

2: FOUR PERSPECTIVES ON CHINESE HISTORY¹

a. In what ways are the archaeological-archival specialists, material determinists and academic consensus proponents all material determinists? How do their motives for being material determinists differ? Which of the three does Kaplan find most useful? Least useful? Why?

b. What is the most crucial difference between the ideational perspective and the other three? How do ideational determinists criticize each of the other perspectives, and how do the other three criticize the ideationals?

A. Four Perspectives

1. Why need we consider more than one perspective?

Why bother with four perspectives, not just on Chinese history, but on history in general? Why not just one? The short answer is that short answers embodying just one perspective will not do the job.

Every story that historians tell is told by a particular kind of narrator. Who that narrator is, what mental framework he employs, where he stands and when he stands there while researching his story, all determine what he knows, and what the content of his story will be.

Since no two persons are exactly alike, there a potentially infinite variety of narrators can exist. We can, however, simplify a bit and clump similar narrators and the basic style of their narratives into a limited number of categories.

I have selected four perspectives which you are likely to encounter, but which also cover the spectrum of possible narrative types. They are:

(1) a seemingly neutral archaeological/archival perspective (which in fact leans toward a naive form of material determinism),

(2) a hard, overt material determinist perspective (the classical Marxist position),

(3) a rather eclectic, superficially complex, but ultimately merely superficial version of the material determinist perspective that (only partly to tease my colleagues) I call the “academic consensus” view,

(4) and finally a fairly rigorous modern version of what might be called an ideational determinist view.

Once you understand what I mean by “material” and “ideational,” you might reasonably surmise that these four perspectives could be reduced to two: material determinism and ideational determinism. For each of the first three perspectives, all historical change, including creation of the most rarefied of ideas, is caused by mere possession of various kinds of material objects. This is the essence of material determinism.

For the fourth perspective, however, ultimately it is autonomous changes in men’s most fundamental ideas and opinions that change the kinds of things they choose to produce and possess.

In practice, as in the famous dilemma involving the priority of the chicken and the egg, it is hard to trace things back to their ultimate causes.²

2. An Overview

a. the archaeological-archival and academic consensus views

The archaeologist and the archivist have a lot in common. They provide much of the data that historians use to construct their narratives.

The archaeologist digs up objects, and invents or borrows the scientific techniques for dating these objects in absolute terms. When this proves impossible, he devises the fuzziest techniques for arranging them in terms of chronological sequences of styles.

The archivist collects and preserves historical documents (or copies of them) that survive from the time that produced them. He then arranges them according to date and/or some system of categories.

The archivist is a kind of archeologist

of documents, who sorts and flips pages of paper (or baked clay, or even turtles’ belly shells). The archaeologist is a kind of archivist of objects and their contexts, who flips strata in the earth. He destroys the strata in the process, but nowadays he preserves them in virtual form via computer data bases.

So we may reasonably combine the two into an archaeological-archival perspective. However, the fact that both manipulate objects does not make them altogether objective (i.e. material determinist) sciences.

Things (including documents) do not automatically explain themselves. The path of least resistance for someone contemplating material objects is to assume that their possession caused what happened. When something material changes—a new kind of pottery appears, smelting of metal shows up, paper is invented—it is easy to assume that the material change has somehow tripped off whatever happens next, including changes in fundamental mental habits.

This kind of naive, unexamined material determinism does not much hurt when practiced by archaeologists or archivists. Ideational determinists can later revise the categories into which archaeologists and archivists arrange things and documents, if to do so seems more reasonable.

Unfortunately, at least in our times, the consensus among university intellectuals has been to accept the assumption of material determinism just as unthinkingly as do many of those doing archaeological or archival work. This academic consensus disguises its blind acceptance of the fashion of the age by unnecessarily complicated or incomplete arguments that blur over alternative lines of causation. Academics also concentrate on narrow studies of particular aspects of history that seem not to require confronting the larger issues that consideration of ideational determinism would raise.

Upholders of the academic consensus do this, argue the ideational determinists, to avoid acknowledging that they have bought into the guiding idea system of the material determinists. Since the more explicitly material determinists are usually Marxists of one sort or another, and explicit Marxists are in somewhat bad repute, disguising links with such people seems prudent to most academics.

² The 18th century philosopher David Hume, himself closest to the material determinist position, stated the material-ideational dilemma nicely in a paradoxical epigram: “Our opinions are determined by our interests, but our interests are a matter of opinion.”

¹ 1st draft 9/94; 3rd rev. 9/98, by Edward Kaplan.

b. material determinists and ideational determinists compared

The overt material determinists are usually more straightforward. They insist that insisting that things cause ideas constitutes the essence of any scientific approach. When in power they do hideous things to people who disagree with them on this point. When out of power, they sometimes take on some softer version of material determinism. This allows them to co-opt the academic consensus.

The ideational determinists' position is equally clear. It is the polar opposite of the material determinists'. It too comes in softer and harder forms. The softer form might concede that while things also affect ideas, if you push the chain of causation back to its root you find a change of mentality—in ideas—has occurred first. That is what trips off the chain of material changes.

c. advantages and disadvantages of each perspective

Each of these perspectives has its advantages. The archaeological/archival position provides us with the raw material for historical narratives. We do not have to assume that things cause the ideas we incorporate into our narratives. We can often infer their non-material causes from the nature of the things that survive and the contexts within which we find them.

