (Austic, Eurasiatic, Nostratic, etc.), which will one day, no doubt, be ascribed to a single, aboriginal family. Yet it is unlikely that human language began as single and indivisible and only subsequently diverged and ramified, it is more likely that it began as multiple and divided and that prehistoric, probably middle-Palaeolithic, convergence through contact and imitation preceded further historic divergence. That contact again implies connection. Finally, there was the dress connection. Clothes, no less unique to humanity than developed language, have received less attention from prehistory than food, partly because the evidence has survived less well, and partly because it has been insufficiently recognized that since nature is lavish in providing nutriment especially in the form of fish, though outside Africa she is parsimonious in providing warmth, thermoregulation has been a greater problem for humans than nutrition. Professor Steven Mithin of the University of Reading has argued that dress, outside Africa, was an invention of the late Palaeolithic, a response in part no doubt to the last ice age, but one with profound psychological and social consequences which were eventually generalized everywhere. Such generalization, a first instance of the force of fashion, again implies contact at least to the level of peer polity and personal emulation.

Yet impressive as these connections are as founding human unity before the Neolithic Revolution modulated it through diversity of crops and domestic animals, it may be doubted whether they amounted to a systemic world order. Even in the period of the rise

of the East, AD500–1000, when true world institutions had appeared, what they constituted might be more than a co-presence, but it was less than a network, much less than a system. Indeed, in the strong sense in which Frank intends it, it is not certain that there is a world system today.

Second, the world system is holistic. Here the issue is not the unity of the world order, but its power, in the sense of causal determination of its components. Holism is not an implication of system. One may believe in a world system, perhaps from some determinate date, 1250, 1500, 1800, 2000 and so on, and deny its holistic character: that anything can only be explained by everything. System does not exclude exceptionalism; indeed, exceptionalism or singularity can be envisaged as the mode of the system, for it is a poor way to praise the whole by denigrating the parts. In itself exceptionalism is only a recognition of Leibniz's principle of the identity of indiscernibles: that everything is itself and not another thing. Whether the system is in fact all-determining, as Frank supposes, or whether the relation between whole and parts is a more reciprocal one, can only be settled by causal analysis at particular times and places. Frank's demand for a global perspective need not have the consequence he thinks it has in the canon of holism.

Holism is Frank's weapon against exceptionalism, for, unlike system, holism does exclude exceptionalism. One reason why Frank affirms holism and denies exceptionalism is that his history is insufficiently grounded in geography. Apart from time, space is the most basic factor in singularity. Frank lacks Braudel's marvelous sense of place. In his system, as in Gertrude Stein's suburbia, there is no there there. He takes too much for granted the conventional list of continents as constituting genuine historical realities. Asia is particularly unsatisfactory in this respect and Europe is not much better. Asia covers too much that is culturally disparate while Europe covers too little that is culturally distinctive. A better schema, because emphasizing culture rather than nature, is to regard the world before the convergence of histories, when its order was only a set of interconnections, as consisting of four primary civilizations: pre-Columbian America, Black Africa, Western Eurasia and East Asia. This schema has been criticized as Sinocentric, as leaving Western Eurasia too disparate, and as implicitly racist. But some Sinocentrism is necessary

to counterbalance the Europocentrism of much Western historiography, a point which may elicit Frank's support. Whatever the subsequent originality of the civilizations of Christendom, Islam and India, Western Eurasia as a primary civilization does have a degree of unity in language, culture, institutions and shared history; and the primary civilizations are post-genetic, cultural entities, so that coincidence with skin pigmentation, if that is what is meant by race, is accidental as well as partial. A division into primary civilizations is, of course, only a beginning of legitimate exceptionalism in human historical geography. A full panoply of Braudelian structures needs to be deployed: peninsulas, highlands, lowlands, islands large and small; and further structures appropriate beyond the Mediterranean, such as have been outlined by Pierre Chaunu and Frederic Mauro for the Iberian Atlantic, by Anthony Reid for Southeast Asia, and Robert Delort for the Baltic.³¹ It is on such specifications in space and time that the analysis of the independent actions of the parts in relation to the whole are based. They both permit it and demand it. In them are rooted the exceptionalisms, the historic personalities and singularities, which a radical global perspective, a horizontal integration of histories, has no reason to reject, and many reasons to expect and identify. The world order should be understood not as the whole of history but as the whole in history. Whole and parts stand not in holistic but reciprocal relations. Holism, as either whole to parts, or inversely from parts to whole, should be discarded.

