

The Chinese Civilizing Process: Eliasian Thought as an Effective
Analytical Tool for the Chinese Cultural Context

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

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Abstract:

This thesis is an effort to apply Elias's thinking on social development to the Chinese social situation. At first glance his account of the civilizing process would appear incompatible with this context, in that, after state formation with the Qin and Han dynasties beginning in 221 BC, Chinese civilization remained both stable and highly traditional for well over two millennia. It is argued, however, that closer scrutiny reveals a process that was merely interrupted for a considerable period. The traditional system relied upon a symbiotic relationship between local society and the centre whereby the centre remained relatively small and aloof, not interfering with local social relations, as long as local society provided the required taxes and labour. In this situation the state had the monopolies of both violence and taxation that Elias would look for, but left local society to its own devices primarily because it was already pacified. This self-reinforcing system was enshrined and codified in the Confucian canon over the course of centuries from the Han dynasty. Central control of the distribution of resources was eventually required to re-start the Chinese civilizing process, for this was the mechanism through which the local social structure would finally be altered. This only happened within the past century as the Chinese people struggled to grapple with their own 'backwardness' in the face of incessant Western and Japanese incursions. At this point the old system was toppled and replaced by progressively more aggressive central governments who saw as their most important task the destruction of the traditional social order in the interest of modernization. As the Chinese state consciously and forcibly took control of the distribution of resources at all levels of society, traditional social relations were stretched and warped, and the Chinese civilizing process re-

commenced its long-stalled march toward modernization. This has been evidenced both by the dramatic growth in mobility and the rapidly extending chains of interdependence in the form of *guanxi* connections primarily during the Post-Opening period after 1978.

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Part One – Norbert Elias

Introduction

This thesis falls into two distinct parts. In the first part, the thought of Norbert Elias will be examined in some depth specifically focusing on those aspects or concepts that are felt to be of value in the analysis of the Chinese culture making up the second part.¹ The goal of this first more theoretical part is to show how Elias's theory of civilizing processes is fundamentally rooted in the concepts of competition and power. Through the state formation process and the attendant changing locus of control of the distribution of resources came increasing integration, differentiation, and extending chains of interdependence. With all of this, social relations at the local figurational level began to change, until finally social constraint was internalized as self-restraint. This whole process was fuelled by competition for power chances.

Elias and Sociology

According to Richard Kilminster, the very conditions under which sociology was born in academia dictated that certain intractable difficulties would arise.

¹ A note should be made on the nature of this thesis before digging into the content. It is intended that this effort will use the ideas of Norbert Elias as both a framework and a boundary through which to examine China's social context. As such it is a sociological analysis of the subject. While some historical sources will necessarily be used it is not intended to be in any way an historical analysis of China (though it is probably also worth pointing out that the line between history and sociology is not that distinct, especially for a project covering such long spans of time). It is, on the contrary, intended to be a purely sociological endeavour with the dual purpose of expanding the horizons of the use of Elias's ideas within the field as well as gaining greater insight into the Chinese social situation.

Sociology emerged when European peoples became aware in the late eighteenth century that the patterns that their far-flung interdependent social relations made were increasingly exceeding the scope of individual action on a large scale. In terminology developed by later sociologists for understanding the structure of these developments, these interdependencies constituted an emergent level of social organization *sui generis*. Groups of social scientific practitioners, propelled by various interests and purposes, began to investigate its autonomous patterns empirically - initially in the realm of economic regularities (Kilminster 1998: 3).

According to Kilminster, society was for the first time seen as an entity in some sense above and beyond the individuals making it up, and for that reason an object to be studied as such. This formulation obviously begs the question as to how to go about the investigation.

There are two perceived problems resulting directly and indirectly from this dilemma that Norbert Elias addressed with his theory of civilizing processes.

The first problem broadly speaking, relates to the fact that there have for a long time been two approaches to the discipline of sociology. Does one study individuals, or the totality they collectively seem to comprise? “Indeed it has been argued, for example by Dawe (1970), that not only do the ‘individual centred’ and ‘society centred’ approaches represent two distinct traditions in the history of sociology but that it is impossible in

principle to bridge the gulf between them” (Mennell 1989: 94). Norbert Elias has a different view on this. In talking about social theory Elias says

it is quite easy to overlook the fact that the concept of figuration is expressly coined to bypass the ingrained polarization of sociological theories, by which they are divided into those which place the ‘individual’ above ‘society’, and those which place ‘society’ above the ‘individual’ - a polarization which used to correspond to the main axis of the conflicts of beliefs and interests in the wider world (Elias 1994b: 135).

He seemed to feel that if social theory were to find a way to proceed in an effective manner it would first have to resolve this issue, and the idea of figurations was central to achieving this goal.

Arguably, Elias’s notion of figuration has avoided the pitfalls of exaggeration to either side of the dualism... In this model the indubitable self-experience of the modern individual is acknowledged in its authenticity and relative autonomy and explained sociologically. At the same time, but without the reification of ‘society’, the figurational compulsion of the networks of human interdependencies of which that individual is a part are shown empirically to possess regularities which in the long run exceed the scope of individual actions, even though inclusive of them. Instead of starting with individuals and trying to bridge the gap to that which is apparently ‘beyond’ them - ‘society’ -

Elias deals from the outset with interdependent people in the plural... Working from this starting point makes it harder for ideological over-extensions... to be smuggled into the analysis (Kilminster 1998: 91).

Elias's reliance upon figurations effectively bridges the gap between the micro (individual centred) and the macro (society centred) approaches. According to Kilminster it also provides a more or less inbuilt protection against straying too far into one camp or the other.

Van Krieken says that it was Simmel's *How is Society Possible?* and its view of the individual and society that "stimulated a profoundly relational understanding of human intersubjectivity and sociality which underlay much of the social theory and research which followed, but by no means all of it" (van Krieken 2003: 2). He continues by saying that it was Parsons' *The Structure of Social Action* (1937) that changed this view within the discipline. Without going into too much detail, the effect of Parson's work "was to entrench an individual/society opposition within sociological thought" (van Krieken 2003: 4). Elias consciously attempted to reverse the damage, as he saw it, seeking to put things back on a more relational basis. He believed the individual/society opposition was the source of many difficulties within the discipline. For Elias it was "networks of people acting" that had to take the central position in sociological thought (van Krieken 2003: 4).

Dualisms like individual/society, or agency/structure and the 'Parsonian problem of order' are integrally linked, bound to each other like Siamese twins. Accept the latter and we are condemned to forever

recycling individual/society dualisms in their various guises, and their supposed transcendence (van Krieken 2003: 4).

Van Krieken goes on to make the point that even though it is generally agreed in the field of sociology that people are social beings, these dualisms keep creeping back into sociological thought, often in disguised forms (van Krieken 2003: 5).

By the very nature of his ideas, Elias occupies an important position in this debate.

Quilley and Loyal express the main points of Elias's ideas on civilizing processes fairly effectively with the following:

Analysing civilising processes in Western Europe, Elias's argument is basically that social differentiation and the extension of the division of labour engendered a progressive ordering of social relations that compelled more and more people to attune their conduct to that of others. Over time, external controls to this effect were increasingly complemented by internalized patterns of self-restraint, discernable as a particular psychological trait (Quilley 2004:51).

And

the internalization of progressively more restrained codes of conduct, greater and more or less automatic patterns of self control, the increasing mediation of affective drives and short-term impulses - by processes of calculation and foresight - and in short the formation of a

more complex ‘super-ego’ agency in the psychological structure (Quilley 2004: 49).

Stephen Mennell also succinctly captures the debate and Elias’s position on the main issue of the individual versus society. Mennell starts off by saying that as society becomes more differentiated and complex more and more people become entwined in webs of interdependence that are beyond anyone’s control. Elias attempted to show why people experienced these figurations as something constraining and beyond them. As far as the ‘Individual vs. Society’ debate goes:

Elias cuts across all this. He argues that it is as much a nonsense to try to understand the ‘individual’ in isolation from figurations in which he is entangled as it is to try to study ‘society’ as something separate from the people who comprise it. The repercussions of a person’s actions for those with whom he is interdependent can only be understood by tracing them through the structure and dynamics of the encompassing figuration (Mennell 1977: 100).

Mennell takes this a step further when he argues that Elias has effectively bridged the ‘unbridgeable’ gap between the macro and micro approaches to the discipline. “Because interdependence has always been Elias’s central category, he has always been able to bridge the gap between micro and macro-sociology with seeming ease” (Mennell 1990: 369). It is his focus on interdependence, or social relations that enables Elias, according to Mennell, to more or less bypass this previously intractable obstacle.

The second problem area within sociology has been the tendency to view society in very static, unchanging terms as opposed to taking the more process oriented perspective.