The hard material determinist position has at least one virtue. It forces us to confront the issue. It wears its material determinism on its sleeve, so that the reader knows (or should know) what he is dealing with.

The problem with the material determinists is that though they know where they stand and usually tell you so, they insist (whenever they have the power to do so) that you stand there too. If they run a country, as they have run China for the last half century, they insist that those over whom they rule become material determinists too.

Even (or especially) when they are wrong, we must take the material determinists seriously. Most of what we read about China reflects narratives published in China by Marxists or people bullied by Marxists over the last half century. This is twice as long as most of you have lived and constitutes almost all of my adult life.

You must also consciously take into

account the academic consensus view, since that is what most textbooks and specialized writings on China take as their perspective. Its “soft” material determinism is not as easy to recognize as the hard material determinism of Marxism that is its closest intellectual neighbor.

Why is there so close a link between the academic and the Marxist version of material determinism? Probably it has much to do with the logic of meritocracy (the nice word for “bureaucracy,” a Chinese invention during late antiquity that has become increasingly important in the West during the last century).

Meritocrats either work for a government or need government to enforce the definition of merit (the “template of merit”) that a particular disciplinary group of private meritocrats (doctors, lawyers, professors) uses to recruit and evaluate its members. The Marxists, even more than other material determinists, need a large number of meritocrats to help run their very strong states. These states have replaced firms operating in markets with bureaus giving orders.

Marxism therefore has a tendency to become, as Raymond Aaron has put it, “the opiate of the intellectuals,” (i.e. meritocrats). This (along with misinterpretation of the hard sciences) tends to warp the template of merit even of non-Marxist meritocrats in a material determinist direction. Even people who want to teach Asian history in the universities of the Western countries (including Japan, which has long since joined the Western scholarly world) tend to become implicit material determinists.

Though I personally find a particular ideational determinist perspective most persuasive, I will not try to impose any single orthodoxy on you. Instead I will try to impose *four* orthodoxies on you. Once you are aware of all four perspectives, you will be able to spot them should you run up against them in East Asian or Western history.

At first in this course your life will become a little more burdensome, since you will not have a single party line to follow. As I tell the story of East Asia's history, I will rarely give a narrative based on just one of these four perspectives, even the one I favor, without at least a nod in the direction of one or more of the other three.

The good side is that on exams you can safely risk not coming down on my

side. You just have to take account of ideational determinism in constructing your narrative along with one or more of the other three perspectives, even if you choose to reject it.

B. The Archaeological/Archival Perspective

Recall that this perspective delivers to us information on objects dug up by the archaeologists or written objects saved by the archivists. It tends to lead people to assume that changes in these objects precede and cause changes in the mental arrangements of the people who created and used them.

That is not a terrible flaw. At least the archaeologists and archivists provide hard evidence for past times. For preliterate ages, the archaeologists provide virtually the only evidence we have. Our species has been literate for only a few thousand years (a mere 30 H), but it has probably existed for upwards of a hundred thousand years (1,000 H). Without the archaeologists we would have no direct evidence for this vast stretch of our prehistory. Even for literate ages, archaeology provides much direct evidence, including many documents.

Archaeologists even contribute to the writing of contemporary history. Journalistic pseudo-archaeologists have pawed through Henry Kissinger's garbage cans. Genuine archaeologists are writing interesting social history from the contents of municipal garbage dumps.

1. The labels for China's main archeological stages:

The archaeologists provide us with many of the labels we most commonly use. (See below and the table at the end of this chapter.) Notice that these labels imply material determinist notions. The earliest labels translate into plain English as various “stone” ages. (Paleo = old; Neo = new; lithic = pertaining to stone.) The label itself tempts us to associate other traits with stone. We are tempted to think “No wonder they had no state or writing. All they could do was make their tools of stone.”

Most surviving early objects are of stone, but people then also made objects out of softer stuff (textiles and/or leather made into clothing with bone sewing nee-

dles and scrapers, for example). These objects have long since rotted away. Only the stone stuff survived.

Even at the material level this represents a bias introduced by the working methods of an archaeology that can only find the things that have lasted.

The dates given below for archaeologically defined stages of prehistory and history are for China. Dates for Western Eurasia are somewhat earlier through the early iron age. Dates for China's early industrial age begin several centuries earlier than for Europe's. See the table at the end of the chapter for comparisons with the other three perspectives:

a. Upper Paleolithic (c. 30-50,000 [?] BC - 8,000 BC). (Upper = later for the archaeologist; paleo = old; lithic = pertaining to stone).

b. Mesolithic (c. 8,000 - 6,000 BC) (meso = in between)

Beginning Neolithic (6,000 - 3,000 BC) (neo = new)

c. Late Neolithic (3,000 - 2,000 BC)

d. Early Bronze Age (2,000 - 1500 BC)

e. Middle Bronze Age (1500 - 1,000 BC)

f. Late Bronze Age (1,000 - 500 BC)

g. Early Iron Age (500 BC - 300 AD)

h. Middle Iron Age (300 - 1,000)

i. Late Iron / Early Industrial Age (1,000 - 1880)

j. Full Industrial Age (1880 -)

Paleolithic tools were used by hunters and gatherers. There is no sign of pottery at this stage. People probably did not even make baskets yet.