Third, the holism is economic, mercantilist and bullionist. Economics is the most successful of the social sciences, more esteemed than sociology or anthropology. Even in non-Marxian Paris, *Économies*, especially in the form of *ports, routes et traffiques* long took precedence over *sociétés* and *civilizations*, while *mentalités* made only a tardy appearance. It is natural that Frank should privilege economics. Yet any reductionism is unfortunate and unified field theories have a long record of only temporary success. Unity is nearly always undermined by further unsuspected multiplicity. In particular, economics, the effort to wring a living from the environment by making an ecology, has always been only one strand in human activity. Consider the three basic Palaeolithic interconnections noted above: genetics, language and dress. All may have possessed economic or ecological facets, but all had or developed other facets. A world order

need not be mainly economic. Its different registers, political, economic, social, intellectual and so on cannot be privileged *a priori*. In the case of the period AD500–1000, the intellectual register of the world order, specifically its religious institutions, was more significant than its economic. If, for a later period, Frank would admit that the global economy is *part* of the world system, we would have no quarrel with him, just as we do not question the relevance of the whole to the parts, so long as it does not exclude the relevance of the parts to the whole. Reductionism below should be discarded along with holism above.

If Frank's option for economics as the prime constituent in the world system may be considered natural, his choice of a mercantilist and bullionist version of economics is more surprising. Economics has fluctuated between regarding money as everything (mercantilism), nothing (Classical) or something (Keynesianism, Monetarism, post-Monetarism). Keynes' rehabilitation of mercantilism in the *General Theory* was little more than a *jeu d'esprit*, and while the *Treatise on Money* is more monetarist and has accordingly been upgraded by neo-Keynsians such as Robert Skidelsky (1992), neither offers much support for Frank. As so often, Frank spoils a good case by exaggeration. In traditional as in modern economics, bullion flow, both commercial and monetary, was both an indicator and an activator, but so too were propensity to consume, the sectoral directions of consumption, liquidity preference, the proportion of public to private expenditure, the level of enterprise culture and the conditions of territory, technology and taste. Frank's reluctance to allow causal efficacy to any but his chosen parameter again leads him into unnecessary extremism and implausibility. His bullionism rests on too restricted a view of what constitutes money. He undervalues cartalism, the ability of the state to designate money through its particular tax requirements, and he undervalues tokenism, the ability of either the state or society to designate non-metallic monies. Thus in the first half of the T'ang period, the state's tax requirements in effect made silk the principal currency of China, while under the Sung the use of paper currency expelled silver, so that the Islamic world, long subject to silver famine, was able to resume coinage.³² In these circumstances bullionism of the kind Frank assumes could not prevail. Even where bullion prevailed, more attention needs to be paid to private paper, instruments of credit, and personalized rates of inter-

est – all things characteristic of China. As economics is general, so bullionist mercantilism in particular is not enough.

Fourth, the world system is centred. Here again there are objections of both principle and practice to Frank's concept. First, systems do not necessarily have centres. It is possible to conceive of a-centric economic or other systems. For example, Philip Huang so characterizes the so-called Kiangnan model of late imperial and early republican China in the Yangtze delta, whose origins in T'ang times will concern us later.³³ Similarly, Janet Abu Lughod characterizes the world system of the Islamic commonwealth, which preceded those of the Mongols and Europeans, as non-hegemonic – polycentric certainly, a-centric possibly.³⁴ Frank himself allows degrees of centrality to both China and India. Second, the term centre as applied to systems, economic and otherwise, is metaphoric. It may be used to denote a number of different realities, of which four in the economic sphere are of most relevance to Frank's argument.