Elias does suggest that the pendulum has swung back and forth between the two but that a corrective to the static view was necessary at the time.

While a considerable proportion of last century's sociological theorists concerned themselves with process-theories covering the past, the present and equally the possible future, their current successors concern themselves with a type of law-like theory which, like classical physics, ignores all changes in the course of unrepeatable time (Elias 1977: 364).

This, according to Elias, was not always true. In the past, a continuity of generations was seen to link past, present and future. For this reason, neither time frame could be explained without reference to the others (Elias 1977: 366).

For Elias it was Comte and Marx, the "ancestors of sociology" (Elias 1977: 355), who helped in establishing the more process oriented approach, making a break from what was at their time a more popular philosophical perspective. "Both unambiguously placed the problem of change in human society, or in other words, the immanent order of the sequence of societal stages at the centre of their research programmes" (Elias 1977: 356-357). Elias argued that Comte provided the necessary orientation to facilitate the break with classical thinking.

Comte pointed out that the classical philosophical idea of an eternal reason, an unchanging mind supposedly shared by people in all

historical periods and places, was a reified abstraction, a fable. He tried to show that human reason changes in the course of time, that in people's social life it goes – just like that social life, like human society – through a specific, empirically verifiable series of stages (Elias 1977: 355).

Elias holds to a very similar view to Comte of sociology on this issue.

It is probably also worth pointing out early on that Elias saw his description of the civilizing process as in no way complete. As Kilminster puts it:

As the German title *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation* makes clear, the book was intended to be 'on' or 'about' the process of civilization. The emphasis is on the *Prozess* of civilization... The provisional character of Elias's theory became lost in the rather bald and compressed title of *The Civilizing Process*. By using the word *Über* Elias signalled that he wanted to demonstrate something in a preliminary fashion (Kilminster 2007: 73).

He wanted to show, according to Kilminster, that Western self-restraint emerged out of changing figurations of people over an extended period that were themselves part of "wider social transformations" such as state formation, and that the process was ongoing (Kilminster 2007: 73).

These characteristics also make Elias's framework a good candidate for a sociological examination of China. This will become clearer in the second section of the thesis, but for the moment, it is enough to say that China remains a very traditional culture with small, tightly knit figurations, and at the same time one in which these same characteristics are changing rapidly.²

Elias feels that the two major problems with sociology, individual/society and static/changing (process), need addressing in order for the discipline to head in the right direction, and that the way to do this is to focus on interdependence.

Using an Eliasian analogy one might say that the shifting balance of power in the figuration of the sociological community has recently tipped in favour of the 'social' side of the equation. Elias arrived on the scene when this was anything but the case, however. This is probably explanation enough for the fact that his thought was long overlooked in academic circles. As the balance has tipped in his favor, Elias might be said to be both a cause and the beneficiary of this turn of events in that the worth of his work has been increasingly recognized in recent years.

While certainly not without its critics, the explanatory power of Elias's civilizing process in the European context (and beyond) has proven significant. The Eliasian understanding of civilizing processes has been used in many other contexts and to explain many social phenomena³ but one culture to which it has not been applied in

² The written Chinese word for person, *ren*, which joins the characters meaning 'human being' and 'two', might offer some insight into the starting point for understanding this assertion (Renard 2002: 434). The Chinese do not think in terms of the individual, but in terms of the person in relation with others.

³ Stephen Mennell recently made a valuable contribution along these lines, in this case applying Elias's framework to the United States (Mennell 2007). Craig Calhoun of New York University refers to it as 'long overdue' and Bruce Mazlish of MIT calls it a 'splendid contribution to history, sociology and

great depth is that of China (Brandstadter (2000) being one exception). Given the obvious size and growing impact of Chinese culture as well as the growing popularity of Eliasian thought, it would seem an opportune, if not overdue time for such an effort. It is hoped that through such an investigation further insight will be gained into both the Chinese culture and the general applicability of the thought of Norbert Elias. As Stephen Mennell pointed out, concerning the verification of the “theory of civilizing processes... The best test - urgently needed - of whether the specific pattern of development first sketched for Western Europe represents a more generally valid model would be to investigate other historic civilizations - India, China, Japan for instance” (Mennell 1989: 237). That is exactly the direction this thesis intends to take.

Biographical Background

The background of Norbert Elias’s life and thought have been fairly well fleshed out in the writing not only of Elias himself, but in work by a number of other writers who all touch on the subject in greater or lesser detail (Mennell 1989, 1992, Cavalletto 2007; Goudsblom 1977, 1995; van Kreiken 1998, 2001). But it is still worthwhile spending a few moments looking at relevant aspects of his background in order to better situate the argument to be put forward in this thesis. It is hoped that in doing so some of his motivations and therefore his entire oeuvre will be a more comfortable fit in the second part of this thesis.

Elias struggled throughout his professional life to put forward a particular view of social science. That view was never entirely accepted. In the introduction to one of Elias’s articles, Mennell says that Elias objected to being called a social theorist simply because

international relations.’ The present thesis would not pretend to be anything like so comprehensive an effort with regard to China, but it is hoped that it is a step along that path.

for him social science had to be empirical as well. According to Mennell, Elias “argued that good sociology was always and necessarily simultaneously empirical and theoretical” (Mennell 1995: 1). In meeting his own standard, he used documentary and historical evidence throughout his work, the most obvious example being his use of medieval manners books. Mennell says that by the mid 80s, when Elias’s aforementioned article was written, it had become acceptable to speak in terms of habitus, but not in terms of long term developmental perspectives (Mennell 1995: 3).

Elias seemed to have a profound sense that the accepted wisdom within the discipline of sociology on the nature of man and social reality was fundamentally flawed. In fact, Stephen Mennell points out that his whole master work, *The Civilizing Process*, was really a “model of a sociology which represents a radical rejection of many of the basic assumptions of conventional sociology” (Mennell 1989: 4). Elias remained consistent in this stance throughout his career. Goudsblom points out that *The Civilizing Process*,

and Elias’s subsequent writings are marked by the consistent application and elaboration, of one central perspective. At the core of this perspective is the concept of interdependence. Whether he is dealing with the naval profession, with the dynamics of sports groups, with a community study or with the abstract concept of time, in all of his work Elias is concerned with the manifold ways in which people are bonded to each other, in cooperation as well as in conflict. In this respect his work represents an implicit running polemic against the tendencies both to treat human beings as *homines clausi*, and to isolate the various aspects of what they do, feel and think (Goudsblom 1977: 79).

Elias had very strong and definite views about the historical nature of the social and psychic make-up. He had a well documented dispute with his doctoral supervisor, Richard Honigswald, over his own thesis along these lines, which was only resolved when Elias acquiesced in making the ‘necessary’ changes. Interestingly enough, Honigswald was himself apparently not one to pander to fashionable lines of thought, but was, unfortunately for Elias, not quite so tolerant of the same attribute in his charges. Honigswald stood staunchly in the neo-Kantian camp and was thus unable to reconcile Elias’s shift to the heretical position of holding “that mental categories are historical products of long-term intellectual development” (Cavalletto 2007: 180).

Whether or not Elias ever got over this disagreement with his supervisor - Cavalletto suggests it should be obvious to any student of Elias that it “continued to vex him until his dying days” - is open to question, but it can certainly be argued that, at the very least, the experience provided him with further motivation in pursuit of his goal (Cavalletto 2007: 181). This is confirmed when Elias later made the initial discovery of Courtin’s *Nouveau Traite de civilité* that provided him “a way to substantiate notions he had long held about the historicity of the human psyche” (Cavalletto 2007: 178). This ‘epiphany’ is described by Cavalletto as a seminal moment in Elias’s thinking (Cavalletto 2007: 178). Cavalletto says Elias was seeking “a way to overthrow academic psychology’s scientific methods and ahistoricist conception of the human mind” (Cavalletto 2007: 179). According to Cavalletto, Elias’s goal was ‘to overturn the dominant idea of the psyche as ‘static and unchangeable’ and ‘mak[e] the rules of the historical change in the psychical accessible to our understanding’” (Cavalletto 2007: 194).

In that this goes to the very heart of Elias's conflict with Honigswald, Cavalletto's point is well taken. Regardless, Elias's thesis does seem to have set him on the track that he would continue to follow, more or less, for the rest of his career. Mennell sums this focus up as; "long-term social processes as a form of order *sui generis*" (Mennell 1989: 8). From this point forward Elias would consistently focus on the process nature of social reality in attempting to develop a more historically informed sociology. It is arguable that the rest of his thought flows rather naturally from of this starting point.