Mesolithic tools begin tilting toward use on the food-gathering side. Evidence of basket-making and in some places (earliest in Japan) pottery appears before farming does.

The Beginning Neolithic provides tools unambiguously suited for food-plant cultivation. At least semi-permanent small hamlets appear. The first farmers temporarily abandoned these hamlets every couple of generations when nearby fields (which they cleared and fertilized by slashing and burning of their native vegetation) had to be abandoned when their fertility declined.³

³ You might be tempted to rigidly link slash and burn and periodic abandonment of agriculture to the Beginning Neolithic. Notice, though, that much of the United States, particularly in the South, was brought under cultivation by the same method during the Full Industrial epoch. For that matter, most

Late Neolithic people created more differentiated tools, permanent farming villages (perhaps made possible by use of fertilizers and fallowing of fields), specialized pottery for graves (as opposed to ceramics for everyday use), and the first evidence of some people (presumably the rulers of the first small states) having fancier graves than most people (who were presumably the subjects of these states).

During the Bronze Age, though large numbers of spectacularly large and complex bronze objects turn up at the later stages, only rulers seem to have used the metal at least in China. Everyone else remained at a Late Neolithic material level. (Bronze was far more widely used as an industrial metal during the West's Bronze Age.)

Conversely, during East Asia's Iron Age, including during its Early Industrial climax, iron was used far more widely than in the West. However, China was at least a century behind the West in entering the subsequent Full Industrial Age.

2. What the labels don't say

a. Neolithic & Bronze Age beginnings of state & civilization

Notice that the archaeological label "Late Neolithic" in itself does not alert you to the arrival of the most conspicuous of human institutions, the state. By focusing on tools the label tempts you to conclude that the new tools and farming techniques alone stimulated creation of the permanent settlements and then the little states linking these permanent settlements.

Similarly, the label Early Bronze age tempts you to link the first use of metal with larger states, particularly since (in China, at least) use of bronze seems to have been limited to the rulers.

However, finer distinctions must be made even from a material determinist perspective. Merely going over to agriculture at the beginning of the Neolithic does not seem to have been enough to evoke creation of states. Fancier forms of agriculture were needed to support even simple states.

Fine-tuning material determinism is not our only alternative. It is also plausi-

commercial fishermen are still at the hunter-gatherer stage which characterized the Paleolithic.

ble to surmise that state-building came first, before agriculture had become much developed. The first states may then have called forth the first more specialized tools for farming. The first rulers or their priests may have also designed the ceremonial pottery used only in the graves of rulers and had favored tribute payers manufacture it.

It was not the stuff they used that created the first rulers. Rather the first rulers called such goods into existence. Oral traditions, admittedly preserved only in much later books, suggest that from their first appearance, rulers claimed privileged relationships with the gods. Because of that relationship people made payments of goods to them so as to win the favor of the gods. Some of these goods became specialized as their makers began to work solely for the rulers, supported by gifts from the goods contributed by others to the rulers.

Neither the archaeological evidence nor the much later archival accounts of the rulers' relations with the gods allow us to choose between material and ideational determinism. Even our own skepticism about the existence of the specific gods worshipped by the ancients or of the existence of gods or a single god in general need not falsify this ideational determinist explanation. All that is necessary is that people at the time in question should have believed in these gods.

Larger, more elaborate states formed in the course of the Bronze Age. In the West, commoners as well as rulers used bronze tools. In China, however, bronze continued to be almost exclusively used for ceremonial objects monopolized by the rulers. Perhaps this was partly because the tempering technique to harden bronze was still unknown in China.

Judging from surviving later accounts as well as inferences from the artifacts, religion also became still more elaborate during the Bronze Age. And yet an ideational determinist interpretation of the origins of the larger states of the Middle and Late Bronze Age is at least as plausible as a material determinist one.

During the Late Bronze Age, there was little change in the technology of bronze-making compared to the latter part of the Middle Bronze Age, but the bronzes suddenly began to bear long written inscriptions. In style and substance these inscriptions match even more detailed religious documents later copies

of which were preserved by archivists. These novel religious ideas seem to have led the rulers to create novel political forms.

These novel forms eventually ushered in a new stage of civilization even while China remained in the Bronze Age. Only c. 500 BC did the Chinese Early Iron Age begin. In the West, the Iron Age began earlier, c. 1,300 BC, well before the coming of an analogous new stage, that of high civilization. Ignorance of what had occurred in China, encouraged archaeologists to assume that the shift to iron after 1300 BC somehow caused the shift to the new stage of civilization in the West. The Chinese chronological sequence, which has high civilization appear before the beginning of the Iron Age suggests an ideational determinist explanation of the arrival of the new stage of civilization.

b. the first stage of high civilization

This new stage began with what Karl Jaspers has called “the Axial Age.” (Axial = axis, that around which something else pivots.) Suddenly, not long after 600 BC, in Greece, Persia, Northern India and in the northern part of the Central Zone of East Asia there almost simultaneously appeared the first philosophers, the first specialized moneys made by rulers and used in elaborate private market economies, and much more powerful and expansive states.