First it may denote the zone of maximum wealth regardless of the size of the population who share it. Thus countries or areas may be arranged in order of gross domestic product at various dates, and the richest regarded as central. Second, it may be used to denote the zone of maximum per capita wealth. Here city states, tax havens and oil sheikhdoms may outpace territorial countries in this kind of centrality. Third, it may be used to denote the zone whose initiatives have the greatest impact economically on other zones, possibly richer, either per capita or absolutely. It was this kind of centrality that Chaunu attributed to Seville in the days of the Iberian Atlantic/Pacific world market: Seville set the rhythm. Finally, and this is where Frank lays most emphasis, centre may be used to denote the ultimate depository, or sink, of precious metals. Now it is not clear that all these four senses necessarily coincide. They may do with respect to the United States today and possibly did so with respect to China under the T'ang, as we shall argue. Frank considers that all four coincided in China as late as 1800. His assessment is open to question, but even if accepted the coincidence should not be regarded as necessary. One kind of centrality cannot be inferred from another. In particular, bullion flows, quite apart from thesaurization do not guarantee centrality in the other senses. Bullion catchment is a phenomenon of commercial balance and monetary requirement,

it has no necessary connections with a large percentage of global wealth, high per capita income, or powerful external effects. Bullion flows do not automatically produce growth, larger production and heightened productivity, but only in appropriate, possibly exceptionalist, circumstances. If a system is centred in all four senses, that centrality will not be an inherent property of the system, but in part the product of contingencies. Frank's concept of centrality is not sufficiently thought through. The metaphor never quite becomes a message.

Fifth, the system is China-centred, However centre is defined and whatever the facts may have been, this assertion has the effect of reducing, part at any rate, of Chinese history back to the changeless *ewige stillstand*, from which generations of Sinologists have sought to release it. If China was placed at the centre of the global economy by grace of the world system, then it was not there by merit of the Chinese. In particular, if centre be defined as sink of precious metals, this approach obscures precisely the monetary history of China now beginning to emerge from darkness. Recent work by von Glahn (1996) and others has shown that both before and after its unification in 221BC, China practised a succession of monetary systems: archaic, antique, late antique, medieval, late imperial and republican. These covered a wide spectrum: on one axis cartalist to catalacticist, state fiat to market acceptance; on the other axis, bullionism to tokenism, precious metals to no metals at all. It is difficult to see these successive choices as imposed on China exogenetically by the world system. Though China is not rich naturally in either precious or base monetary metals (hence the precocious experimentation in tokenist paper money), external factors cannot be the complete explanation of phase transitions. For this one must look into China's internal contexts: the degree of monetarization, the components of the demand for money, the particular kinds of liquidity preference. Frank's canon of holism makes this difficult to do since it would smack of exceptionalism. For even the centre of a holistic world system cannot exercise initiative of its own. Thus Chinese history evaporates at the moment it is most needed. When at last, like a tributary emissary from the periphery, we reach the central country, see the Son of Heaven and prostrate ourselves before him, he turns out to be a *roi fainéant*, a Taoist impotentate confined to non-action.

Frank's approach obscures not only Chinese history, but also Chinese geography. In particular, it obscures shifts in China's centre of gravity, indeed in the application of the term China. No one would regard Europe as an unchanging, unambiguous monolith. Shifts from the eastern Mediterranean to the western, from the Mediterranean to the North, from the Continent to the Islands and back again, are the commonplaces of its history. Its successive post-Roman, political ascendancies – Frankish, Papal, Spanish, Swedish, French, English and German – are not regarded as dynastic cycles, repetitions of the same, even if, in global perspective, imposed from without by greater Kondratieff cycles. In reality, China too has never been an unchanging, unambiguous monolith. Its meaning has varied as much as Europe's. It has been many as well as one. Periods of interdynastic disorder – only a derogatory term for multistate order – have been long and creative. Even under the single form of the imperial state – China's most prominent, superficial historical feature – there was variety in structure, function, range of power horizontal and vertical. Centres of gravity – political, economic, social and intellectual – frequently non-coincident, have circulated through macroregions and provinces. Thus between 1920 and 1950, China was divided four ways: Kuomintang, Communists, Warlords, Japanese Satellites. Nanking and Chungking were political capitals, Shanghai was the economic capital, Peking the intellectual capital, while Yen-an functioned as counter-capital in one direction, Mukden in another, not to speak of other cities serving as local capitals or warlord headquarters. An extreme example no doubt, but such assignments and circulations, each with its singularities and exceptionalisms, are the tone and colour of Chinese history. They are obscured and not illuminated by the concept of an ongoing, perennial centre of a global economy, constituted as such by being a universal monetary sink. China was the central country in more than this sense, indeed sometimes not in any sense.

