Introduction

The time has come for 'civilisation' to be reintroduced. Historians, archaeologists, and anthropologists have overcome the critical suspicion mounted by so-called post-modernists and post-structuralists of any long narrative or of empirically based theory. Combinations of the three disciplines, by both students and researchers, have survived and they now flourish. In any case, from the 1970s of early post-ism, anthropology has increasingly included history, the study of documents and archaeological remains that predate but inform the present studied by lived experience, observation, conversation, and interview. But they have avoided 'civilisation' because of its Eurocentric bias and thus they still avoid the questions posed by histories of diffusion and long-term evolution that certainly were biased but only in their assumptions and answers, not in asking about the long-term formation and transformation of civilisations and culture areas. Brilliant overviews in archaeology using new techniques and finds as well as anthropological insights to find long durational continuities and long processes of transformation under the heading of 'civilisation' are still trapped within a Eurocentric bias that confines it either to modernity or to the archaic, to Bronze Age cities and their empires, or to so-called 'world religions' and their spheres of influence. This book liberates 'civilisation' from those confines.

In the early years of archaeology, ancient history, anthropology, and ethnology, when all were thought of as one, 'civilisation' was associated with the word 'archaic'. From the archaic, civilisation grew or evolved into modern civilisation. But modernity was then sociologised and so was anthropology in the first half of the twentieth century. This left civilisation 'archaic', the civilisations of Egypt, Mesopotamia, Greece, and Rome and, if found elsewhere, such as in China, central and South America, or India, civilisation

was assimilated into an equivalent historical category. Questions of long duration in history were similarly confined to the area studied by Braudel and his colleagues: the Mediterranean. Still now, the study of civilisation is confined to the archaic and so is left to history and archaeology. In the meantime, the close study of cultures and societies, with or without states, has been divorced from this kind of history and archaeology, even though the findings of such studies have informed both.

Some Precedents

When non-specialist readers over a certain age think of civilisation they might bring to mind the big names of Arnold J. Toynbee and Kenneth Clark. Toynbee's *A Study of History*, its first volumes published in 1934 and its twelfth and last in 1961, all summarised by him with revision and illustrations in one volume in 1972, were immensely popular. They described the rise and fall of twenty or more civilisations, rising by dealing with external challenges, falling by self-destruction, including the moral decline and barbarisation of the dominant minority. The criterion of what is a civilisation was, at first for him, by his own admission, based on Hellenic Greece and on Rome, though he was famed for his world-inclusion (of for instance Inca and Japanese civilisations) and though he was criticised for *under*-estimating the superiority of the Enlightenment West. Beside the twenty-plus major civilisations, he mentioned others that were, for him, proto-civilisations arrested in their growth to full civilisation. For Toynbee as a comparative historian, as his twelfth volume recorded, 'civilisation' was a preferable unit of comparison to nations because the latter are never self-sufficient, whereas civilisations are, although they impinge upon other civilisations and in their decline are absorbed into other civilisations.

Toynbee's learning and ambition were admirable. His series of studies aspire to a comprehensive history of humanity, rejecting any deterministic theory of cause and effect, be it racial or environmental. We too reject any determinism but are not as ambitious, because our conception of civilisation is neither of a totality of cultural, economic, political, and social history, and because we do not aim to cover the whole of human history. He made life easy for himself because his notion of civilisation was too much based on the achievements of what he called 'dominant minorities' 'who carry along the uncreative mass' (1972: 141). We seek to include all those living in a civilisation without assuming that only the leaders are creative. They may be in their own lights, but we do not accept elite self-definitions for anything more than an interesting fact.

Toynbee's definition of civilisation has one central element that is almost identical with our's, namely a cosmology, or in his terms 'a cosmological vision of living in harmony' that impels action (1972: 44). But he claims that pre-civilisational societies, including present-day 'arrested' cultures, only have a classificatory world vision. We have found from ethnographies of hunter-gatherers, pastoralists, and small-scale polities that none of their cosmologies are simply classificatory: their visions of the world that includes them are as grand and universal as any other. His conception of civilisation is that of a species of society and it is defined according to the definitions of culture offered by historians and a few of the anthropologists of the 1950s. We will be arguing that there already was in the writings of Marcel Mauss a much superior conception of civilisations that went far beyond definitions of culture and society. Further, his conception of civilisation is based on mythical and literary sources indicating universal truths of human cognition and creativity as much as it is on histories, and it is very thin on archaeology, whereas we will base everything we write on historical documents, archaeological finds, and the secondary histories, as well as on ethnographies and anthropological findings based on them.

We aim for an opening of enquiry, not an attempt at exhaustive inclusion. His theory of growth and decline is also too dependent on a metaphysical analogy with life forms, whereas we aim to suggest, again in opening a field of enquiry, that there are several long-term sequences of histories of civilisations that cannot be reduced to a single life force. What we suggest is based on current and future evidence-based demonstrations, not a Bergsonian conception of life force, its rise, stagnation, and disintegration.