These changes mark the appearance of a higher stage of civilization than had existed before. From an ideational determinist perspective I label it the first stage of *high* civilization to distinguish it from the *early* civilization that preceded it.

Associating this enormous change with the coming of iron as the archaeological-archival perspective does, tempts us to miss its larger significance. Historians of East Asia can help their colleagues in European history by informing them that, in China at least, these momentous behavioral changes began to appear a century or so *before* the first significant use of iron.

Much later, the Middle and Late Iron (or Early Industrial) Ages were both preceded by revolutionary changes in the stage of civilization involving both the political and religious orders. These included the fall of the great ancient empires and the coming of Christianity to

Europe, and somewhat earlier, the fall of its great ancient empire and the coming of Buddhism into China.

The ideational determinist associates these profound religious innovations with the entrance into a *second* stage of high civilization. Only some five centuries after this did the Early Industrial stage get under way, first in China, then in North-western Europe.

Here too an ideational determinist perspective seems more plausible than material determinism with its assertion that fancier tools and techniques appeared on their own and ultimately caused both industrialization and a new stage of high civilization.

China’s 160 year lag in entering the *Full* Industrial Revolution may have occurred because, having entered the second stage of high civilization sooner, they entered the crisis accompanying the end of that stage of civilization. Various non-material aspects of that crisis might have interfered with the transition from early to full industrialization.

C. Marxism’s Hard Material Determinist Perspective

Some of my best friends are Marxists, which is fortunate for my social life, since otherwise I would not have very many academic friends to talk to.

The best thing about the Marxists is that they clearly and distinctly assume that autonomous changes in *things* precede and cause changes in *ideas*, including ideas about how to organize a state. It is difficult to get into a direct conflict with a holder of the archaeological-archival or even of the academic consensus view. Both are usually ready to back at least partly away from material determinism when pressed.

For the strict Marxist (especially when in power), however, there is a rigid connection between the form of the state and the religious order that justifies it on the one side and the cluster of factors that constitute material life (the “mode of production”) on the other side. The Chinese Marxist leaders have been Marxists of this type.

China has not just been overtly dominated by Marxist hard material determinists for the past half-century. For at least a century before that, the dominant form of traditional Chinese thought had already

become congruent with a hard material determinism which was Marxist in all but outward form. This was probably the most important cause of the takeover of China by the Marxists. (Several branches of Western thought followed a similar trajectory of increasing congruence with Marxism during the last couple of centuries.)

1. The key Marxist historical stages:

a. Primitive Communism (through Beginning Neolithic)

b. Slave Society (Late Neolithic through Late Bronze Age)

c. Feudal Society (Early Iron Age through Late Iron Age)

d. Capitalist Society (“sprouts” during Late Iron Age; Mao says it began c.1842, was ripe for socialism by 1949; Deng says it has barely begun during 20th century.)

e. Socialist Society (Mao: dominant after 1949; Deng: must coexist with Capitalism until c. 2050)

f. Pure Communism (Mao: almost began 1958; Deng: postponed indefinitely)

a. the Garden of Primitive Communism

These stages are fewer than the archaeologists’ and hence are presumably easier to memorize. More interesting, despite Marxism’s antipathy to religion, they strikingly parallel the Christian progression from primeval innocence, to fall, and ultimate redemption. Of course, unlike Christianity’s climax, the ultimate Marxist redemption is to take place on earth rather than in Heaven.

Under Primitive Communism everyone supposedly lived in a state of perfect equality with everyone else. Everyone shared what they had with everyone else. There were no rulers, no ruled. People lived in isolated small Neolithic hamlets. Inhabitants of one hamlet did not trade with residents of even nearby hamlets. The ancient Chinese philosopher Lao Zi had a similar view of China’s remote antiquity: even though in one village you could hear a cock crowing in a neighboring village, it would never occur to you to go there.

The Marxist Primitive Communism resembles a somewhat more heavily populated version of the Garden of Eden. Each hamlet constitutes an isolated Garden, with several dozen Adams and Eves

living together in it in perfect harmony with themselves and with nature. All of them are without knowledge and hence without sin. (Lao Zi's Daoism and Christianity are at one with Marxism in so characterizing their respective primitive utopias.)

b. enter the snake

Who is the snake in this materialist garden? So far from losing his legs, the materialist snake multiplies legs (along with heads and bodies). The snake comprises the whole class of slave-holders.

The 19th century Western anthropologists discovered that primitive people often first establish regular relations with their neighbors to practice exogamy (marriage outside the local group). They need wives from other groups to avoid the bad results of inbreeding. The simplest way to get wives exogamously supposedly was to steal them from nearby hamlets.

In his *Family and the Origins of Civilization* (1895), Marx's partner, Friedrich Engels, surmised that wife-stealing must have eventually inspired the stealing of children and of adult males to serve as slaves in the fields and workshops of the slave-takers.