The Six 'Antis'

The investigation will begin by first viewing Elias's ideas in terms of what they are not. It is hoped that this will aid in bracketing, or further situating, his thinking to make its use in the rest of the thesis more easily accessible. As noted, Elias early on railed against the then current approach to social science which he considered to be both static and a-historical, and hence gravely misleading (and misled). He had significant difficulty with numerous other closely intertwined concepts which might be said to emerge from these two. Johann Arnason's description of Elias's ideas in negative terms provides a good outline of these issues (Arnason 1987). The following are his six 'antis' formulated in an effort to describe what Elias felt to be areas of misconception within the sociological cannon and in proposing Eliasian theory as a 'Counter-Paradigm'.⁴ Each will be described only briefly here in an effort to set the stage for what will come after.

1. Anti-Economistic

With his figurational sociology, Elias was not looking at "...a common denominator of social action and social relations" as had Marx (Arnason 1987: 433). He was focussing

⁴ It is acknowledged that, as Arnason points out in several cases in his paper, there are problems with some of Elias's assertions; however those issues are not the primary concern here. For further elucidation, see Arnason, 1987.

much more on a relational view of society as a better way of coming to an understanding of power, and in this way moved beyond Marx. He felt that Marx had tried to explain all of social development by using only one aspect of it and that this approach was destined to lead to misconceptions.

‘relations of production’ is a misconception; it obscures the all-important point that the internal logic of social relations as such always transcends the functional correspondence to or dependence on purposeful activity (Arnason 1987: 432).

Arnason seems to feel that by failing to move beyond economics the field was left too open to more dogmatic followers of Marx to develop a sort of economism. For Arnason, and for Elias, the unplanned aspect – unintentional outcomes - of social relations is always more important than the planned functional aspects.

2. Anti-Normative

Elias held that in an effort to come to terms with social reality one had to dig down to a more basic level than social norms. “Norms should, in other words, be understood as a superimposed layer of social reality, varying in strength and scope but always partial and derivative” (Arnason 1987: 435). They are not a priori fixtures of the social world. Instead, they emerge out of the social world. That being the case, how can one come to an understanding of how relations not governed by such norms came to be so? The only way to achieve the necessary depth of analysis for Elias was to look at long-term social processes. This more basic level of social analysis upon which Elias focussed, and upon which he urged the sociological community to focus, was specifically that of “power

balances and power chances” as they played out within this new, longer term perspective (Arnason 1987: 435).

Elias’ aim is to show that the civilizational periphery of normative structures is in the last instance reducible to configurations of power, and that this infrastructure also determines the overall framework of social life - including its normative patterns: the ‘social constraint towards self-constraint’ is seen as one aspect of the more comprehensive network of controls and constraints, arising from the interdependence of people (Arnason 1989: 46).

This, for Elias, is the “more fundamental layer” to be examined in any effort to understand social reality (Arnason 1987: 435). Blok stands fairly decidedly in Elias’s and Arnason’s corner on this point. “Theories emphasizing ‘values,’ ‘ethos,’ ‘subculture,’ and so on, are inherently circular; they fail to account for the values themselves and, by ignoring the realities of power and power resources, they beg the very question they claim to answer” (Blok 1977: 179). The more appropriate starting point for all such theorizing is, argue Blok and Arnason, with power or, at the very least somewhere other than with norms.

In that some of the sociological classics were clearly more concerned with norms (acknowledging, as Arnason does, Durkheim’s growing awareness of the problematic aspect of a one-sided emphasis on norms), Arnason suggests that Elias was a “more concrete and decisive step beyond the classics” (Arnason 1987: 437).

3. Anti Reductionistic

Elias advocated that the social world was something to be studied in and of itself, and as such argued against the “tendency to subsume the social system under a common denominator of living systems” (Arnason 1987: 438). Sociological theory should, therefore, focus on the social. “According to Elias, the overall evolutionary process generates increasingly complex forms of integration” from inorganic to organic to social (Arnason 1987: 438). In this development it is the form of organization that gains in explanatory force. For this reason the latter cannot be explained in terms of the former. This is theoretically a far cry from the more reductionistic conceptions of social theory. He was clearly opposed to the search by Parsons for a model that would cover everything from amoebas to Chinese civilization. “As Elias sees it, the social level of integration adds new forms and dimensions to the pre-social ones, and social theory should focus on these innovations, rather than on the search for invariant aspects” (Arnason 1987: 438, 439). Elias looked at invariants as part of a bigger evolutionary process: “all apparent invariants are in reality relativised through the incorporation into a more comprehensive and complex figuration” (Arnason 1987: 439). Once one moves on to the social, one is looking at something not only vastly more complex, but categorically different, and which cannot be explained simply in terms of the less complex.

For Elias, to search out social reality as part of any other discipline or under any other guise than the social could lead only to mistaken understanding. Sociological research necessarily focuses on an object at an entirely different level of complexity which therefore has to be analysed in a very different fashion.

4. Anti-Functionalist

For Elias, functionalism is “both one-sided and value laden” (Arnason 1987: 440). As the term function is most commonly understood it simply reintroduces teleology with regard to social relations and thus redirects the focus away from relations back in the direction of individualism by encouraging “an image of society as the individual writ large” (Arnason 1987: 440). The point for Elias is that all social relations necessarily entail perspective as an essential element and that certain conclusions flow directly out of this fact. When talking about functions it is all too often the case that this element is neglected and the “figurations of empirical individuals upon which the institutional patterns are imposed” are ignored (Arnason 1987: 441). ‘Functions’ cannot be adequately described without taking their perspectival character into account.

Arnason points out that;

From a strictly relational point of view, the concept of function is to all intents and purposes synonymous with that of interdependence... to acknowledge the pluri-perspectival character of social relations is to relativise all systemic centres and boundaries. Systems are always superimposed on more fundamental, more extensive and only partially controllable figurations, and every systemic pattern interacts, overlaps and competes with others of a comparable kind (Arnason 1987: 441).

Within Elias’s overall understanding of the social milieu, function properly understood is simply another word for interdependence, and as such is both superfluous and misunderstood within sociology.

5. Anti-Structural

The notion of structure at the very least downplays and may even eliminate process from social thought. Arnason suggests that Elias's pointed remarks about this are probably primarily directed at the limitations inherent in those conceptions of society put forward by both Marx and Durkheim. Within the structural approach the more dynamic historical aspect of structure, if there can be said to be one, is something to be considered only after an understanding of the 'internal constitution' is reached. This limiting of the elemental notion of process is, of course, unacceptable to Elias. Jackson suggests that Elias goes a bit too far in this direction and in this he may have a valid point. "Theories that recognize both institutional and figural structures can provide a fuller picture of human behavior" (Jackson 2003: 733). That some significant correction in this direction was necessary is evident, however. Elias insists on the starting point of analysis being change, or, as we will see, the "processual patterns embedded in historical contexts" (Arnason 1987: 442). These patterns of change emerge out of the central position of power within the social nexus.

For Elias the universality of process in social life seems to be a direct consequence of the omnipresence of power: because of the plurality of centres, the diversity of resources, and the asymmetry of balances, the structure of power can only exist in a state of flux, and the only order that can be imposed on them is that of durable patterns of change... The fusion of structure and process is thus achieved by the means of a redefined and generalized concept of power (Arnason 1987: 442-443).

Because power is so fundamental an aspect of social relations, in fact for Elias the object of sociological inquiry, and because the power balances that are relationships are so constantly and necessarily shifting, any proposed focus on the more static concept of structures is misguided at best. “Elias sensitizes the sociological imagination to problems of language and particularly the dominant conceptual vocabulary that reduces processes to states” (Quilley and Loyal 2004: 6). This is undoubtedly one of his most enduring contributions to the field. The importance of the concept of power will emerge with greater clarity later but for present purposes it is enough to say that all relations are indeed, in one fashion or another, power relations in the sense that they are rarely (never) equal and there is always a power balance between the actors involved. It is for the reason of its ‘omnipresence’ that power is mentioned at this point. As Olofsson makes clear in his chapter in the book *Norbert Elias*, everything is about negotiating power balances in relationships (Olofsson 2000: 361 - 375). Elias holds that the more equal the relations are, the more tightly enmeshed the actors are. These relations, the effect the actors have on each other, the power over, and hence fear that can be instilled from one to the other, represent the social constraints that are so important in Eliasian thinking.

6. Anti-Individualist

Eliasian theory moves strongly against what he refers to as ‘*homo clausus*’ (closed man) and towards ‘*homines aperti*’ (open man). This is probably the most basic of his objections to the then accepted paradigms. The notion of *homo clausus* will for that reason be discussed in somewhat more detail later but for now it is enough to say that it represents the idea of the individual somehow isolated within the biological box of his body from the outside environment. For Elias this was unacceptable in that “individual

and society cannot be separated, that they merely represent two different levels of observation. Group processes have certain peculiarities that are distinct from individual processes, but one must always consider both levels” (Elias 1994b: 64).

