

China in Early Eurasian History: A Brief Review of Recent Scholarship on the Issue

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This paper is a review of the debate that has developed concerning the degree to which early Chinese civilization was linked to other early cultures in Eurasia. I give a short history of the controversy, provide a brief survey of some of the recent archeological finds that have forced a re-opening of the debate, and discuss some of the possible avenues for future research on the problem. My central argument is that we are now finally gaining enough empirical data to begin a complex exploration of the historical development of cultures across Eurasia, and that we need to undertake such an exploration in a way that will avoid the excesses of previous scholarship on the issue.

The question of the degree to which early Chinese civilization was linked to other early cultures in Eurasia has been an enduring one in Sinological studies, and one that has been marked by radical swings of scholarly opinion. This paper will be an attempt to survey briefly the history of this controversy, to explain why it has come to the fore again, and to argue that some of the recent archeological discoveries may finally allow us to start conceptualizing this issue in a more helpful way. Although a full narrative of the debate would have to begin with Jesuit views in the seventeenth century, I will, for the purposes of this paper, pick up the controversy with the rise of archeological study in this century.

I. History of the Major Themes of the Debate

Until roughly the 1960's, the dominant means of explicating the development of civilizations throughout Eurasia was in terms of processes of diffusion. By far the most influential proponent of such a view was V. Gordon Childe, who held that the rise of what he called "civilization" occurred through a series of innovations that began in the Near East and were thereafter diffused to Europe and the rest of Eurasia (see, for example, Childe 1936 and 1954). The Near East, therefore, was seen as the birth-place of the Neolithic, Bronze Age, and Iron Age, each of which was introduced in succession to the rest of the continent.

Such views were widely held in the study of early China as well. With few exceptions, scholars tended frequently to assume that early Chinese civilization had developed through, and in large part because

of, influence from West Asia. Childe himself took this position (1954: 170), as did most Sinologists. Indeed, diffusionist theories were frequently invoked to account for the great archeological finds in Anyang during the 1920's and 1930's, which revealed to the world that a Bronze Age, state-level society, possessing chariots and a written language, existed in northern China in the twelfth century BCE. Since all of these inventions (metallurgy, chariotry, writing, perhaps even statecraft itself) seemed to appear suddenly in the archeological record, they were commonly posited as having had a single origin in West Asia, from whence they were diffused. For example, E. G. Pulleyblank, writing in 1966, claimed:

Viewed as a part of a world historical process, the beginnings of civilization in China take their place as a natural extension of the gradual spread outwards of cultural developments from the Fertile Crescent which we can trace in other directions (1966: 9).

Accordingly, argued Pulleyblank, the rise of the Shang state should be seen as a "...shock coming from the outside" (1966: 31).

In the late 1960's and 1970's, however, diffusionist theories that had held sway for so long became increasingly suspect in the study of Eurasian history. The reasons for this shift are several, involving a combination of a general change in theoretical concerns throughout archeology in general, increased empirical knowledge, and, in some areas, political views. Let me begin by discussing the first of these.

It was during this period that neo-evolutionary thought was once again coming into prominence, and with this came a broad disenchantment with diffusion as an explanatory principle. Indeed, Julian Steward, as early as the 1950's, had argued:

The use of diffusions to avoid coming to grips with problems of cause and effect not only fails to provide a consistent approach to culture history, but it gives an explanation of cultural origins that really explains nothing.... One may fairly ask whether each time a society accepts diffused culture, it is not an independent recurrence of cause and effect (Steward 1955: 182).

In other words, the use of diffusion as an explanatory principle is missing the point: what is of relevance is the internal evolution of the society and economy in question. If a given society was not at a point in its evolution when it could utilize a given technology, then the technology could not have been successfully accepted anyway. As Marvin Harris claimed in a similar vein, diffusion explains nothing (1968: 377-378).