Though he kept a mistress (only marrying the poor lady, who was a pious Catholic, on her deathbed to assure her that she was not going to Hell), Engels was a partisan of 19th century feminism. Identifying wife-stealing (or for that matter, marriage in general) with slave-taking fit feminist notions then. Wife-stealing alienated women from their own nature; slavery alienated the slave from the fruits of his labor.

As slave-taking became habitual in the course of the Late Neolithic, Primitive Communism evolved into a state-building Slave Society. The first rulers were a kind of executive committee of slave-owners, dedicated to preserving their right to systematically steal the labor of others.

The rulers used that stolen labor to build their state and the stage of civilization congruent with slavery. This materially determined Original Sin was therefore both inevitable and the root cause of man's social development. The Original Sin of slavery tainted both state and civilization. This was closer to the Calvinist than to the Augustinian view of original sin. (Augustine linked it more closely to sexual desire. The Jews and Calvinists linked it to disobedience to God's moral

laws.)

Marx and Engels insisted that all successors to Slave Society were just as inherently exploitative. The chaining of serfs to land under feudalism and the "renting" of people by capitalists were both tantamount to enslavement.⁴

c. material determinist economics

I will not use Marx's cramped version of the long-since superseded classical economics tradition to explain the logic of the transition from each of his stages of history to the next. To do so would load the dice against Marxism. Instead, I will use instead the much more sophisticated 20th century economics of the Belgian Marxist, Ernst Mandel. Mandel attempted to graft the Neo-Classical and Post-classical economics of this century onto Marxism. The attempt almost worked.

At the stage of Primitive Communism, Mandel reasoned, lots of land was available, but not yet many people to work that land. People (Labor in the abstract) were the scarce factor of production. The slave-taking human snakes in the Garden understood that they had to grab the scarce factor and confiscate the high income that would otherwise come to Labor to reward its scarcity. Hence it was economically rational to steal people but not land. Without people, how could you work the relatively abundant land?

Capital was also scarce, but since capital is produced initially by people working with land to make tools or to improve the land, stealing labor was also the key to eventually making more capital. Hence Slave Society rulers also got some capital by stealing labor.

Slaves might not be badly treated. What you own, you tend to take care of. Hence slave owners encouraged laborers to be fruitful and multiply, even though they remained unhappy about being slaves. As slaves multiply in number eventually Labor becomes more abundant relative to Land. At some point, Land becomes the scarcer of the two factors.

⁴ It is easy to make Marx look bad for missing the distinction between renting and buying people. He was not an economist. He was a Hegelian philosopher who picked up some elements of classical economics by hastily reading Adam Smith and David Ricardo and their contemporary epigones in the reading room of the British Museum after he had become a revolutionary and been kicked out of France.

So the next stage, Feudal Society, arrives when the human snakes decide that enslaving Labor is no longer as profitable as engrossing Land. The new ruling class (no doubt partly descended from the more enterprising slave-holders) becomes a cabal of land-owners. They too do nasty things to people. In addition to ex-slave owners some are former assistants of slave-owners; some are new men altogether. Once the new ruling class of land-owners has engrossed all the available accessible land, they can free the slaves because these ex-slaves must become their tenants or even their serfs so as to gain access to land. The new ruling class of land-owners uses the state it controls to take over ever larger amounts of land and bully ever larger numbers of people into attaching themselves to that land.

The relatively scarce factor eventually becomes Capital. Sooner or later a new class (like its predecessor partly formed out of the old class, the land-owner rulers) arises to engross capital goods and the most free-floating form of capital—money. Eventually, everyone—laborers and landlords alike—must come to these capitalists for access to capital and the new and ever more productive technology it transforms itself into.

At some point, Capital and the technology it embodies becomes so abundant that it becomes a free good, like sunshine, which renders who owns it moot. The workers (either through revolution or evolution) free themselves, expropriate all the capital from the capitalists, and then replace the capitalists' state with their own dictatorship of the workers.

Soon, even the workers' state becomes redundant. There is no need to exploit anyone now that universal abundance has been achieved. The state fades away and Pure Communism reigns forever. History has ended and paradise has been created on Earth, not in Heaven.

Marxism's Socialist and Pure Communist stages correspond to the Christian idea of the millennium and the Daoist notion of the Heavenly Kingdom (Tian-guo 天國). Both of these also envisioned the creation of Heaven on earth. (Unlike Marxism, however, the Christian millennium brings to an end life on earth and carries the elect to Heaven.)

2. Material determinism in China

According to the Chinese Marxists,

China's Feudal Society started surprisingly early, during the Early Iron Age (c.500 BC) and continued for an inordinately long time, right through the Late Iron Age. European feudalism started at least a millennium later. China's Capitalist Society only showed some "sprouts" during the Late Iron Age, after 1000 AD. Europe's "sprouts" showed up by c. 1200 AD. So compared to Europe, feudalism came early to China, but capitalism came relatively late. China's Early Industrial Revolution sprouts only started to turn into the stalks of the Full Industrial Revolution after the middle of the 19th century. The Western Full Industrial imperialists' incursions finally prodded China into change.