Sixth, the world system is cyclical. Business cycles have long been a staple of economic history and entrepreneurial experience. In 1620 a correspondent of the Privy Council complained that trade, like the moon, was on the wane. A more recent example would be the underwriting profit cycle which was held to characterize Lloyds insurance market. What is at issue here is whether the concept of an endoge-

nous cycle has proper application over longer terms and more widely based fluctuations. Frank insists that the 50 and 500-year fluctuations with which he is concerned, and which he uses to explain such phenomena as the apparent rise of the West, are true endogenous cycles and not just exogenous pulsations and waves. Here, it may be observed that Frank goes beyond the views of Kondratieff himself who, it seems, regarded his long waves or conjunctures as exogenous rather than endogenous, the product of external factors such as technological development or political promotion. It was Joseph Schumpeter who first interpreted Kondratieff's long waves in endogenous cyclical terms.³⁵ It is easy to see why Frank was attracted to this interpretation of Kondratieff; anything else would mean the abandonment both of the canon of holism and of economic reductionism. Frank cannot allow anything to be outside his system, so that its fluctuations must be endogenous and must be cyclical if they are not to be random. However, if the canon of holism and the ultimacy of economics are dropped, then long-term, exogenous, interfactorial conjunctures become possible. Their existence in fact is then a question of enquiry and judgement. Some long waves may be regarded as cyclical, others as not. If the world order in a particular period were less than systematic, only a network or co-presence of institutions, then such waves might be more likely to be exogenous or generated by shifts between registers. Even a highly integrated system, however, might not proceed cyclically, as its complexity and multifactorial character could give rise to more contingency and manifest phenomena of indeterminist chaos, for, as Robert Musil (1979) observed, history has to accept a principle of insufficient reason: the ultimate spontaneity of singularities. In the world order, cyclicity, if it exists at all, may be a phenomenon of the middle passage: after the world order was too weak for necessity, before the world order was too strong for necessity.

* * *

To conclude. Frank's concept of the world order cannot be accepted as it stands. System, holism, economic reductionism, centrality, sino-centrality and cycles, its six main elements, are all open to question. Nevertheless, it remains a brilliant synthesis, a superb theory in Roger Penrose's sense, as the most radical interpretation of Joseph Fletcher's

demand for horizontally integrated macrohistory.³⁶ As such, critique lays an obligation to do better. In particular, it calls the historian to investigate how the global and the exceptional have cooperated to produce long-term shifts in the balance of civilization. This will now be attempted for the Rise of the East which occurred in the second half of the first Christian millenium: a dark age for Western Europe, but light ages for Byzantium, Islamdom and India, and high-noon meridian for China. The first step must be to assess the state of civilizations before the Rise of the East, and where any balance of advantage between them might lie.

The preponderance of the West

Civilizations are multifunctional; they require analysis at different levels, of which political, economic, social and intellectual are only the most obvious. Comparison between them, where it is possible and incommensurables are not involved, may give different results at these various levels. Superiority at one level does not guarantee superiority at all. Similarly, shifts in superiority and inferiority at one level may be accompanied by countercurrents at others, which may in the long run reverse the major tendency. Nevertheless, these caveats admitted, a convergence of evidence indicates that in the first half of the first Christian millennium, and specifically around the year AD 400, the balance of advantage lay with the West rather than China. This may be shown by a comparison between the Roman and Han-Chin empires.

Similarities

At the political level, the Roman and Han-Chin empires were at least comparable. Both covered similar areas: Rome, under Hadrian, slightly larger at 1,800,000 square miles, the Eastern Han, at the end of the second century AD, slightly smaller at 1,500,000 square miles. Both operated through privileged bureaucracies composed, on the one hand, of the slaves and freedmen of Caesar's household, and on the other of the 'guests' *k'o* and protégés of great aristocratic families the Tou, the Pan, the Wang and the Ssu-ma. Both maintained large armies of infantry on closed, but porous, frontiers whose protection required *limes*: walls, watchtowers and security zones. Both empires began effectively in the second century BC. Both in their origins