This rejection of theories of the development of civilization through diffusion became particularly prominent in Anglo-American anthropology during the 1960's and 1970's with the rise of processual

archeology, a movement expressly concerned with discovering universal laws of internal evolution. One of the guiding principles of processual archeology was that internal processes had to be the focus of interest, for only then could one explicate why and how a given technology or practice was employed, regardless of the origin of that technology. Although such a position did not necessarily entail a claim that diffusion never occurred historically, there was nonetheless a tendency in much of this scholarship to emphasize independent invention, out of the argument that internal processes are so commanding in a given society that diffusion was a much less common occurrence in antiquity than earlier analysts had maintained.

Perhaps the best example of the radical shift in emphasis that processual archeology created can be seen in the complete re-evaluation of European pre-history undertaken during the 1970's. In explicit opposition to Gordon Childe's thesis that European pre-history could be understood as a gradual acceptance of successive innovations diffused from the Near East (including, most importantly, agriculture and metallurgy), several studies were undertaken to analyze the internal development of pre-historic Aegean and European societies (see, for example, Renfrew 1972 and 1984). Indeed, one of the leaders of this re-evaluation, Colin Renfrew, described much of his project during this period in terms of the question: "how do we find some alternative explanation for the various developments in Europe (or in the other areas under consideration) which we may put in place of the 'diffusionist' accounts so widely offered until the last decade?" (1984: 5).

A similar emphasis on internal development came to characterize Sinology as well, and, here too, such an emphasis frequently took the form of a commitment to studying indigenous origins. This shift in theoretical orientation was accompanied, and greatly aided, by developments within mainland China itself. In the first few decades of its existence, the People's Republic of China explicitly took up the issue of the origins of Chinese civilization, interpreting the claim that Chinese civilization was a product of diffusion from the West as an example of imperialistic thinking, i.e., a failure to believe the Chinese capable of creating a civilization (see the useful summary by Tong Enzheng 1995). Accordingly, the government funded a large number of archeological projects to trace the development of early Chinese societies. The results, as is well known, were tremendous: numerous sites were found that finally enabled archaeologists to trace the gradual, internal development of society and statecraft within a progression of cultures in what is now China, and to demonstrate that such markers as Yangshao and Anyang itself were clearly products of a lengthy, evolutionary process. The claim, for example, that Anyang marked a radical break, that it

had emerged through a diffusion of technologies from the Near East, seemed increasingly unconvincing.

Based upon these finds, K. C. Chang, the leading Chinese archeologist in the United States, was able to propound his "nuclear" theory of the origins of Chinese civilization, arguing that Chinese civilization had grown internally from a nucleus in the Yellow River valley (1963). By the early 1970's, it had become common to argue not just that Chinese civilization had arisen through internal developments, but that in fact most significant technological advances had been made through independent invention. Thus, Paul Wheatley, in his study of the emergence of the Chinese city, could state that China was "effectively insulated from contact with other foci of high civilization," and that it enjoyed "autonomy in its development" (Wheatley 1971: 8).

A stronger claim of this sort can be found in Ho Ping-ti's well-known work, *The Cradle of the East*, a work explicitly devoted to arguing for the "indigenous origins" of Chinese civilization. Professor Ho, borrowing from Morton Fried's definition of a "pristine" state as one that "... has developed sui generis out of purely local conditions" (1960: 729), claimed the following:

The Chinese civilization was just as pristine as the Mesopotamian and in terms of originality could claim equal primacy. It can no longer be treated as one of the several "peripheral" civilizations of the Old World. As Mesopotamia is rightly known as the cradle of the West, so the loess region of North China deserves to be called the cradle of the East (Ho 1975: 368).

Such a position, to be sure, would have been opposed by most processual archaeologists, insofar as Ho was still arguing for diffusionism: he wanted to say that the origins of China were indigenous, but that the rest of East Asian civilization was diffused from China, just as, he claimed, Western civilization had been diffused from Mesopotamia. Nonetheless, the argument that the development of Chinese civilization was based entirely in internal developments, and that the major technological advances in early Chinese history were a product of independent invention, met with widespread acceptance: it seemed to be true archeologically, and it fit in well with the dominant theories of the day. Indeed, it would not be an exaggeration to say that the view had become orthodox by the early 1980's.