In holding that scholars should never go too far towards either end of the individual-society spectrum Elias seems to be, according to Arnason, pointing his criticism first and foremost at Max Weber, whom he considered to have held a strongly individualistic sociological perspective. Having said that, Elias, in *The Symbol Theory*, also fingers Parsons and Habermas for the same misperceived individualism (Elias 1991b: 20). He does go on to point out however, that they are not primarily at fault for the “knowledge blockage” evidenced in their theories. It is actually a result of the then current idea of human beings as individual actors. The social theorists mentioned “are spokespersons and representatives of a distinctive social habitus which is characteristic of our age” (Elias 1991b: 20). With this, he is pointing to a concrete example of his theoretical position. There is another important aspect of this same problem that Elias wants us to be aware of. Approaching the study of society as a collection of individuals hides the fact that larger units and/or organizations have characteristics of their own which are categorically different from the individuals making them up (Elias 1987: 29-31). This is not to say that organizations have an existence apart from the individuals making them up, but that they are not reducible to and far more complex than individuals.

Arnason suggests that while power is central to all of Eliasian thinking, “it is here [within *homines aperti*, the social aspect of man] that we can grasp its most basic meaning: the re-conceptualization of the social nexus in terms of power” (Arnason 1987: 444). For Elias, individuals are, throughout their lives, part of figurations (loosely

described as webs of relations) which they ‘co-determine’, in relation with others also part of the same figurations. This co-determination is worked out through “the network of controls and constraints” of the figuration (Arnason 1987: 444). In other words, they are worked out through the balances of power that are the relations that make up the figurations. It is only by starting with the figuration that one can understand either the individual or society. Once again power comes to centre stage as also fundamentally necessary in understanding this formulation.

Norbert Elias was clearly seeking to change the way the entire field of social science was pursued. This fact is reflected in all of his work; from the most basic of his premises to his grandest conclusions. As the above implies, Elias formed a system for understanding social development that went against much of the accepted wisdom, starting with Marx’s economic theory, and moving through a number of the various other figures and schools of the time. All of the above objections can ultimately be traced back to his starting point in interdependence and long-term historical process (Arnason 1987: 442). How successful he was in consistently adhering to all these ‘anti’ positions is a matter of some debate, but that he did advocate such a position overall is fairly apparent in his work.

Having looked at Arnason’s ‘Six Antis’ the focus now shifts to what it was that Elias was trying to put forward. This will be done first through an examination of his historical perspective, to be followed by a more specific study of his concepts and ideas. This is clearly not intended to be a thorough examination of Norbert Elias’s entire body of work, but it is proposed that these concepts are the ones central to the cross-cultural analysis making up the second part of this thesis.

Process – Elias’s Historical Understanding of Sociology and Social Development

Arnason further confirms Elias’s position in pointing out that “Elias’s objections to classical and contemporary paradigms are closely linked to his interest in the analysis of long-term processes” (Arnason 1987: 442). It is worthwhile briefly looking at Elias’s understanding of the historical nature of social reality. Given that his ideas on the civilizing process represented a rejection of most of what was accepted theory at the time of its formulation, it is not difficult to see just how integral historical process was for him. As noted above, one of Elias’s early intuitions about psychic development was of its deeply historical nature. In other words, in *The Civilizing Process* he proposed that the human psyche changed over time in response to changing social circumstances. These changes, both the social and the psychic, are processes that occur slowly over extended periods.

Elias’s basic point is that habitus and culture are very slow to change, making it impossible to understand social life except over long spans of time. A temporal dimension, in other words, is crucial to understanding the workings of human social life (van Krieken 1998: 49).

To do other than to view society from a very long-term perspective is to run the risk of committing the unpardonable sin of what Elias called ‘process-reduction’, which is to take both the temporal and the constantly changing nature of social reality out of the equation. The field of sociology at the time when Elias was developing his ideas was, in Elias’s opinion, rather more focussed on social reality as consisting of static elements

fitting together in static fashion and, therefore, in Elias's view, hopelessly caught in this trap. He describes this problem nicely with the following:

We say 'The wind is blowing' as if the wind were actually a thing at rest which, at a given point in time, begins to move and blow. We speak as if the wind were separate from its blowing, as if a wind could exist which did not blow (Elias 1978: 112).

We tend to see a thing naturally at rest which takes on the added characteristic of motion and change. The wind, at rest, subsequently blows. This is a misperception.

He discusses this as a linguistic problem which translates into a conceptual problem, something he believes has created enormous difficulties in the sociological endeavor. Elias points to an interesting example that might help in understanding the background of this issue.

Studying the long-term development of the words 'culture' and 'civilization' leads to a number of relatively unexpected discoveries. One is that in the eighteenth century both terms to a large extent referred to *processes*, while in the twentieth century they represent something almost entirely static. This declining sense of the dynamics of social processes is by no means confined to the changing meanings [of] the concepts 'culture' and 'civilization'. The increasing tendency to conceptualise processes as if they were unchanging objects represents a more widespread pattern of conceptual development running conversely

to that of society at large, the development and dynamics of which have noticeably quickened from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries (Elias 1989: 225).

He goes on to point out that in the eighteenth century the rising middle class's understanding of these terms "reflected this deeply development-oriented and dynamic character of their attitudes and basic beliefs" (Elias 1989: 227). By the twentieth century this had clearly changed with the vision of what is actually an ever-changing social reality being seen in a much more static fashion. But again, it is important to remember that these changes in perception are attributed by Elias to historic transitions in social relations; in this case the rise of the middle class and all that entails in the civilizing process.

Referring to his civilizing process, Elias discusses this basic misapprehension of then contemporary sociology. He starts by saying that when looking into social processes the focus must be on "society itself" (Elias 1994a: 288).

This applies to the process of feudalization as to the process of increasing division of labour; it applies to countless other processes represented in our conceptual apparatus by words without process-character, which stress particular institutions formed by the process in question, for example, the concepts of "absolutism", "capitalism", "barter economy", "money economy" and so on. All these point beyond themselves to changes in the structure of human relationships which are clearly not planned by individuals and to which individuals are

subjected whether willingly or not. And this applies finally to the make-up of people themselves, to the civilizing process (Elias 1994a: 288).

With the word 'process' appearing six times in the above passage, the point should be clear. The concept of process under-girds essentially all of what Elias is talking about. This word, of course, entails both time and change.

At the time when Elias was developing his ideas, and for a significant period thereafter, the social sciences were not very accommodating to this sort of thinking. Van Krieken suggests one possible contributing factor in saying that sociologists were uncomfortable with the determinism of evolutionary theory. In other words, evolution, which necessarily (at that time at least) occurs by gradual accumulation of minor changes over extended periods, simply did not fit into their understanding of social reality as consisting of structures and functions and other such relatively fixed entities.

Unfortunately, "in the process sociologists also forget about history altogether" (van Krieken 1998: 49). This quote is helpful in understanding the macro side of Elias's social theory. The difference lies in the understanding of how these processes work. Where their focus was on, for example, structures and functions, Elias was looking in a very different direction. For Elias, their static starting points and units of analysis were a significant error in method and resulted in a number of difficulties which had to be resolved for the discipline to get back on the right track.

Looking at long-term processes or what is often termed historical sociology, helps in gaining a clearer picture of Eliasian thought, for it directly impacts his entire oeuvre. As

we saw, his career started with an eye to this understanding of social reality, and he never really deviated from it. He was not treading entirely new ground here.

The long-term socio-cultural differentiation of human groups in varying degrees of competitive interdependence has been familiar to sociologists since the days of Victorian social evolutionists. So have processes of integration into larger co-ordinated units, processes which are the other side of the coin from differentiation, the two running together in the long term, though with many complicated leads and lags over the shorter term (Mennell 1990: 360).

The sociological community seemed to have been aware of long term development of sorts, yet in Elias's eyes they still viewed social reality through hopelessly short-sighted lenses; in terms of reified units of analysis.

His magnum opus, *The Civilizing Process*, would of course be the outstanding example of his own perspective. His examination was of a civilizing process which itself (continues to) occurred over, in effect, millennia, and which he was dogged in pointing out, had neither a start nor a finish.

There is no zero point in the historicity of human development, just as there is none in the sociality, the social interdependence among men. In both 'primitive' and 'civilized' peoples, there are socially induced prohibitions and restrictions, together with their psychic counterparts, socially induced anxieties, pleasure and displeasure, distaste and

delight. At the very least, therefore, it is not very clear what is meant when the so called primitive standard is opposed as ‘natural’ to the ‘civilized’ as social and historical (Elias 1994a: 131).