owed something to the example of the Achaemenid empire, the world's first imperial state, as reconstructed by Macedon. Both started from the western peripheries of their respective civilizations before moving east to take over older economic and cultural cores. Both then returned west to incorporate barbarians previously outside civilization. Subsequently, trajectories were similar: a lesser, political crisis around the beginning of the Christian era which saw a transition from republic to principate and from meritocratic Western Han, to aristocratic Eastern Han; a greater political crisis in the third century AD which led to a recasting of empire with new capitals, Trier and Constantinople in the West, and a new dynasty, the Chin, in China. Finally, both empires experienced disruption: earlier in China, on the lines of north and south, the first divided, the second united, later in the West, on the lines of west and east, the first divided the second united. In both areas of division, barbarian aristocracies, originally leaders of mercenary armies in search of employer states, were added to existing ruling classes.

At the economic level, both the Roman West and the Chinese East had advanced agricultural foundations, based in the first on wheat and barley, and in the second on millet and wheat. In both cases, irrigation, by aqueducts and water wheels in the West, by canals and water wheels in the East, played a part in raising per areal yields to support an urban superstructure. In both, too, arable farming was supplemented by pastoral, though at this time to a greater extent in the East where great aristocrats doubled as runholders in the Sino-Mongolian borderlands. Parallel to both kinds of agriculture, West and East both possessed basic techniques of metal winning and metal working in copper, tin, lead, iron and zinc and in their alloys of bronze and brass. In textiles, wool principally in the West, hemp principally in the East, both shared a similar technology of spinning, weaving, plain or twill, application of vegetable dyes, tailoring and sewing. Both shared a preference in dress for loose civilized draping rather than tight barbarian shaping, though in both, trousers and the battle dress of the *limes* were making progress. Styles of building did differ, the East preferring wood, the West preferring stone, but overall the level of shelter provided for the generality did not contrast significantly. Both civilizations deployed an economic infrastructure which provided 50 million people with standards of living higher than those of Black Africa and pre-Columbian America, higher too

than those of the surrounding barbarians, on whom consequently they exerted a powerful magnetism to install themselves within the *limes*, whether as mercenaries, economic migrants or asylum-seekers.

At the social level, both the Roman West and the Han-Chin East were urbanized societies which culminated in splendid capital cities: Rome, Constantinople, Trier and Milan in the West, Ch'ang-an, Lo-yang and Nanking in the East. Both, at the apex, were dominated by political and military aristocracies: in the Roman empire, the old senatorial aristocracy plus the new aristocracy of the *virtus Illyrica*; in the Han empire, the *hao-tsu*, the grand clans, the old families who had restored the Han after the usurpation of Wang Mang, the newer *wai-ch'i* or consort families, with whom subsequent emperors had tried to control them. These aristocracies owed their social leverage less to land, though latifundia existed as basic investments in both East and West, than to portfolios of office, command, *clientelae*, cultural advantage, genealogy and marriage prestige, whose periodic readjustment ensured long-term survival despite accidents of politics and war. At the base of society in both East and West were the cultivators, esteemed in theory if often despised in practice. Their condition was diverse, more by terrain and crops than by status or class, but characteristically they were not a downtrodden peasantry or plantation peons. In China, in the central provinces of Honan, Shansi and Shensi, the smallholders were the basis of the tax registers and muster rolls and when they declined so did the dynasty. Szechwan by contrast, as indicated by the *Hua-yang kuo-chih*, the earliest Chinese local gazetteer, was a land of gentry villas which allied irrigated wheat and the production of well salt with fishponds, tea gardens, forestry and copper mines, but there too it seems farm servants and tenants shared in the prosperity. In the West, Tchalenko's thriving olive oil producing villages of the Antioch hinterland, Bagnall's prosperous grain-producing Coptic villages of the Egyptian chora and Wachter's comfortable co-resident farm workers on the 1,000 villas of lowland Britain have qualified Rostovtzeff's picture of a 'dark people' cut off from classical culture.³⁷ Rural alienation existed, but in both China and the West the threat to classical stability came less from such peasantry, but from soldiers, sectaries, barbarians and a potentially radical interface. For, at both ends of the Eurasian continent, between the urbanized apex and the rural base came a third layer, the *liu-min*, the people of the routes, positioned

less in consumption or production than in distribution: carters, coolies, cameleers, travelling merchants, boat people, entertainers, vagrants, camp followers, quacks, pilgrims, students and emissaries, all who must resort to mobility. At the top of this third layer was an intelligentsia, not rich but educated and potentially powerful if given aristocratic protection, in a world where intelligence was at a premium.