However, the tide then began to turn yet again. Increased archeological research throughout Eurasia, as well as a wider circulation of Soviet studies of Central Asia, began to reveal more and more that a great deal of interaction had in fact occurred in the ancient period. This led to a number of attempts by archaeologists to question such notions as a "pristine state." For example, analyses of

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trade by C. C. Lamberg-Karlovsky (1989), Philip Kohl (1989), and Rita Wright (1989) revealed the complex systems of exchange that existed among several proximate societies in the Near East and Central Asia. Similarly, K. C. Chang revised his earlier theory of the nuclear origins of Chinese civilization and came instead to stress what he calls an "interaction sphere" involving several distinct cultures within the current political borders of China (1986).

Of particular interest to the topic at hand, however, are the archeological finds which have suggested possible interaction between some of the cultures in Central Asia and some of the cultures in what is now China. Certainly the most provocative of these, and the ones most likely to generate the greatest debate, concern metallurgy. As will be discussed in more detail below, archaeologists have demonstrated with increasing clarity the gradual spread of metallurgical techniques across Central Asia (see in particular Chernykh 1992), reaching Xinjiang by the beginning of the second millennium BCE (Chen 1990). The fact that such dates fit well with the emergence of bronze metallurgy in the Central Plains site of Erlitou in the first few centuries of the second millennium BCE has led several scholars to begin considering the possibility that such technologies were introduced (Childe would have said "diffused") to the Yellow River valley cultures from Central Asia. Nothing could signify this shift in scholarly attitudes more completely than the fact that An Zhimin, one of the leading archeologists in the People's Republic of China and a long advocate of the indigenous origins of Chinese civilization, has recently argued precisely this position (1993: 1117). Similarly, the fact that iron technology has also been shown to have reached Xinjiang in the early first millennium BCE, again a few centuries before iron technology came to be practiced in northern China, has led Tang Jigen (1993: 564) to argue that iron metallurgy as well may have been diffused into China.

These arguments, as well as others that will be discussed below, suggest that the strong emphasis in the scholarship of the 1970's and 1980's on "indigenous origins" and "pristine states" is coming to be seen by at least some scholars as extreme, and that the issue of diffusion, a notion deemed taboo for so long in Sinological studies, is once again being seriously entertained. And, as with the last swing of the pendulum in this debate, there does appear to be at least some archeological evidence to support the shift.

Does this mean then, that we should return to speculations such as those of V. Gordon Childe, that the pendulum should swing back to the forms of diffusionism dominant in anthropology before the late 1960's? I would argue, on the contrary, that the materials now being discovered should instead allow us a means of breaking out of the old "diffusionism/indigenous origins" debate itself. Now that we are finally gaining enough archeological material to begin to piece

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together a coherent view of the development of societies across Eurasia, we may be able to begin constructing an understanding of Eurasian history that should both lay to rest some of the old controversies as well as open up a host of new and exciting questions. Before turning to these issues, however, it may be helpful first to outline briefly some of the evidence that now exists for interaction between the cultures in the central plains of China with those in the remainder of Eurasia. The discussion that follows is not in any way intended to be comprehensive; the hope is simply to present enough basic material to allow for a more detailed discussion in the third section of this paper about how these issues should be conceptualized and what implications they may have for the study of early Eurasian history. Specialists, of course, may wish to turn directly to section three.

II. Evidence of Interaction in the Early Period

Speculation ran rampant in the early diffusionist literature about the rise of the Neolithic itself, the spread of pottery motifs across Eurasia, etc. As discussed above, views such as these went out of favor with the rise of processual archeology, and now increased archeological research has rendered such doubts all the stronger. It seems clear that, with the climactic shifts that occurred following the end of the last Ice Age, domesticated agriculture began independently in several areas of the world. Although agriculture then spread from these foci into neighboring regions, there is no evidence to suggest that such techniques actually spread across the entirety of Eurasia at such an early date. In short, significant contact between western and eastern Eurasia at the beginning of the Neolithic period seems highly unlikely. Attempts by earlier scholars to link, for example, Yangshao pottery motifs to those from Mesopotamia are thus, based on our current knowledge of Eurasian prehistory, implausible.