Elias’s study looks first at the Roman period, extends through early feudalism and then the state court society, proceeds further to ‘bourgeois’ dominated society, and extends into the future to a ‘world society’. With no beginning or end to the process, there is only constant change and transition. In addition, each and every one of the processes with which we are concerned that are part of Elias’s overall civilizing process; state formation, integration, differentiation, extending chains of interdependence, and internalization of constraint, exemplify and analytically flow out of this historical ‘process nature’ of social reality. What this whole civilizing process, along with all its key elements, is ultimately all about, of course, is changing interdependencies – relations between people – and the impact of those changes on the human psyche. It is all about sociogenetic change effecting psychogenetic change over extended periods of time. It is ultimately about how ‘traditional man’ became ‘modern man’. “Rather, what Elias wants us to contemplate is the entire restructuring of the personality and psychic economy in the process of historical change” (Burkitt 1991: 174).

The civilizing process viewed from a distance is really the process whereby people’s characters, their self-control, and the controls themselves become ‘more even’, ‘more automatic’, and ‘more all-round’ over extended periods (Mennell 1998: 20). There is no single universal process, with specific characteristics that fit all cultures and societies. The civilizing process is involuntary and with no beginning or end. “Only the direction is clear” (Elias 1995: 8). One can not look at any one individual or any society and say

that they are civilized - they are only becoming more civilized, often in fits and starts, and always over extended periods of time.

The process of civilization is related to the acquired self-regulation that is imperative for the survival of a human being... Without learnt self-regulation a person is not in the position, without great discomfort, to defer - in accordance to realistic circumstances - the fulfilment of urges he or she pursues, nor to change the direction in which they are pursued... The pattern of self-regulation, the way it integrates to one's own urges and those of other people, changes in a definite direction in the course of the development of humankind. The concept of civilization quite properly relates to the direction of this process (Elias 1995: 9).

Different societies will go through different civilizing processes, but, according to Elias, all these processes have a singular direction toward the internalization of constraints leading to the more *self-controlled* individual described above.⁵

It is also worth noting at this point that the process nature of social reality for Elias will be an important point of comparison in looking at the Chinese situation; specifically how, and over what time frame, the process played out in each context. Elias does acknowledge that different societies go through different processes, and that all processes entail constant change, but the important point is that the long term direction of the change is always the same. In the Chinese case it will be obvious that the

⁵ Duerr makes the argument that people from traditional societies often exhibit considerable – and possibly greater – control than people in more modern societies (van Kreiken 1998). This objection may apply in the case of the Chinese and will be discussed in somewhat more detail in a later section.

civilizing process being proposed contrasts with that of Europe in important ways. Having said that, it is held that there are interesting and worthwhile parallels to be discussed. It will also be made clear that while there is consistent change through time, there are also what Schwartz refers to as dominant orientations weaving their way through the social fabric of time (Schwartz 1985: 3). Because the Chinese civilizing process occurred over more extended periods, it is posited that these orientations, to be described loosely as Confucian in nature (hierarchy, respect for elders, filial piety, among others), are more obvious and important to the analysis. The point of this brief digression is to prepare the ground for seeing both difference and change as inherent, and to stress that these dominant orientations, when they are described in more detail, should not be misconstrued as being static social structures.

In looking at Elias's historical perspective the focus is on how changes in social structure actually effected changes in psychic structure, or personal habitus, over time. Primarily, Elias looked at the transition from feudalism to the state in European society, with the idea that this change was largely responsible for increasing differentiation, integration, and extending chains of interdependence. These social changes ultimately resulted in greater affect control and eventually the internalization of social constraint as self-restraint at the individual level. This is what Elias referred to as the second nature.

So, as part of the individual civilizing process, learning self-control is a human universal. It follows that the conversion of external constraints into self-constraints takes place in all societies. But the degree, strength and pattern of this process vary between societies, as does the balance

between external constraints and self-constraints adopted as a social standard in each society” (Mennell 1989: 207).

While there are undoubtedly other similarities and differences Mennell here points to the one most fundamental to Elias’s work. The process of the internalization of constraint, the bedrock of Elias’s civilizing process, differs from one society to the next. That it happens in all societies, however, is equally true in Elias’s eyes.

Chapter One – Social Processes

In this chapter, a number of Elias's central concepts will be examined in greater detail, sometimes within his overall theory, sometimes not. It should be reiterated that the intent is not to isolate and therefore reify these ideas. It is only to gain a greater understanding of them in order to enable their application to Chinese culture. The way in which they are arranged is not meant to imply a temporal or hierarchical ordering. It is simply thought to be the best way to introduce the main points to be put forward in Part Two of this thesis, and hence, those points central to the whole project.

For Elias, the central ideas in sociological analysis are process and interdependence. Having already dealt at some length in the Introduction with the importance of historical process, the focus over the next several pages will turn to interdependence. It might be said of Elias that "his subject matter is always people in dynamic interdependence" (Mennell 1992: 94). "Elias sees patterns of relations to be of greater significance. 'The individual' is not the point of departure or epistemological foundation for sociology. *Social relationships* should, according to Elias, be the analytical starting point for sociology as a study of how societies work" (Olofsson 2000: 371). It is only here, within social relations (or interdependencies), that one can begin to gain an understanding of the social whole.

Focussing on interdependence in formulating his civilizing process, Elias assembled a formidable social theory that has effectively proven its worth in terms of explanatory power. Ilse Seglow comments: "Already then Elias had put into the centre of his sociology the problem of interdependence which was then - and it still is - greatly in

advance of prevailing “interaction” theories” (Seglow 1977a: 21). In this sense Elias was and remains ahead of his time.

Elias had a profound sense that the historical development of humankind could only be understood in relational terms. To say that he was the pioneer in this aspect of his thinking would be misleading. Taken individually the relational planks from which his platform was built were not particularly original, but viewed as a whole; the platform they constructed was. As will be explored in more detail below, he was able to overcome some of the more problematic lingering issues through his unique view of the bigger picture.

Determining how social constraints turned into self-restraints is the primary issue both for Elias and for sociology at a more general level according to Stephen Mennell.

How these constraints through other people from a variety of angles are converted into self-constraints is the question that links the mainly ‘microscopic’ concerns of volume I of *The Civilizing Process* to the mainly more ‘macroscopic’ concerns of volume II. In constructing this link, in showing how the regulation of the whole instinctual and affectual life by steady self-control becomes more and more all-embracing in step with the developing structure of society as a whole, Elias sketches their psychogenesis and sociogenesis (Mennell 1989: 95).

This is clearly true of Elias’s civilizing process. Quilley and Loyal suggest that the civilizing process that Elias describes entails

the internalization of progressively more restrained codes of conduct, greater and more or less automatic patterns of self control, the increasing mediation of affective drives and short-term impulses - by processes of calculation and foresight - and in short the formation of a more complex 'super-ego' agency in the psychical structure (Quilley 2004: 49).

The Civilizing Process then, forming the backbone of Elias's life work, might be accurately described as his answer to the question of the hegemony of either the macro or the micro approaches to sociology. For it is within this transition from external constraint (the constraints of the social environment or social other) to internal restraint (psychic restraint) that the macro is tied to the micro, that socio-genesis is tied to psycho-genesis. Elias would say neither the macro nor the micro approaches to the fundamental questions of sociology are correct in and of themselves. He instead aims at a target somewhere in between, and in so doing, has found a way to effectively access both. His target for the bulk of his analysis is, as has already been emphasized, interdependence.

The central idea of Elias's civilizing process is that changes in social relations, or interdependencies, result in changes in personal habitus, or psychic structure. As already shown in Chapter One, he looked at the transition from feudalism to the state in European society. In the process of this transition social interdependencies were transformed in fundamental ways. His idea was that this rather lengthy transition was to a very large degree responsible, through the civilizing process starting first within

limited circles and expanding from there, for increasing affect control and eventually the internalization of social constraint as self-restraint. Over time this internalized constraint became part of the habitus of the wider public that would later result in what Elias referred to as “second nature... as an automatic self-restraint, a habit that, within certain limits, also functions when a person is alone” (Elias 1994a: 113). In different words, the individual’s way of understanding and responding to the world is a product of the processes of social change.

If Stephen Mennell is correct in his assertion that the main issue of sociology is the development of self-restraint, and if it is accurate to say that this shift is fundamental to the transition from traditional to modern culture, then a logical extension of this thought would be that Elias has provided another way of discussing the mechanisms of the transition from traditional to modern culture. Elias himself took pains to point out that he was applying the detail of his ideas on the civilizing process only to the European context but also seemed to imply at several points that all societies go through civilizing processes, even if the details differ. To quote Mennell again;

So, as part of the individual civilizing process, learning self-control is a human universal. It follows that the conversion of external constraints into self-constraints takes place in all societies. But the degree, strength and pattern of this process vary between societies, as does the balance between external constraints and self-constraints adopted as a social standard in each society (Mennell 1989: 207).