At the intellectual level, both the Roman and the Han-Chin empires were culture states, kingdoms of the written word. Herein they differed from their common ancestor the Achaemenid empire which rested on a dynasty, an ethno-class and a common protection of cults, with Zoroastrianism only the house religion of the ruling family. In Rome and China, the word which provided the cement of empire was the word of a *paideia*: the paradigms, manners and protocols of a curriculum. More a medium than a message, this word was rooted in bodies of literature, both prose and poetry, propagated through their memorization in the classroom, and acclimatized as the communications code of a male ruling class, though in both civilizations eminent bluestockings from Sappho to Pan Chao to Hypatia were active participants. *Ching* – classics, warp, mainstream – did not exclude *wei* – apocrypha, weft, undercurrents in astrology, numerology, magic and theurgy. *Ching* could also accommodate *chiao*, sectarian religion, whether native or imported: the revealed Word of scripture and *sutra* which in both civilizations was playing an increasing role from the middle of the second century AD. For paganism, the cultic component of the *paideia*, was less a religion than a ritual, piety rather than position. Neither St Augustine (d 430) nor Hui-yüan (d 417) felt excluded from the *paideia* though both claimed to transcend it.

Dissimilarities

At the political level, there was a difference in topography. Rome was both a land and a sea power, Han China, except episodically, only a land power. The Chinese world turned its back on the sea, because, till the third century AD, its local seas led nowhere. River power was significant in the regional wars of the *San-kuo* period (221–280), but the significance was limited in that the Huang-ho, the principal river of China down to AD 500, with its shifting bed and rapid rises and falls, was more suited to irrigation than navigation. The Roman

world, on the other hand, was built round the amphitheatre of the Mediterranean, an extended version of Plato's frogs round a pond. If warfare deserted the Mediterranean after Actium, sea power was still required to safeguard the grain fleets from Africa and Egypt from piracy. When Caesar and the Julio-Claudians incorporated the manpower of the Celtic world, military sea power had a role in the narrow seas of the Circumterranean *limes* and its admirals played a part in the regional wars of the third century AD. In AD 400, the emperor of the West Honorius had his capital in Ravenna, primarily a naval base, while his brother of the East Arcadius sat at the juncture of two seas.

On land, the Chinese, like the Romans, built roads of standardized design, but they built fewer of them: 22,000 miles, an average of 14 miles per 1,000 square miles of territory, compared to the Roman 48,000 miles, an average of 28 miles per 1,000 square miles of territory. Topography again was a factor. The Chinese built most of their roads radially out from the imperial capitals of Ch'ang-an and Lo-yang into the loess-lands of Shensi and Shansi, a much dissected plateau of deep valleys, terminal ravines and sudden dead-ends, inimical to intercommunication. The Romans, on the other hand, could begin with the coastal plains of Latium, Campania, Apulia and Emilia, and once free of the Appenines and the Alps had only the plain of Celtic Europe and its forest cover to contend with.

The advantage of a double communication system and the greater facility it afforded to mobilize resources and information affected the agenda of the Roman state and its agents. It enabled it to undertake welfare functions such as the *annona*: the free distribution to citizens not only of bread but also of olive oil, salt, pork and wine, along with free entry to the baths and games. Caesar's munificence set the tone for his patricians: the euergetist mode of distribution which provided, at private cost but to public benefit, so many provincial cities with their amenities – baths and their fuel, amphitheatres and their animals, theatres and their actors, basilicas and their orators. Jean Durliat may have exaggerated the dependence of the ancient macro-city on the *annona*, but *panem et circenses* became a defining characteristic of urban *Romanitas* and a source of its greater magnificence and fragility in comparison to the polity of Han-Chin China.³⁸