Indeed, China's Capitalist Society may not have been fully ripe and ready for the next stage when Socialist Society replaced it in 1949. Mao Zedong thought China was by then ripe not just for Socialist Society, but for Pure Communism. His 1958 attempted "Great Leap" into the Pure Communist final stage of history killed some 30 million people and very nearly caused the total collapse of the Chinese economy.

Mao's successor, Deng Xiaoping, decided in the '80s that Capitalism had to finish maturing (paradoxically, under a socialist government) before a full-blown Socialist Society could replace it after another 50-100 years. Pure Communism will perhaps follow at some unspecified time in the remote future and so discussion of its nature is premature. Chinese Marxists do not emphasize the theology implied by the concept of Pure Communism as much as they used to.

Socialism supposedly will not work in China until Capitalist Society creates enough capital to turn capital into a free good. Mao's error turns out to have been, Chinese Marxists now say, merely one of timing. He moved into socialism prematurely and too rapidly. His successor, Deng Xiaoping, was more prudent.

D. The Modern Academic Consensus Soft Material Determinist Perspective

1. A hybrid perspective

The academic consensus perspective is really a hybrid between the archeologi-

cal-archival and Marxist (material determinist) perspectives. The former provides the objective body of evidence, but cannot provide a very sophisticated organizational framework to justify its naive tilt toward material determinism. Material determinism provides a sophisticated organizational framework, but one no longer able to explain the data being generated in ever greater volume by the archaeologists and archivists.

In the course of the 20th century a more self-conscious generic Marxism has become ever more common among academics. This has occurred not just in places like China and many former colonies of the West, where it provides a satisfying explanation for their exploitation by the West. It has also increasingly dominated the minds of intellectuals in North America, Western Europe and Japan, even though it discredits the very ancestors of many of those men of merit who use it. It also, however, frees them from the moral burdens imposed by their original civilization. That is, Marxism serves as a kind of "opiate of the intellectuals." Even the recent collapse of the Soviet Empire has done little to diminish the popularity of Marxism among academics.

Under even an implicit Marxist order, the intellectuals are to be the ones who give the orders that will replace the supposed anarchy of the marketplace and the supposedly obsolescent ideas of the churches. Who would not be tempted by such power and "liberation?"⁵

That may be why the increasingly obvious errors of a pure Marxist position have had to be ignored or covered over.

2. The "Feudal" and "Pure Communist" anomalies

Despite the best (worst?) efforts of brand name and generic Marxists, enough people like me have survived to point out the peculiarities of Marxism's treatment of "Feudal Society" and "Pure Communism" as to oblige the academic consensus to find some place to hide these ideological corpses.

Chinese Marxists have refused to recognize that the Western Zhou Dynasty (c. 1070-771 BC) was genuinely feudal, al-

beit in a different sense from that used by Marxists. (See chapter 4 below.) Even though their makers were not land owners (private land ownership only appears in the 6th century BC), a number of Western Zhou period feudal contracts between lords and vassals survive. These are strikingly similar to the handful of surviving feudal contracts from much later Medieval Europe.

Chinese Marxists refuse the label feudal to this period because the concept of property in land was not yet present. Landlords could not yet have existed, much less served as rulers. Still, worse, if Western Zhou was feudal, Capitalist Society would have had to begin during Eastern Zhou (771-221 BC), which is much too soon by Marxism's reckoning, which requires a Late Iron or Early Industrial Age material foundation for Capitalism.

Hence the Chinese Marxists relegate Western Zhou to the last phase of Slave Society despite the feudal contracts reporting the kings of Zhou enfeoffing (there is no other way to translate the phrase *fengjian* 封建) their local subordinates as vassals. "Shut up," the Chinese Marxists explain, when people bring up such feudal contracts. That ploy does not work as well in America, though denial of tenure usually does the job for would-be members of the academic consensus.

When even threats fail to stifle objections, what is a non-Chinese academic consensus intellectual to do? Most consensus-builders have decided it would be best to soft-pedal use of the very word "feudal" as "simplistic." The late 20th century intelligentsia must, the intellectuals tell us, rise above such simplistic labels as "feudal." We should instead notice that at first many of the vassals were relatives of the king, if only by marriage. The sophisticated thing to do is to label this system as "patrimonial."

To be sure, non-Marxist academics, can still get tenure by using the word "feudal" in its material determinist sense. To question them on this point is to threaten their academic freedom. But pity the poor naïf who desires to talk of "feudal" in an ideational determinist way as "pertaining to the religiously validated relations between lords and their vassals." That remains outside the academic consensus.

Some especially broad-minded members of the academic consensus will even

⁵ Well, I wouldn't, because my mommy & daddy brought me up to believe it is not nice to bully other people. Apparently most intellectuals have not been brought up right or have been ruined by the bad company they kept after leaving home for graduate school.

allow people like me to mention feudalism in the above sense in lectures, though they will raise an eyebrow if we put it into a textbook like this one. (The most widely used textbook, Reischauer, Fairbank and Craig, *East Asia: Tradition and Transformation*, never uses the word feudal in discussing the Zhou Dynasty. “You could look it up,” as another old professor used to say.)

Most practitioners of the academic consensus will pass over briefly or in silence the Chinese Marxist extension of their form of feudalism right up to the 19th century by equating “feudal” with “old fashioned.” The more honest will simply avoid the issue as one having no solution and will never use the word “feudal” at all: No solution, no problem.