The process itself, the balances involved, may differ from society to society but the overall trend of external to internal constraint is always the same. Referring to his monopoly mechanism, Elias says that if

in a major social unit, - so the mechanism may be roughly summarized - a large number of smaller social units which, through their interdependence, constitute the larger one, are of roughly equal social power and are thus able to compete freely – unhampered by pre-existing monopolies – for the means to social power, i.e. primarily the means of subsistence and production, the probability is high that some will be victorious and others vanquished, and that gradually, as a result, fewer and fewer will control more and more opportunities, and more and more units will be eliminated from the competition, becoming directly or indirectly dependent on an ever-decreasing number (Elias 1994a: 347).

Again, in this case he is talking about his monopoly mechanism in the European context, though referring to different timeframes and in language such that the process should be applicable beyond European boundaries. If that is the case then it should be possible to apply his processual concepts to other societies in an effort to elucidate their developmental path; not that they will provide a complete and definite explanation but that they may shed some light on a situation that would remain murkier otherwise. This would situate Eliasian thought as a good starting point for analysing the Chinese cultural context, one that is in many ways still highly traditional, and one that is also currently in a period of rapid transition. Part Two of this thesis will be an effort to do just this, for it is held that Chinese society is experiencing an analogous process to that at the time

when the 'bourgeois' class began to assert itself in Europe. The question that has to be addressed is why this society remained so traditional for so long.

Monopoly Mechanism

In talking about Elias's state formation process as it applies to America, and as he points out similarities between America and Europe, Stephen Mennell starts with a basic premise. "State formation was a violent competitive process through which there emerged successively larger territorial units with more effective monopoly apparatuses" (Mennell 2004: 160). This was central to Elias's state formation and therefore, civilizing processes. Elias proposed that there was what he referred to as a monopoly mechanism operating on the transition from a feudal social structure to one dominated by the state in the European context.

Elias's theory of state formation implicitly begins from Max Weber's definition of the state as an organization which successfully upholds a claim to binding rule making over a territory by virtue of commanding a monopoly of the legitimate use of violence, but he by-passes the problematic term 'legitimacy' by linking a rising level of internal security and calculability in everyday life directly to the formation of habitus (Mennell 1998: 16).

This mechanism is central to his civilizing process as a whole in that it essentially sums up the process leading to the advent of the state, and for Elias, the state is ultimately integral to the internalization of constraint. Where states formed in Europe, they followed a pattern easily identifiable with Elias's monopoly mechanism. He provides a

nice description of the functioning of the monopoly mechanism with the following observations of the social situation of the time (occurring initially in France but eventually all over Europe, though again, the process was different in different places):

that a monopoly will sooner or later be formed has a high degree of probability, at least in the social structures that have existed so far. In the language of exact science, this observation would perhaps be called a 'law'. Strictly speaking, what we have is a relatively precise formulation of a quite simple social mechanism which, once set in motion, proceeds like clockwork. A human figuration in which a relatively large number of units, by virtue of the power at their disposal, are in competition, tends to deviate from this state of equilibrium (many balanced by many, relatively free competition) and to approach a different state in which fewer and fewer units are able to compete, in other words it approaches a situation in which *one* social unit attains through accumulation a monopoly of the contended power chances (Elias 1982: 99-100).

This transformation begins with numerous feudal territories, all relatively equal in strength, vying for greater control. Finally, over the course of an extended period, "through marriage, purchase or conquest" one becomes clearly the strongest assuming command of all the other territories (Elias 1982: 94). Early, it is the individual knights fighting for more territory and hence, more power. Then it is the larger territories fighting each other for more space and greater control, first within the territories, and then between them. It will be important to remember that, as per Elias's final sentence in

his description above, when they contend for territory they are really competing for more power. More territory means control of more resources and more people. In this sense, territory equals power. They are fighting for control of a greater proportion of the available power chances. If they do not expand, they will be taken by their neighbours. All are competing for survival, and if they do not compete successfully, they do not survive. This is true at the very least in terms of their position and prestige, their power, and was often true in a literal sense as well. If they do not become more, they become less. The process of elimination continues until there are only two, or a few, left. At that point those that remain are approaching a monopoly position. The winner ultimately secures a monopoly of physical violence.⁶ “The mechanism leading to hegemony” according to Elias, “is always the same” (Elias 1982: 95). In looking at China’s civilizing process it will be evident that a very similar progression occurred over the centuries leading up to the eventual unification under the Qin dynasty over two millennia ago. In this sense Elias is corroborated in his belief that the civilizing process in terms of the monopoly mechanism operates in the same ‘law-like’ fashion in different places and times.

Comparing the ‘free feudal nobility’ with the ‘courtly nobility’ Elias says that, “In the former, the social power of the individual house, a function of both its economic and military capacity and of the physical strength and skill of the individual, determines the allocation of resources; and in this free competition the direct use of force is

⁶ At this point there are actually two monopolies that are vital to the maintenance of the monopoly position. The first, as already stated, is the monopoly of violence where “Free use of military weapons is denied the individual and reserved to a central authority” (Elias 1982: 104). The second, described by Elias as the other side of the same coin, is that of taxation, whereby the right to tax the property and income of individuals is reserved by a central authority. Each both supports, and cannot survive without, the other. The monopoly of the means of violence enables the central authority to collect taxes, and the money secured through taxation enables the centrally controlled military, and hence, the monopoly of violence. As one goes, so goes the other. For the purposes of this effort, in speaking of the monopoly of violence, both are assumed unless otherwise stated.

indispensable” (Elias 1994a: 352). In this earlier situation, the use of violence is basic, and the distribution of resources is determined by the head of the house (on a very local basis), the person most adept at the skilful use of violence. Social functions are relatively independent.

Elias compares the eventual monopoly situation with the above more competitive environment in saying, “As against this phase of free competition, monopoly formation means on one hand the closure of direct access to certain resources for increasing numbers of people, and on the other a progressive centralization of the control of these resources” (Elias 1994a: 352). This transition is vital both in terms of the civilizing process and, as will be evidenced, the overall analysis of this thesis, for the situation in China developed far differently. As the resources, or more precisely, their distribution, became more centrally controlled in the European context the formerly independent social functions became dependent social functions. With unification and the formation of the state in China, centralized control of the distribution of resources was never achieved in a lasting way. In Europe the formerly traditional social relations/functions had been fundamentally altered. The old figuration was changed forever. This was not the case in China. It was at this point that the Chinese civilizing process took a different route. The traditional social relations and functions remained largely as they had been despite the formation of a state with a monopoly of violence. More and more people in Elias’s European context became dependent upon the central authority for access to needed resources and hence had to look progressively farther down chains of interdependence to meet daily needs. They had to interact in a different way with many more, different people. Initially, it was the monopoly of violence by the central authority that facilitated this change.

In historical terms Elias's discussion of the European situation begins with Louis VI consolidating his power in the region of Francia. He was apparently preoccupied with this effort throughout his reign from 1108 to 1137 (Elias 1982: 92). At that time there were a number of feudal lords fighting it out for control of this region of what would later become France. Elias makes very clear that the difference in strength between the eventual victor, the Capetians, and the surrounding houses was at first not all that great. He adds to this the "low degree of economic integration, undeveloped transportation and communications, and the limitations of feudal military organization" as further contributing factors to the difficulty in acquiring the monopoly that would ultimately come to the victor (Elias 1982: 93). "Louis VI was... essentially a great landowner who had to contend with lords with somewhat smaller possessions and military power; and only the victor of these battles could attain a kind of monopoly position within the territory, beyond the competition of other houses" (Elias 1982: 92). Giving a specific example, Elias refers to the house of Montlhery occupying a very important strategic location and as having become largely independent in a typically feudal fashion. This represents what Elias refers to as "a typical example of the centrifugal movements that are taking place everywhere in this period" (Elias 1982: 93). Louis apparently struggled for control of this fortress for many years. When the final victory came he added a tidy sum of 200 pounds to his own income ("a handsome sum for those times" (Elias 1982: 94)) and over thirty fiefs providing significant military strength. There were other battles as well, and with each victory the dominance of the Capetian position grew, while that of its competitors diminished.

As an important corollary to this, it is worth considering briefly how the lives of the people formerly under Montlhery rule changed. With this new situation, they had become part of a significantly larger, more centralized domain. Spierenburg, in his discussion of the unique nature of the development of the Dutch Republic, says that “Integration and state formation on a higher level imply a loss of functions, prestige and power of people on a lower level” (Spierenburg 1977: 366). He also points out that this process was common. Control over the resources the Montlherians produced was no longer their own, or even local, but was in the hands of someone with whom they may have had no contact whatsoever. In fundamental ways this changed the entire web of social relations in which the people, all the people, of the Montlhery estate formerly existed. As the overall argument develops in Part 2 of this thesis, this point will become more important. For the Chinese, the emperor controlled all under heaven in name only, ruling instead from afar by moral example. Control over the distribution of resources, in fact, remained in local hands, much as it always had.