Kenneth Clark presented his history of art as a series on British television in 1969 called 'Civilisation'. It became famous as it was viewed and was repeatedly broadcast in many countries. Entirely addressing the history of Western fine visual art (including architecture), rising out of the less civilised art of the European 'Dark Ages', Clark knew its limitations but insisted that his discernment of art could justify the term 'civilisation' and set a singular standard, a measure for all civilisations. This trope of admitting the possibility of other civilisations but against one measure, whether it be that of creativity or artistic and scientific achievements or centralised rule or urbanisation, or all these combined, we think is too limiting and lacks a basis in the various civilisations' own criteria of what is civilised. Even more than Toynbee's, Clark's measure is based on what the dominant minorities do and have achieved, omitting serious consideration of hierarchy and of its lower reaches being part and parcel of the same civilisation.

The 2018 BBC series 'Civilisations: masterworks of beauty and ingenuity' emphasised the plurality but followed Clark's formula closely in confining itself to the discernment of great art as the highest representations of human creativity and the human spirit in all its variety and, importantly, in its connections and mutual influences across great geographical expanses and times. In this respect, in the ways that civilisations borrow from and mix with each other, we go along with the creators of 'Civilisations', Simon Scharma, Mary Beard, and David Olusoga. But like Clark they underplay to the point of total neglect the everyday life and the rituals for which the objects they select were created.

Both series are a paramount example of 'civilisation' as culture, discerned as high achievements of and in the creative arts, above the arts of craft, manufacture, and design. In this they continue the tradition of Matthew Arnold and of T. S. Eliot and their definitions of culture, defined against mass culture. Their equation of culture with civilisation was also defined against rationalist and machine materiality and production, or technological science.

The anthropological tradition of defining culture as all that is learned and transmitted symbolically and through the imagination, including a distinctive set of values, is similarly not distinguished from civilisation.

It will become evident that for us the two are clearly different in scale and nature. A civilisation is composed of several cultures that borrow from yet distinguish themselves from each other in similar ways. And to us it is obvious that the distinctions between great and lower arts upon which Scharma et al., Clark, and his predecessors relied must themselves be included in any description of civilisation. Bearers of the lower arts and knowledge of the world must be included in any conception of civilisation.

A much more recent and new treatment of civilisations, in the plural, defines civilisation as a regional ecological phenomenon, an imposition upon and transformation of its environment. Fernandez-Armesto (2000) is more even-handed and more inclusive than Toynbee and puts cosmology together with technology. His book is arranged according to a typology of environments, so that any one large regional civilisation, such as the Chinese, can figure more than once, differentiated by and comparable to other civilisational formations of and adaptations to a type of environment, more than one of which can exist in any one country. A civilisation in his account is not only environmentally mixed but also affected by migration and trade between civilisations. His scheme is ingenious and it deals with long-term histories of duration. But he is against conceptual approaches to civilisation, whereas we attempt to provide an analytical apparatus

based on the theory of Marcel Mauss and a critical appraisal of many other treatments of civilisation. A further difference is that our approach is prompted by the wish to provide a means of describing long-term transformational change, not just duration. And we make a crucial distinction between technological invention and changes in political economy on one hand and their effects on a continuing but possibly transformed civilisation and its cultures on the other.

Our Approach

We think the time has come to pay closer and more analytic attention to long-term histories, questions of duration and transformation, and in doing this we have to reintegrate history, archaeology, and anthropology not necessarily as methods of study, but as addressing questions and issues common to all three.

At the outset, it is salutary to acknowledge that reintegration of historical, evolutionary categorisation of the ancient with what preceded it (the presumed non-civilised) and what followed it (the modern) is a European problem. Our Chinese colleague Wang Mingming constantly reminds us of this being our problem. It is not a problem for Chinese scholars, unless they have accepted and incorporated European biases. One of Toynbee's great merits was that he overcame European biases.

But Chinese scholars have their own central assumptions, which are also a bias. One of them is the assumption of their civilisational history being of long duration, lasting for four thousand or more years. We shall eventually have to deal with the effects of the new European (seventeenth-century) word 'civilisation', its nineteenth-century translation into Chinese, and its association with modernity. But for now we remark on this idea of civilisation as something of long duration but undergoing transformations, which themselves take place over hundreds of years, as one of the correctives that inspire this book.