The Pure Communist final stage of history is too embarrassingly pseudo-religious for the academic consensus to swallow in any form. Dumping it also helps justify dumping consideration of genuine religion as a real and often positive factor in historical development.

Such maneuvers allow most academics to retain their allegiance to material determinism at least implicitly. They have it, but do not have to talk about it.

Avoiding “simplistic” explanations also obliges the academic consensus types to complicate their chronologies. They dare not use the smaller number of labels of the other perspectives that would allow them to clump dynasties into larger categories.

If you wish to join the academic consensus, you should first contemplate the second column of the table that follows this chapter. You should then memorize in chronological order the names of all the early rulers from Huang Di through Yu, and then the names of all the dynasties.⁶

Before committing to that feat of memorization, you might, however, want to first consider the ideational determinist perspective I favor. Ideational determinism eases the burden on your memory (See column four of the table) and avoids

many of the blind spots of the alternatives.

E. An Ideational Determinist Perspective: Eric Voegelin

The key figure in ideational determinism, is the late philosopher of history, Eric Voegelin. Some of what he wrote is quite readable and the rest is well worth slowly lip-reading your way through. A good place to start is his relatively brief and highly readable *The New Science of Politics* (1953). A more demanding follow up for those who like ancient history is his five volume *Order and History* (which does not reach ancient China until volume four). Those who prefer the moderns, might try *From Enlightenment to Revolution*. For a reader’s digest version of Voegelin’s philosophy of history, read on here.

1. Voegelin stands Marx on his head

Voegelin’s philosophy of history is essentially an upside down mirror image of Marx’s, just as Marx claimed to have set Hegel on his head. Voegelin’s career as a philosopher was in large measure an ongoing argument with the Marxists and their academic fellow travelers, an argument that he considered the greatest intellectual task of the modern age.

For Voegelin, mind changes matter rather than matter changing mind. A change in the mentality of human beings always precedes and trips off the next stage of the evolution of the way they organize their material arrangements.

The resulting new material configuration retains a measure of autonomy and will eventually evolve out from under the ability of the ideas that initially gave rise to and justified it. This lack of Heavenly justification will make people nervous and act in ways causing a crisis of civilization. They are eventually driven to think up new ideas about Heaven to legitimize the new situation on Earth. The chain of causation begins in men’s minds, and even the subsequent material evolution cannot in itself uniquely determine what new ideas people will come up with to respond to those material changes. Mind is ultimately autonomous.

The most important subject for the

mind is the nature of Heaven and of Heaven’s relationship to man. In the logical terms used by the dominant traditional Chinese metaphysical system, Heaven is the antonym of Earth. Earth is the “stuff” of the universe. In the largest sense, Heaven is what renders Earth’s stuff coherent, something more than a shapeless fog. It gives boundaries to the stuff and renders it perceivable.

In ancient times, as civilization was beginning to evolve, Heaven was first perceived as “up there,” just out of reach. That was a useful simile for the descendants of tree-climbing apes for whom danger is down and safety is up. It was appropriate to place the source of coherence and hence safety for beings on Earth “up” as well.

Even that was not the earliest form of interpretation of Heaven. The Australian aborigines, before being contaminated by European visions of Heaven, thought coordinating spirit lay *inside* everything. Little spirits, or breaths, lay inside every unique piece of stuff and made it coherent and capable of being manipulated by men. Of course that inner spirit also allowed the stuff to manipulate people. Paleolithic man apparently did not yet realize that there was a realm of Heaven that they could abstract from the stuff of Earth.

One of the great discoveries that made civilization possible was the realization that you can think of Heaven as somehow physically and hence conceptually separate from Earth. Heaven is also superior to Earth because it lends coherence to Earth and allows us to make sense of it.

In the cosmic game all potential rulers must play, a separate Heaven is “trumps” because however simple it may appear to later and supposedly more sophisticated observers, the people at some earlier time can perceive a simple Heaven as ultimate. The ability to appeal to Heaven is what allows any ruler to exert his dominance. If one of the ruled expresses doubt as to why he should obey the ruler, the priests can assure him that the ruler is in some sense the beloved of Heaven. So the subject has no choice but to volunteer to be coerced by the ruler.

2. The “paradox of sovereignty” resolved

How else can we explain the “paradox of sovereignty”? That is, why do the ruled volunteer to be coerced by the ruler? The

⁶ Xia, Shang, Western Zhou, Eastern Zhou (not forgetting the seven great powers contending for power during Eastern Zhou—Yan, Qi, Han, Zhao, Wei, Qin and Chu), Qin, Western Han, Eastern Han, the Three Kingdoms (Shu-Han, Wei and Wu), the Sixteen Kingdoms, Western and Eastern Jin, the Northern and Southern Dynasties, Sui, Tang, the Five Dynasties of the North and the Ten Kingdoms of the South, Northern and Southern Song (and its contemporaries in the north, Liao and Jin), Yuan, Ming, Qing, the early, national and socialist republics.

ruled always outnumber the ruler. Often they are stronger than he is and can literally get away with murder, either of one of their peers or of the ruler himself. Still worse, the ruler is usually out of sight, somewhere over the horizon from most of the ruled. Most of the time, therefore, the ruled must volunteer to be coerced by him. Yet most of the time they do not even try to disobey. This can only be because they believe Heaven is on the side of the ruler. This is especially true when a new state is being founded and the habit of obedience to it has not yet been established.