The battle for Montlhery was merely the first step leading to the huge monopoly of military and economic strength that the French state would become “four or five centuries later” (Elias 1982: 94). It is very unlikely that Louis, or any of the other feudal lords, had any vision toward this ultimate outcome. Again drawing on Spierenburg and his study of the Dutch Republic, explanations based on singular causes and effects fail in that they miss the unintended character of the social processes involved (Spierenburg 1977: 362). “He acts under the direct compulsion of his actual situation” (Elias 1982: 95). If Louis does not control the house of Montlhery, he loses control of a significant portion of his domain. Again, if he does not become more, he becomes less, and possibly disappears altogether. It was roughly half a millennium later that the true

monopolist emerged from the fray. It is hardly conceivable anyone involved in the process planned for what would be the eventual outcome.

Social Constraint/Internal Restraint

In talking about this overall civilizing process Elias points to a steady historical trend of increasing division of social functions, or differentiation, binding people from all classes together in relationships of interdependence (Mennell 1989: 109). What this represents is greater specialization of essentially economic (subsistence) tasks necessarily resulting in decreasing self-sufficiency. This is what is occurring as the monopoly mechanism works itself out and as authority becomes increasingly centralized in any given society. The traditional figurations, and the people within those figurations, whether one is looking at the courts or elsewhere, became increasingly integrated into the larger society and thus dependent upon a more centralized authority. As a result, they also became dependent on a significantly larger number of other people who had formerly been beyond their figurational boundaries. In addition, the social distance between people in terms of hierarchy gradually decreased as well.

The persisting division of social functions has continued to bind all social classes and strata to each other in more equal – not equal but more equal – interdependence... Elias uses the term *functional democratization* to denote the process by which every individual is enmeshed in longer and denser webs of interdependence with more and more others, leading to a greater reciprocal dependency and more multi-polar control within and among groups... In the circulation of models,

functional democratization is expressed in an overall trend toward *both diminishing contrasts and increasing varieties* (Mennell 1989:109).

As the more traditionally hierarchical figurations were forcibly changed through the relentless centralization of the monopoly mechanism, social relations were progressively levelled as well. Within the traditional figuration resources were controlled by the head of the house (or village) and social relations were relatively fixed in a strict hierarchical order. Both integration into the wider society and differentiation of social functions were fairly low. In China, contrary to the situation in Europe, this remained the case until fairly recently.

Fletcher points out that for Elias differentiation usually corresponds to economic events while integration usually corresponds to political events. Both economic and political development was at an early stage at the time when these traditional figurations were the norm. Fletcher draws on Elias in talking about the role of the monopoly of violence in the formation of the state as “one aspect of an overall social process which was inextricably bound up with fiscal and commercial activities” (Fletcher 1997: 64). This became increasingly true as the emerging monopolist gained control of progressively more territory and resources, and hence, the distribution of those resources. The chains of interdependence between people extended and grew more complex, and the average individual necessarily relied on an ever greater number of others to meet their daily needs. What had been traditionally far more independent social functions within more traditional and hierarchical figurations broke down (or at the very least, became less important) in favour of new, more dependent, level social functions.

This, of course, occurred first at court with the courtly nobility where they became reliant on the king and their fellow courtiers. One should not underestimate the size and impact of these court phenomena as they progressed toward the absolutist state courts. Elias has received some criticism (briefly outlined in Kuzmics, 1987) for his (over)emphasis on the courts as a social formation. He responded to this in saying that that the courts were for a long time the models for the rest of society. “National bourgeois society is pre-dated by a pan-European courtly aristocratic society which created those models of peaceful interaction responsible for civilizing the warriors of medieval society, through manners which become ‘refined’ and ‘polished’” (Kuzmics 1987: 517-518). Elias clearly never said the courts were the sole force influencing the civilizing process, that there were not other interweaving factors, but he did hold to the idea that they were a quite significant force in themselves. Once again, it was at the courts where the model for the civilised habitus was initially set.

Van Krieken confirms that for Elias court society on the whole was a very important period in the social development of Europe calling it “a significant form of social organization” (van Krieken 1998: 86).

In the seventeenth century the absolutist ruler had a great influence on the development of self-constraint among courtiers, in that he forced the nobility to transform themselves from warriors into courtiers; and court life demanded a high degree of self-restraint (Elias 1994b: 60).

For Elias this transition to self-constraint *is* the civilizing process and the courts were where it all began. With the model having been set at the courts, it gradually spread to

the wider population (van Krieken 1998: 97). It was the courts that set the standard for the rest of society, making the courtiers the primary contributors to this process for an extended period. Through the civilizing process the behaviours and constraints of the court gradually filtered down to become those of the 'bourgeois' and eventually the peasant classes of society. Chartier points out that for Elias it was not a simple matter of characteristics flowing down from the elite to the masses and being accepted there, however. Rather, for him, it was the competitive struggle of the 'bourgeois' which then led the court to further their own demands for 'civilité' in order to further their own distinction. This competition led to ever "raising even higher the threshold of censorship of behaviour" (Chartier 1988: 89). It was always a two way process for Elias.

In the situation at court the former heads of feudal territories became isolated, essentially waiting on the king. The constraints on behaviour of the people at court became intensified as they attempted to pursue every possible avenue of advantage over their 'peers,' all the while forming and playing by a new set of rules. These rules were initially enforced by the social other, or what Elias came to call *Fremdzwänge*. *Fremd* "literally means 'alien,' 'stranger,' and 'external,'" and Cavalletto goes on to say Elias uses it here to mean "socially interdependent other people" (Cavalletto 2007: 211). "'*Zwang*' brings to the compound a meaning not only of 'constraint' and 'control' but also of 'compulsion,' 'pressure,' and 'coercion'" (Cavalletto 2007: 211). Using this word Elias sets out the extent of the impact of the social other on ego. It is the social other, the *fremd*, who essentially forces certain standards of behaviour on ego. This word is rendered in many forms in the English translation, indicating the many ways it can be understood, and furthering the previous point.

Cavaletto points out that this also shows the many ways the sociogenetic and the psychogenetic can be related.

Thus, *Femdszwang* signifies both ‘social structure’ and ‘psychic structure’; more specifically, *Fremdzwäng* signifies particular configurations of the interface between these two structures... In *The Civilizing Process*, *Fremdzwäng* often functions simultaneously as both a sociological and psychological concept, thereby exhibiting a key quality of Elias’s method of ‘historical social psychology’ (Cavaletto 2007: 258).

He goes on to point to Elias’s claim that his method is at the same time sociogenetic and psychogenetic.

This, in turn, is related to the historical variability of the idea. The reader must understand this to understand Elias’s rendering of the term ‘social structure’. Social structure for Elias is “a pattern of pressures exerted upon people by their relationship with others upon whom they are functionally dependent either directly or indirectly; it is a historically specific ‘system of pressure exerted on living people by living people’” (Cavaletto 2007: 212 citing Elias). Cavaletto is quoting Elias’s *Society of Individuals* here in order to emphasize his idea that it is the matrix of forces resulting from people in relation that forms the connection between the sociogenetic and the psychogenetic. Regardless of the specific social situation, as people are in relation and are therefore functionally dependent on one another, they also represent a constraining influence on each other. “While a fundamental premise of the entire Eliasian project is the

universality of the constitutive role played by *Fremdzwäng* in the formation of the human personality, the character of this constitution varies radically from one historical period to another” (Cavalletto 2007: 212).

This is equally true from one society and/or culture to another. At the point of the feudal courts that are Elias’s primary subject matter, the *Fremdzwäng* are a given lord’s fellow courtiers, those at court with whom he must interact, those with whom he must contend for social position. As the social situation, or the interdependencies, change, so too do one’s *Fremdzwäng*.⁷

This new situation was entirely different from that of the feudal lords who were much more independent in their self-sufficiency, and were allowed almost free reign of emotion and action. Elias vividly describes the court situation:

These are the consequences of the new, increased dependence in which the noble is now placed. He is no longer the relatively free man, the master of his own castle, whose castle is his homeland. He now lives at court. He serves the prince. He waits on him at table. And at court he lives surrounded by people. He must behave toward each of them in exact accordance with their rank and his own. He must learn to adjust his gestures exactly to the different ranks and standing of the people at court, to measure his language exactly, and even to control his eyes exactly. It is a new self-discipline, an incomparably stronger reserve

⁷ There is a potentially very interesting parallel here to Chinese *guanxi* as it developed in the revolutionary period. This will not be explored specifically in depth in this thesis, but the implied connection will be clear, and it merits further research.

that is imposed on people by this new social space and the new ties of interdependence (Elias 1994a: 177).