At the economic level, however, China enjoyed the advantage in the basic technologies of agriculture and metallurgy. An obstacle to road-making, the loess soil of interior China was an asset in arable

farming. Its porosity enabled it to replenish itself by absorption of both sub-surface and atmospheric nitrogen. More continuous cultivation and less frequent fallowing were thus possible. Chinese farming therefore showed higher average yields per area over time than those of the West. Moreover, its characteristic cereal, millet, produced both higher yields per unit sown and per area than did its rival in the West, wheat. Further, though needing it less, the Chinese manured more via styre-reared pigs and the use of human nightsoil. Thanks to the Kuan-hsien barrage and the Wei valley scheme a higher percentage of Chinese farmland was irrigated in comparison with the West, which in those areas will have led to another doubling of areal yields. In addition, the Chinese farmer had better tools than his Western counterpart. Since as far back as 500BC, the Chinese had been able to cast and not merely to work iron. Cast iron is more brittle than wrought iron, but it is less likely to bend and can be sharpened to greater acuity. Consequently, the Chinese farmers employed superior hoes, ploughshares, sickles, axes, knives and spades. Similarly, the Chinese infantryman had the edge over the Roman legionary in the sharpness of his sword, spear and arrow heads, and it put him into a better position to defend his *limes* against barbarians. Possession of high-carbon cast iron as well as low-carbon wrought iron allowed Chinese metallurgists, by a process akin to the Bessemer method, to make an intermediate product: steel, the Seric iron so much admired by Pliny, which escaped both brittleness and bending and could be sharpened to an even higher degree. This metallurgical precocity had deep roots. It went back to the ability, already displayed in the Shang and Chou bronzes, to raise higher temperatures through stronger bellows. This greater mastery over fire may have derived from the fact that in East Asia, ceramics, possibly first produced in Japan, came before agriculture rather than the other way round as in Western Eurasia.

Nevertheless, the Chinese economy was not without its bottlenecks, particularly in the field of energy. Never well timbered, a land of copses rather than forests, Interior China suffered both from the Chinese preference for building in wood rather than stone and from the superiority of the Chinese axe. Even the seemingly limitless timber resources of sub-Himalayan Szechwan were beginning to fail under the Han, where Rome and Constantinople with good local supplies and the Hyrcanian forest to command had no such problems.

Timber was the major source of energy in antiquity. Whatever the use of stone, bronze and iron, all ages before the Industrial Revolution were timber ages. Despite its inferiority in basic technology, the Roman world probably consumed more energy per capita and in total than the Chinese world. Whether it consumed it more efficiently and effectively is open to question, but it may be guessed that its ecological lavishness did provide its society with higher standards of living, at least in the things of culture. China might be better at production, but the Roman world with its superior communications was better at distribution and consumption.

At the social level, while at the apex both Rome and China were urbanized societies, there were more cities in the Roman World and a higher percentage of the population lived in them. One reason was again the greater mileage of communication in the West which allowed more cities to be supplied by roads and sealanes. Another was that while the Greeks, Macedonians and Romans multiplied cities; the Chinese empire, as evidenced by archaeology, reduced them. In China cities were primarily places of government. When government became united and centralized after 221BC, there was less need for provincial capitals and no need for rival places of courtly glamour. Many former capitals therefore atrophied. In the West, cities were primarily places of enjoyment and civic life: *apolausis* and *civilitas*. The Roman empire, a welfare state, had to provide these things either directly or through the liturgies of local oligarchies. Cities therefore were maintained, extended or created. Under the Antonines the Roman empire became a federation of cities where the Han empire remained a territorial state with a primate capital. At the base, however, Chinese producers, the *nung* and the *kung* better endowed by technology in agriculture and metallurgy and less oppressed by their urban superstructure, probably enjoyed higher status than their counterparts in the West. As the Han period advanced and became first the *San-kuo*, the Three Kingdoms, and then the Chin, the imperial tax registers and muster calls shrank as farmers and artisans commended themselves as *k'o*, 'guests', that is tenants and retainers, to great aristocratic *clientelae*. Although the shift from smallholders to dependents was deplored by political theorists committed to the imperial state, it is not clear that the change represented a deterioration of social conditions: possibly an improvement, since the *clientelae* were vehicles of social mobility for their *k'o*.