By the end of the third millennium BCE, however, we do begin to see the movement of particular technologies across Eurasia. Certainly one of the more significant of these was bronze metallurgy, which spread through much of Central Asia during this period (see Chernykh 1992). Bronze begins appearing in Xinjiang by the beginning of the second millennium BCE (Chen 1990), and can be found in Qijia sites, located in Gansu and Qinghai, soon thereafter (see Zhang 1987). Bronze casting spread to the northern frontiers of China by around 2000 BCE as well (Pak 1995).

The fact that bronze metallurgy begins in Erlitou fairly suddenly in the first few centuries of the second millennium BCE renders it possible that northern China could also be seen as one of the areas to which these metallurgical techniques spread. To be sure, the evidence is by no means definitive one way or the other, and much work remains to be done on the issue. Moreover, even if such an

introduction did occur, the exact route is quite unclear. An Zhimin (1993: 1117) has recently argued that the techniques probably came in through Xinjiang, presumably through the Qijia cultural complex. On the other hand, the documented interaction between Erlitou and those cultures farther north (summarized well by Pak 1995: 385-389) reveals that this is a possible route of transmission as well.

A crucial point to emphasize here, however, is that, even if bronze metallurgy was introduced at this time, it was introduced into a culture in Erlitou that had already developed a great deal of hierarchical differentiation. Thus, the possible introduction of metallurgical technology cannot be presented as an adequate explanation for the emergence of the state itself in northern China at this time—a point that I will discuss in more depth below.

Slightly later, the chariot came into use in the western regions of Eurasia. Although the exact place of origin is still unknown, the northern steppe appears to be a likely possibility. Excavations from the Sintashta-Petrovka culture, located southeast of Magnitogorsk, have yielded chariots from around 2000 BCE (Anthony and Vinogradov 1995). Soon thereafter, chariots began appearing in the Near East, and within a few centuries chariot warfare became predominant in the area (see Littauer and Crouwel 1979: 73-81, as well as the more speculative discussion by Drews 1988: 84-120). The Andronovo cultural complex, which grew out of Sintashta-Petrovka and came to dominate portions of western Central Asia over the course of the second millennium BCE (see the summary in Chernykh 1992: 210-215), relied heavily upon the chariot. Indeed, the successful use of war chariots may in part help to explain the tremendous expansion of the Andronovo horizon. Petroglyphs seem plausibly to suggest the spread of chariot warfare into eastern Central Asia (Littauer 1977), and the first chariots in northern China are then found in Anyang tombs around 1200 BCE (von Dewall 1964 and Yang 1984). The technical similarities shared between Near Eastern and Central Asian chariots with those found in Anyang render it extremely likely that the chariot was introduced into China (Piggott 1974 and 1978, and Shaughnessy 1988).

The introduction of the chariot into Anyang, moreover, seems to have been only one part of a fair amount of contact that occurred around 1200 BCE between the Shang and groups to the north. Anyang tombs from Yin Xu Phase II have revealed bronze animal-headed knives and bronze bow-shaped objects (presumably used for driving chariots) clearly connected with those found in the Northern Zone (see Lin Yun 1986: 264-266 and Watson 1971: 51-52 and 61-63), and four bronze mirrors found in the tomb of Fu Hao closely resemble those found to the north as well (Lin Yun 1986: 251-253).

Other possible links with Central Asia during this time have recently been suggested by Victor Mair, who has argued, based upon

linguistic and archeological evidence, that the *wu*, the figures usually translated as "shamans," might in fact have been Iranian magi who entered China at this time (1990). Mair has also argued that the Chinese word for "chariot," *che*, may be of Iranian origin as well (1990: 47). Since virtually all scholars agree that the Andronovo cultural horizon was in all likelihood Indo-Iranian, such suggestions deserve consideration.

During the first few centuries of the first millennium BCE, full pastoral nomadism began in Central Asia (see the summary by Askarov, Volkov, and Ser-Odjav 1992). Horse riding was introduced into China around the fourth century BCE (Goodrich 1984: 280), and, by the third century BCE, cavalry had fully replaced the use of the chariot in warfare.