Another major corrective concerns the question that the historical and archaeological category of the archaic always poses with strange insistence, which is 'What are the origins of civilisation?' It is predetermined by an identification of civilisation with a state and with cities. We reject this pre-definition along with the 'archaic' and reconceptualise 'civilisation' accordingly. The corrective in this case is based in Africa, scene of two self-defeating ways of appropriating the archaic. One of these is to seek in Africa an urban civilisation to rival or precede the Egyptian and Mesopotamian. The other is to reject the whole concept of civilisation as colonial but still

write long-term histories of African cultures. The African challenge is to accept the duration of certain cultural features and long-term transformations, such as the migration of Bantu speakers, a transforming process equivalent to the Hinduisation of India and Southeast Asia, in their own terms without making them exceptional or conform to a concept of civilisation and then to see how they were affected by the more recent overlaying of colonial states.

China's leaders since it has become a world economic power promote a global concept of harmony as a way of reconceiving the civilisation of the world that could be built, in diplomacy and global governance, to supersede the basically warlike geopolitical realism of hegemony and deterrence. Harmony and common prosperity as they expound it is a Chinese global conception of civilisation, built on the basis of a world history that came into existence with the global spread of industrial capitalism.

A corrective to this is to examine, as we do in the chapter on civilisation in modern China, what governmental 'civilisation' is in China and to examine what might be described as 'modern civilisation'.

There is another good reason for our focus on China and Africa, one already established in anthropology. The British anthropologists Meyer Fortes and Maurice Freedman established the worship of patrilineal ancestors as a basis for comparing West Africa with China. We expand this comparison well beyond ancestors, as an extended example of what is entailed in the comparison of civilisations and of what is opened out by looking onto long-term duration and long-process transformations. There are of course a great many civilisations upon which we could have focused for this demonstration. We make no attempt to cover the globe and all of history. But meeting these challenges enables us to demonstrate the concept of civilisation that we will introduce. This should be sufficient to show the merits of this new approach for a new combination of archaeology, history, and anthropology, which others can take up in other regions of the world and other histories, as well as in other genres and media of presentation of 'civilisations'.

CHAPTER 1

Civilisation: A Critical and Constructive Review

Civilisation has for many decades been a rejected concept in anthropology and sociology because of its past evolutionary and Eurocentric misuses. Our reason for reintroducing it is that it will enable us to go beyond the narrow confines of time and space to which culture and society have been restricted and to raise our eyes to see the relations of societies and cultures to each other on a larger scale. In this chapter we will show how we can do this without the assumption of unilinear evolution and without Euro- or any other ethnocentrism. This is therefore a critical but constructive review of ways of defining civilisation by major thinkers in the twentieth century writing in European languages. Many of them are themselves critical of Eurocentric colleagues.

Durkheim and Mauss on Civilisation

In our view, the most promising, least Eurocentric, conception of civilisation in classical sociology and anthropology was the one forged by Durkheim and Mauss in 1913 (Schlanger 2006, text 3).[1] Emile Durkheim did have a theory of social evolution, which was singular (from mechanical to organic solidarity), and you might therefore expect that he would have had a singular theory of the evolution of civilisation. But surprisingly he and his collaborator and nephew, Marcel Mauss, stressed the histories of civilisations in the plural and rejected connecting them to some hypothetical general evolution of humankind, as Auguste Comte had done.

[1] Arnason (2018) provides a full and well-contextualised exposition of their article, and of Mauss's subsequent text. For him, they are the inspiration for what he calls 'civilisational analysis', which is close to what we are doing. But in this book, we seek to be more precise than Mauss or Arnason in delineating what we mean conceptually by 'civilisation'.

What has come to be shared, a civilisation, may have occurred through the spread of institutions, techniques, myths, or other practices and products from a single origin or, they point out, by exchanges among a number of contiguous societies.

Durkheim and Mauss acknowledge the predecessors of their theory in ethnologists, ethnographers, and cultural historians in North America and Germany and museums in France and Sweden. They had established, for Durkheim and Mauss, a less than clear but still distinctly social phenomenon whose spatial extent is bigger than political society upon which their own theories of social order had been based. Tools, styles, language families, institutions of organisation, such as chiefdoms, and types of kinship, spread spatially over time. These sets of institutions have no clear bounds, no single social organism, yet they are linked to each other in an integrated but not a functionally interdependent system. Such a system is properly called a civilisation, which can be constant across languages and political societies. The examples they list at one point are Christian civilisation, Mediterranean civilisation, and Northwest American civilisation. Because civilisations are social phenomena, like all social phenomena they are, to Durkheim and Mauss, moral milieus – they determine a certain cast of mind and of conduct, yet they travel and spread across social boundaries of all kinds over long courses of time.

In a later text, dated 1929 or 1930, Mauss, now writing on his own (Schlanger 2006, text 7), defined civilisation as 'those social phenomena which are common to several societies' 'more or less related to each other' by lasting contact 'through some permanent intermediaries, or through relationships from common descent' (61). A civilisation is, then, 'a family of societies' (62). We can imagine what these permanent intermediaries are when we think of tributary or diplomatic, trading or marital relations. In the technical terms of Mauss's and Durkheim's sociology, a civilisation is the spread through such intermediaries of collective representations and practices, which are the social aspect of the materials of civilisation. Mauss says they are 'arbitrary', which means they are not universal but preferred modes of making and doing things. In other civilisations the same things are done in different ways, functions performed by different things.