A Heaven clearly discerned as separate from Earth, can serve as the matrix for creating a kind of template. This template determines not just the perception of what already is, but of new things, particularly changes in the organization of the state and its relationship with those over whom it rules.

Once created, however, the state and the culture (including the material culture) over which the state presides can evolve further on the basis of their own inner logic. Eventually they assume forms that are no longer congruent with the old template derived from the original perception of the nature of Heaven. In Voegelin's phrasing, it is no longer possible to "re-present" the original vision of Heaven onto the changed Earth in the form of the original template.

At this point people begin to get nervous, or in fancier terms, they collectively enter into a "crisis of civilization." No longer validated by the old vision of Heaven, the state eventually disintegrates and the culture no longer seems to have much meaning. First the rulers and then many of the ruled no longer cherish and cultivate the old vision

Eventually some one or a few heroes of culture perceive a new Heaven or a new way of thinking about the old Heaven. The new or re-thought Heaven can then be re-presented onto Earth. It becomes the template for a new state and style of culture. This template fits not just the configuration that Earth has evolved into, but provides civilizational growing room the old template could not provide.

The key breaking points in history correspond to the fundamental changes in our understanding of Heaven's nature and the re-presentation of the new Heaven onto Earth. (See the underlined words at the beginning of the next subsection and

the capitalized words on the fourth column of the table that follows this chapter.)

The Voegelinian version of ideational determinism has not yet been falsified by the data provided by the archaeologists and the archivists. The inner logic of the system seems to be self-consistent and congruent with what seems to be equally self-consistent political and economic theory systems. A final bonus is that it allows you to postpone memorization of a long list of culture heroes and names of dynasties, or at least allows you to group them within the half dozen categories Eric Voegelin uses to mark the stages of mankind's historical evolution.

3. An ideational determinist chronology:

a. Late Neolithic, Early & Middle Bronze Age = beginning of Early Civilization: (Heaven is perceived as fully separate from Earth, but as still so small and close to Earth as to be only re-presentable as one of a congeries of local states. The rulers are literally linked to Heaven. For example, the mother of the ancestor of the Xia-Shang royal house was impregnated by a black bird which flew down from Heaven; the mother of the ancestor of the Zhou kings became pregnant with him when she stepped into the toe print of the god of grain in a millet field.)

b. Late Bronze Age = Crisis of Early Civilization & transition into First Stage of High Civilization. (After a possible regression to a Heaven linked to Earthly fertility, Heaven came to be perceived as linked to the stars and planets visible in the night sky. The relationship of the North Star with the fixed stars and wandering stars—planets—was re-presented onto Earth as the mode of organization of the feudal empire of Zhou.)

c. Early Iron Age = First Stage of High Civilization. (The astronomical Heaven was abstracted from to create Confucian philosophy and early science.)

d. End of Early Iron Age = First Crisis of High Civilization. (The Qin-Han universal states outgrew the ability of the ancient philosophies to serve as their matrix.)

e. Middle Iron Age: (Crisis was potentially resolved by importation of the new Heaven of Buddhism which linked a much larger and more complex Heaven directly to Earth by way of savior figures—the Buddha and Bodhisattvas—analogue to the Judeo-Christian messiah.)

f. Late Middle Iron Age (c. 8th c AD) & Late Iron/Early Industrial Age (c. 10th c) = Blossoming of Second Stage of High Civilization. (Made possible by China assimilating the Buddhist Heaven, which also served as the matrix for rethinking the Confucian vision of Heaven and then re-presenting it onto Earth.)

g. Maturing of Early & approach to Full Industrial Age c.1500/1800: Onset of Second Crisis of High Civilization. (The Confucian ruling class drifted away from the Buddhist model, narrowed and secularized its Confucian vision of Heaven. This caused the rulers to become increasingly alienated from the ruled, who retained allegiance to the Buddho-Confucian Heaven. This crisis has still not been transcended.)

(These categories are applied in outline to the whole of East Asia on the table located just before the map of East Asia preceding chapter one.)

It is worth noting that largely because of the earlier arrival of Buddhism in China as compared to Christianity in much of Europe, China entered into the second stage of high civilization several centuries before Europe did. At the material level this resulted in the onset of China's Early Industrial Revolution earlier than Europe's. But because it also entered into its crisis several centuries earlier than Europe did, China was hobbled and somewhat delayed in its transition into the Full Industrial Revolution compared to Europe and North America.

One of the more plausible reasons for the more pious of the holders of the academic consensus being so devoted to the cause of the Chinese Marxists was that they believed (without quite accepting or even being aware of Voegelin's reasoning) that China had, via Marxism, somehow transcended its crisis of civilization. It was, therefore, a proper model for the West to follow.

Almost everyone now concedes that judgment was mistaken, but followers of the academic consensus still hope to find an alternative embodiment for a material determinist vision of Heaven. EHK