Iron technology also became widespread throughout Central Asia, reaching Xinjiang in the early first millennium BCE (Chen 1990). Within a few centuries, iron use began in China as well, and became predominant over the course of the fourth century BCE (Wagner 1993). As with bronze technology, these dates raise the possibility that iron use was introduced into China from Central Asia (Tang 1993: 564). The pre-eminent authority on the subject, Donald Wagner, had tried to argue as recently as three years ago that iron technology was indigenous to China (1993). Now, however, he has changed his position dramatically:

New finds, together with old finds only recently studied and published, have made this position untenable. It now seems likely that the technology of iron smelting diffused to China by the 8th century BC[E] from the west via [Scythian] nomads in Central Asia (1996).

Finally, after the formation of the major empires in China and the Mediterranean, the so-called "silk road" began. At this point, as is well known, interaction among cultures throughout the Eurasian continent developed to a far greater degree than before. Religious movements started spreading throughout Eurasia, as, of course, did diseases (for the latter, see McNeill 1976: 97-121). Hereafter, the histories of cultures across Eurasia became closely linked, and later inventions, such as gunpowder, were to spread fairly quickly across the continent.

III. Implications and Avenues for Research

In terms of the old debate about diffusionism and indigenous origins, a few basic points should be made at the outset. First, and most obviously, the increased empirical knowledge that we are finally gaining about early Eurasia should allow us to move the discussion to a higher level of complexity. In the period before the 1960's, the archeology of areas outside of the Near East and Mediterranean

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regions was far less developed than it is now, and relatively little empirical data existed to check diffusionist speculation. However, the outline of early Eurasian history that is beginning to emerge renders many of these speculations highly implausible, and allows for a far more nuanced discussion of the types of interaction that can be documented.

Moreover, the scholarly community has learned, and should continue to embrace, the important insight of processual archeology, namely that diffusion is not a sufficient explanatory principle for analyzing complex societal change. As the processualists correctly emphasized, internal processes are crucial, for only these can reveal how a given technology, even if introduced from outside, is accepted and employed. The attempts by earlier diffusionists to explain complex historical processes through the claim of an introduction of a single technology should be regarded as highly suspect.

This point is certainly crucial for the study of early China. For example, the rise of the state in the north China plain during the second millennium BCE certainly cannot be attributed to the use of bronze metallurgy. The fact that bronze metallurgy came to be practiced throughout much of Eurasia during this period, while states did not emerge in all societies that utilized such technology, shows clearly that there is no direct relationship between the two, and, as comparative studies with New World civilizations easily attest, state societies are certainly possible without a significant use of the technology. Clearly, as the processualists have long argued, the study of the rise of the state involves complex internal processes, such as the development of hierarchical differentiation, not the emergence (whether through diffusion or independent invention) of a single technology. Accordingly, the recently re-opened debate about the origin of bronze metallurgy in East Asia should not be allowed to become conflated with such old diffusionist concerns as whether or not the state in China was introduced from the Near East: the state clearly emerged in north China from local processes, and bronze metallurgy, whether introduced or not, could not singly have created it.

A similar point can be made with iron technology. V. Gordon Childe made large claims for the impact of iron metallurgy on Eurasian societies, arguing that it helped to "dissolve the established ideologies that corporations of anonymous priests and clerks had wrought into dogmatic theologies in the Bronze Age" (1954: 218), thereby paving the way for the rise of philosophical speculation and, later, universal empires. But such a purely materialist explanation leaves unanswered the question of how iron technology in itself could create such changes, and unexamined the problem of why the vast majority of cultures across Eurasia that employed iron technology in the first millennium BCE did *not* undergo such developments.

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A further corollary of this point is that the simple discovery of an imported object cannot in itself be taken as a sign of significant cultural contact. Clearly, an exploration of the full historical context is a necessary prerequisite to making any conclusion as to the significance of imported items.