In the actual order of analysis, to say these things belong together as a civilisation is, as he and Durkheim stress, to infer from archaeological, ethnological, and historical evidence a common set of practices and meanings, not one dominant characteristic, design, or thing, but the way they hang together, and to trace their evolution over time and space. Note

that these inferences mark limits of civilisational spread. Beyond them are the further spreads of bartered or marketed goods that are accepted for their strangeness, or exoticism, rather than the symbolic meaning or the practice and conduct that goes with them within the civilisation from which and within which they are produced.

Within a civilisational spread there are other boundaries of more coherent social and cultural structures and their centres. These singularities enclose and differentiate themselves from others in similar ways, ways that in fact characterise a civilisation. In this sense, the civilisation, as a way of defining inside and outside, logically precedes and gives societies and cultures a mode of self-definition and internal coherence.

The variation among them increases with greater geographical distance until a civilisational border region is reached where even greater differences are to be found, namely differences between civilisations. But even there in these border zones, local societies and cultures will be creative mixtures of civilisations, related to both or more sides and their centres. And what comes from elsewhere through these border regions may well be absorbed into those centres. Civilisations are centred mixtures.

Mauss relied on there being cores and origins of civilisation (Schlanger 2006: 67). But he included in 'civilisation' the societies of hunters and gatherers, such as the Australian aborigines, and he envisaged four regions of what he speculated might be the huge civilisational spread through the coasts and islands of the south Pacific (63). On land, such as that of Central and West Africa or the Amazon basin, when tracing non-hierarchical societies or a series of small states and the shallow hierarchies of each to claim that they are similar, differentiating themselves from each other in similar ways, the space across which the series runs can be very broad. It is also harder to detect a civilisational border region than when we are dealing with steeper hierarchies and their centres.

For Mauss's conceptualisation of 'civilisation' the idea of a culture area (*Kulturkreis*), one of whose main ethnologists was Adolf Bastian, was a critical predecessor, criticised for its propensity to single out a cultural object or trait and survey its diffusion, whereas for Mauss you could only make sense of either when you saw how they were related to others in a complex of objects and traits. For Bastian, 'culture' and its local variation in a geographical region was the effect of an historical adaptation to the changing ecology of that region, whereas for Mauss there was the additional factor of a culturally autonomous (or arbitrary) process. We too will stress the interdependence between political economy, adaptation to changing ecology, and conquest or other kinds of involvement with other cultures on one

hand and the processes of cultural adaptation and transformation as a relatively autonomous and formative history.

Bastian is well known to have been the teacher of Franz Boas, founder of an anthropology of singular cultures. Unlike Boas as well as Bastian, but like Mauss, sharing his stress on ways of making and doing across cultures, we have chosen to stay with the word 'civilisation' instead of the almost cognate 'culture area'.

We also follow Mauss and Durkheim in their moral project – a way of knowing what they called a moral milieu is also a way of knowing how to reform a world lacking moral sense, a distinctly political project. Mauss's concept of civilisation is no less part of this project than any of his other writings. Like the rest of his and Durkheim's work it is both an analytic and a critical concept. We will shortly give our view of this critical potential.

While we share with Mauss the centrality of moral aspirations as formations of humanity, we do not stress the higher reaches of civilisations. We reject the idea that those who are at the bottom or at the margins of hierarchical civilisations are any less part of those civilisations and any less human than those who have the accomplishments that each civilisation ranks high. Indeed, it is among the heterodox, at the margins, and at the lower reaches of a civilisation where we often find within civilisations critical disputes and challenges to the claim of being civilised or human. Further, those who retreat from civilisational empires cannot be understood except by reference to what they seek to escape and indeed to some extent still aspire to reach.[2]

We follow Arnason's (2018) high regard for Durkheim's and Mauss's concept, but we seek to take it in certain directions not followed by Arnason. One is to stress spread, mix, and variation, while Arnason takes from Mauss his more expectable stress on systemic coherence, albeit a looser coherence than that developed by Talcott Parsons in his systemisation of Weber, Durkheim, and Pareto. A stress on systemic coherence can lead to the empirically false idea that civilisations do not borrow and become changed in borrowing from other civilisations. New civilisations emerge out of such fusions at and from their margins, where the hopes and aspirations raised by the criteria of civilisation are dashed or denied.

We are interested in differences between civilisations and in their comparison, as were Mauss and the early twentieth-century ethnologists to whom he referred. But in Mauss's and our own emphasis on spread and mixture, we reject the idea of 'clash' of civilisations put forward by

[2] We do not suppose that James Scott would disagree (2009).