Between the apex and the base, thanks to the greater availability of routes by both land and water, the third layer was thicker in the West than in China, particularly in regard to business. Ssu-ma Ch'ien has a chapter in the *shih-chi* on millionaires in the Western Han, but they were transitional figures like the Russian oligarchs of the Yeltsin era and were not characteristic of the long aristocratic age which followed. Business in Han China did not match the sophistication of the Greco-Syrian connection in the West: the Antiochene inheritors of Athenian proto capitalism, whose activities extended from Britain to India, diffusing Christianity to Lyon and Bath in one direction and to Muziris and Mylapore in another.³⁹ Even subsequently, the new commercialism of salt, fish and overseas voyages associated in the *San-kuo* period with Sun Ch'üan and the kingdom of Wu at Nanking did not reach the level of Antioch and its more étatiste competitor, Alexandria.

At the intellectual level, though both the Roman and Chinese empires were culture states, their cultures differed in the spectrums they covered. Intellectual activity may be plotted against a grid formed by two axes: a horizontal axis of meaning, according to which thought is either paradigmatic or syntagmatic, that is, rhetorical or realist; a vertical axis of intention according to which thought is either categorical or critical, that is, directed to objects or to its own processes. This grid, itself a piece of low-level critical thinking, provides a fourfold spectrum: paradigmatic and categorical, categorical and syntagmatic, syntagmatic and critical, critical and paradigmatic. In terms of this spectrum, the bodies of thought most characteristic of Han China, and transmitted to the *San-kuo* and Chin, were concentrated in the two paradigmatic quadrants. China was strong in literature, poetry especially, and in literary criticism. It was less strong in the categorical and syntagmatic quadrant especially in metaphysics and cosmology, though in historical scholarship, Ssu-ma Ch'ien may be accorded second place above Herodotus but below Thucydides. Categorical realism was inhibited by the shift within the Confucian tradition from the *hsin-wen chia*, the New Text school, to the *ku-wen chia*, the Old Text school, which occurred during the usurpation of Wang Mang between the two Han dynasties. This shift represented a move away from the syntagmaticism exemplified in the correlative cosmology of Tung Chung-shu, and before him of Tsou Yen, back to the literary paradigms of the classics themselves.

Empirical theories, for example in medicine, were resignified as *a priori* categories. Han thought was weakest in the syntagmatic and critical quadrant, but there, until the late middle ages, the West was not much stronger. Prescinding for the moment from religion, because in AD 400 Christianity had conquered in the West while Buddhism and Taoism had not yet done so in China, the West's intellectual preeminence lay in its competing cosmologies: the rival syntheses of Heraclitus, Parmenides, Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus and the Atomists as transmitted to the Roman world by Lucretius. These represented a decisive extension of thought from the paradigmatic to the syntagmatic. Without such an extension, thought remained confined in mythology in Lévi-Strauss' sense of mental exercises and preparatory categorization. Chinese myth might be aniconic or historicized, rather than rooted in epic as in the Mediterranean or India, but myth it remained.

If the West covered a wider intellectual spectrum in Antiquity than China, it also did so in a greater range of languages and scripts. Translation, it has been claimed, was the great discovery of the Hellenistic world. Though Greek and Latin were initially the only classical languages, by the end of Antiquity their number had been extended to include Syriac, Coptic, Armenian, Georgian and Ethiopian, sometimes with new scripts. Meanwhile, the Chinese *paideia* remained monoglot and monographic though the Chinese language itself was being enriched by Iranian loan words to do with wheeled transport, medicine and magic through contacts with a wider world in Central Asia.⁴⁰

China did not yet possess a Sinosphere or effective institutions of translation. It remained shut up within its own script and texts separated by mental and physical barriers from the rest of civilization. It was the resulting sense of isolation and provinciality which had driven emperor Han Wu-ti to send his emissaries to the West and from the middle of the third century AD sent Chinese Buddhist pilgrims in the same direction. It was a state of affairs which the next half millennium was to reverse radically.

Civilizations are seldom superior or inferior to each other in all respects. They are not blocs, but aggregates and distinctions between levels and within levels must be drawn. That said, if an overall judgement has to be made, and Frank's argument compels us to make one, it is difficult not to conclude that around AD 400 the Roman world

was more advanced than the Chinese world. China might have the better economic infrastructure, on which a great future was going to be built, but in terms of superstructure – political, social and intellectual – Rome held centre-stage. It is the rise of a new Chinese centrality that we must now examine. The Rise of the East was a genuine novelty and not just the reaffirmation of an existing reality through a fresh super-Kondratieff.

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