A case in point is to be found in the imported materials found in the Anyang tombs of the late Shang. Although these tomb materials have revealed significant interaction with northern states connected with Central Asia, one should be cautious in interpreting such finds. Shaughnessy (1989: 2-3), for example, has suggested that much of this was a consequence of a brief series of military successes in the reign of King Wu Ding, during which the Shang may have penetrated into the Ordos region and thus came into contact with southern Siberian and Central Asian materials. If this is true, it would imply that the materials that have been found in tombs were primarily elite status objects—important for understanding aspects of Shang elite culture, but not necessarily indicative of a significant impact of foreign influence on the Shang polity. Even the chariot seems to have been primarily an object of status during the late Shang—not a significant weapon of war and not of great social consequence at the time (Shaughnessy 1988: 213-221). Accordingly, the excavated materials indicating interaction around 1200 BCE with cultures to the north do not, in themselves, necessarily imply tremendous foreign influence on late Shang culture.

However, if we need to avoid the mistakes of diffusionist explanations, it is also important to avoid some of the excesses of the scholarship of the 1970's and early 1980's: the importance of focusing on internal developments should not be turned into a prior commitment to pristine states, independent invention, and indigenous origins. Just as we should not reduce the analysis of the rise of the state to the question of the origin of bronze metallurgy, it is equally unacceptable to allow such an emphasis on local processes to turn into a denial of the significance of cultural contact.

On this point, it may be that one of the problems with early processual archeology was embedded in its initial program. As discussed above, many of the original theoretical formulations that ultimately led to the rise of processual archeology were based upon evolutionary models, and much of early processual archeology as well was concerned with the search for evolutionary laws of internal development. While this had the laudable consequence of focusing attention on the socio-economic conditions underlying change and development, it also resulted in a tendency to treat societies in isolation, for only in this way could they be seen as test cases for discovering internal laws of development. Although such an approach may be acceptable from the point of view of evolutionary theory, it can be misleading if used to account for complex historical processes,

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processes which may in fact involve the impact of technologies invented elsewhere.

To return to the example of the chariot: as mentioned above, the chariots found at Anyang are not necessarily indicative of a significant foreign impact at the time. Later, however, chariot warfare certainly did have such an impact. Indeed, Shaughnessy has argued that the use of the chariot may even be linked to the Zhou conquest: the fact that the Zhou people were farther west, and thus came to be far more proficient in the use of chariot warfare, may help to explain their conquest of the Shang, who, during the last century and half of their rule, had largely retreated behind the Taihang Mountains (1988: 229-231). Over the next few centuries, as Shaughnessy has shown, chariot warfare gradually became predominant in north China (1988: 221-227), a fact that, clearly, had important social ramifications.

If such a reconstruction is accurate, it would imply that the precise ways in which the chariot was introduced may have had tremendous repercussions for early Chinese history. The same point would hold true for other technologies, such as bronze and iron metallurgy. The former certainly did not create state organization, nor did the latter create philosophical debate and, later, imperial centralization. At the same time, however, metallurgy unquestionably had a fundamental impact on early Chinese culture, politics, and social organization. As K. C. Chang has argued, bronze metallurgy played a crucial role in the political culture of pre-Qin Chinese states (1983), and iron technology was undoubtedly of great technological importance from the Warring States period on. Developing a solid historical understanding of the emergence and socio-cultural impact of metallurgical technologies, therefore, would be invaluable. For iron technology, Wagner has already done a great deal to write such a history (1993), and we are now developing a sufficient empirical knowledge to at least begin doing the same for bronze metallurgy.

In short, I am arguing that a fully historical approach is needed to avoid both the simplistic causal explanations that were maintained in diffusionist analyses and the prior commitment to indigenous origins that held sway for so long in processual archeology. On the one hand, we must be careful not to return to the error in diffusionist literature of reducing cultural phenomena to particular diffused traits, and of reducing our explanation of complex historical processes to the assumed spread of single technologies. On the other hand, however, we should also avoid the tendency in early processual archeology to an a priori commitment to analyzing societies in isolation, as simple instantiations of universal laws of internal development.

And, on this latter point, a final set of observations should be made. Many of the technologies and practices that have been mentioned in this paper, such as metallurgy, chariot warfare, and

cavalry formations, are not only common to but crucial to the ancient cultures of Eurasia, and are found only to a limited degree or not at all in ancient cultures outside of Eurasia. Although this fact may be of little importance from the point of view of evolutionary theory, it is a crucial and necessary point in discussing the particular historical development of Eurasian cultures, and it opens up a host of intriguing comparative questions. In other words, not only are we now in a position to perform careful historical analyses of the spread and introduction of various technologies and practices throughout Eurasia, but we should also start posing comparative questions from a more broadly Eurasian perspective.

One avenue for research along these lines involves comparative studies of the ways that various cultures across Eurasia employed the same technologies. For example, in what different ways were metallurgical techniques utilized in the various cultures that began employing the technology, and what effects did the technology have on the different societies in question? In what different ways were various military practices put into place, and with what social and political effects?

Moreover, such a comparative approach would allow us to confront successfully the sorts of problems that V. Gordon Childe was attempting to solve via the inadequate explanations of simple diffusionism, and that early processual archeology, with its commitment to studying cultures in isolation, simply dropped from the discussion, namely, why certain phenomena became so prevalent in several societies across Eurasia in specific periods. For example, why is it that one finds the rise of comparable intellectual debates in several cultures between roughly the fifth and third centuries BCE? V. Gordon Childe attributed such similarities to the spread of iron technology across Eurasia in the first millennium BCE, a solution which, as mentioned above, is in itself inadequate. Moreover, considering the outline given above, it seems unlikely that philosophical notions were being diffused at this early a date, and, even if they were, it is unclear how any such diffusion could create the socio-cultural conditions in which the intellectual debates flourished. The explanation, therefore, would have to lie not in the diffusion of a specific technology or idea but rather in the fact that common socio-economic conditions were developing in these civilizations. But, if this is the case, then what precisely were these common socio-economic conditions, and why did they arise in so many places in Eurasia at roughly the same time, in societies that were not in direct contact with each other? And why did they not develop at this time outside of Eurasia? The only way to answer such questions, I would argue, is through a careful comparative exploration of the internal processes of development within each culture, alongside of a study of the forms of interaction that resulted in the fact that, in at least a few cases, these

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processes developed along similar lines.

As another example of this same problem, why is it that one sees the emergence of empires across Eurasia in the last few centuries before the Common Era? Here again, simple processes of diffusion are inadequate to solve the problem: the diffusion of a single technology, or of the idea of empire, could not possibly create the social and political conditions in which empires emerged. The solution must surely be found instead in the new methods of statecraft and social organization that arose in the second half of the first millennium BCE, and only a careful comparative and historical analysis can explain why such methods were employed in several societies at roughly the same time across Eurasia.

Other forms of comparative analysis should be encouraged as well. Precisely because of the above-mentioned similarity of various societies across Eurasia at certain periods, comparative studies of such cultures can be highly illuminating. In other words, beyond the question of why certain phenomena emerged in several cultures across Eurasia at roughly the same time, much work remains to be done on comparing those phenomena themselves. Thus, comparative studies of the intellectual debates in early Greece, China, and India from roughly the fifth through the third centuries BCE should be encouraged. Similarly, studies of imperial institutions and cultures in the last few centuries of the Common Era would be valuable as well.

Overall, then, I am arguing that the fact that we are now finally gaining a coherent view of the development of a number of cultures across Eurasia should allow us to move beyond some of the old debates of diffusionism versus indigenous origins. We are now beginning to have enough empirical data to begin careful historical scrutiny of precisely what technologies and practices were introduced into each culture and how each culture utilized and was affected by such an introduction. Moreover, we can and should develop comparative studies of Eurasian cultures, analyzing how different cultures employed the same technologies and practices, and studying similar phenomena in different cultures at comparable levels of development. As regards China in particular, I am arguing, in short, that the geographical commonplace that China is a Eurasian civilization should be taken seriously from an historical perspective as well.

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