The former feudal lords now ensconced at the victorious monopolist's court remain in a struggle for power chances, albeit on a far more limited basis. The battle they now wage is not an independent conflict with swords, one where they are in command, but a dependent one of wit that requires a greatly heightened sense of awareness and control of all aspects of interaction. They are now fighting a battle in which weapons are denied them, for social position within a new figuration in which they are but another member. In this case independent social functions have been taken over by dependent ones as these formerly highly autonomous lords now must look to the king and all the other courtiers in living out their daily lives. They are now far more integrated into and dependent upon the more centralized authority that the monopolist represents.⁸

With the growing intensity of these dependencies and constraints, far different from their former social reality, the courtiers were gradually and increasingly forced to monitor themselves.

When life at court located distinction in proximity, reality in appearance and superiority in dependence, it required of those who participated in it specific psychological gifts that are not common to all, such as the art of observing others and oneself, the censorship of

⁸ This transition from independent to dependent social functions is quite significant in the analysis of the Chinese context, for it is posited that this is where the fundamental difference between the civilizing processes of the two cultural blocks lies. As was pointed out above, different societies proceed through their own civilizing processes at different rates and in different ways. The Chinese shift from independent to dependent social functions took far longer than that in the West.

sentiments and the mastery of passions and the internalization of the disciplines that govern civilité. A transformation of this sort modified not only ways of thinking but the entire structure of personality and the psychic economy of the individual to which Elias gives an old name: Habitus (Chartier 1988: 88).

With the continuing growth in differentiation in society, the 'bourgeois' gained in influence and began to compete professionally in wider circles, as well as competing to enter the elite courtly society. In the process, they took on aspects of courtly behaviour in an effort to emulate those of higher rank. This was done primarily to facilitate their own rise in stature, and thus their own access to more power chances. With this process, "the waves of expansion of the standards of civilized conduct to a new class go hand in hand with an increase in social power of that class, a raising of its standard of living to that of the class above it, or at least in that direction" (Elias 1994a: 506). This change had occurred by about the eighteenth century according to Elias.

Here it is important to make the Eliasian connection between the civilizing process at court and that among the 'bourgeois', for they can appear to be two distinct processes with little theoretical connection. To facilitate this Elias will be quoted at some length:

In every social stratum that area of conduct which is functionally of most vital importance to its members is the most carefully and intensively moulded. The exactitude with which, in courtly society, each movement of the hands while eating, each piece of etiquette and even the manner of speech is fashioned, corresponds to the importance

which all these functions have for courtly people both as means of distinction from below, and as instruments in the competition for royal favour... They are pre-conditions for the respect of others, for the social success which here plays the same role as professional success in bourgeois society (Elias 1994a: 502-503).

Elias makes the point here that those skills deemed most important in the competition for power chances are naturally those skills most carefully monitored and therefore most highly developed. It is these skills, whatever they may be, that will set one apart from others, and facilitate successful competition. The mode and means may differ from class to class, but the goal does not; greater control of power chances. And neither does the result according to Elias; the internalization of constraint. Continuing with the same source we see that where the 'bourgeois' may have started by imitating the skills used by the courtier as a means of ascendancy, with continuing competition, differentiation and the associated changes in social structure, the skills deemed necessary for success in their quest changed as well:

Other skills take their place as primary skills on which success or failure in life depends – skills such as occupational proficiency, adeptness in the competitive struggle for economic chances, in the acquisition or control of capital wealth, or the highly specialized skill needed for political advancement in the fierce though regulated party struggles characteristic in an age of increasing functional democratization. While the aristocratic courtiers' personality structure is to a large extent determined by the need to compete for status and power chances within

one of the ruling establishments of their age, the social personality structure of the rising bourgeois strata is determined by the competition for a greater share of the growing capital wealth, or else for jobs or for positions which endow their occupants with greater political or administrative chances of power. These and related competitive struggles now become the main factor of constraint which leave their imprint upon the personality of individuals (Elias 1994a: 503).

The social milieu in which the ‘bourgeois’ operated clearly differed significantly from that of the courtier. For this reason their short term goals, which were really a means to an end, differed as well – wealth as opposed to the courtier’s pursuit of social position.⁹

With regard to movement toward self-restraint in court in France, as opposed to that of the ‘bourgeois’, Mennell stipulates that Elias was

not arguing that self-restraint was uniquely severe in these circles, nor that it is exclusively from the cultural legacy of these circles that the pattern of restraint in modern society is derived. In fact, in many asides comparing the constraint of life at court with those found in what is badly translated as ‘professional- bourgeois’ society, Elias depicts the latter as more compelling. For one thing it was only towards their peers

⁹ In clarifying this transition, Elias distinguishes two different bourgeois groups; the *robins* and the lower bourgeois. Mennell points out that the interests of the robins were not identical with those of the lower bourgeois but that they all depended on the crown in maintaining their privileges. They were tied into the old status quo. “Only with the emergence of bourgeois forms *not* dependent on privileges derived from the crown did this cease to be true - and then the old middle class was swept away along with the monarch and the nobility” (Mennell 1989: 79). It is held that only then could wider social dependencies with longer chains of interdependence form among the bourgeois.

that court people need subject themselves to great constraint, and far less toward their social inferiors inside and outside the court. In bourgeois society, the occupational functions - competition for capital and wealth, the acquisition of professional skills, success in business - are far more central to social existence and esteem, and through the occupational sphere people of all classes are far more closely bonded to each other. Bourgeois people of the nineteenth century were shaped above all by the necessities of careers demanding regulated work and the subjection of affects to routine; overall, the pressures upon them were more demanding than those upon courtiers. (Mennell 1989: 93).

The social side of court life that had been so vital to the courtiers was for the most part relegated to private life for the 'bourgeois' (Mennell 1989: 93). But for Elias, constraint on the 'bourgeois' was still more demanding than that on the courtier. This point is quite important in that, as alluded to earlier, it has been suggested that Elias is advocating the idea of a much more stringent social environment at court than in other social milieus and/or at other times. This is not the case. What the 'bourgeois' and the courtiers have in common in their respective civilizing processes is a great deal of social constraint as well as the ever-present differentiation, integration, and competition for the goal of access to power chances. No matter the social class, people compete for this goal resulting in increasing differentiation and finally the internalization of constraint – the civilizing process. And in the historical situations of both the courtiers and the 'bourgeois', the social constraint is internalized as self-restraint.

Van Krieken sums up this process, as seen by Elias:

The development of habitus ‘always veers towards a more or less automatic self-control, a subordination of short-term impulses to the commands of an imagined longer-term view, and to the formation of a more complex and secure “superego” agency’. The dynamics of this development, Elias felt, was also always the same in Western societies, beginning with ‘small leading groups’ and then affecting ‘broader and broader strata’, not through some process of ‘diffusion’, but resulting from the dynamics of social competition (van Krieken 1998: 105-106).

The specifics of the civilizing processes for both groups may have been different but they are in a sense tied together through competition for power chances. The so called diffusion of the model set at court to the lower social classes did not occur through a passive process of assimilation but more one of aggressive competition. The details of the courtiers’ environment and struggle certainly differed from that of the ‘bourgeois’, but the fact of the struggle, and the general goal for which it was waged, were the same. This is presumably true for all civilizing processes. The notion of competition as it plays out in different social environments is a very important point of analysis for comparing the civilizing processes of Europe and China.

From the ‘bourgeois’, the civilized habitus finally trickled down to the masses. The ever increasing social differentiation continued and was accompanied by a greater need for affect control as one was forced to interact with and give consideration to an ever-growing number of people. Here again we see independent social functions being replaced by dependent ones except now on a much broader scale. People even down to

the local level were integrated into and became dependent upon the centralized state for their needs. Also, over time and as the chains of interdependence became more extended, Elias says that the external social constraint once manifested at court and filtering down to the broader society, became internalised as self-restraint here at the broader, lower social levels. Differentiation continued, there was more specialization and interdependence, and relations between people and classes became more equal facilitating greater interaction. The chains of interdependence one had to deal with in living out each day became so long, involving so many people, that they could no longer actively consider and engage them all. They had to account for the constraint imposed by these myriad unseen, often unknown, others by restraining themselves. Van Krieken summarizes Elias's ideas thus: "Elias argued that the restraint imposed by increasingly differentiated and complex networks of social relations became increasingly internalized, and less dependent on its maintenance by external social institutions, developing what Freud was to recognize as superego" (van Krieken 1998: 98).

Over time anti-social impulses that had been consistently suppressed externally in the past no longer needed external monitoring, as they were restrained internally; and this, at last, by the whole population.

Taking a step back and looking at Elias's civilizing process as a whole, the most important individual aspect would seem to be differentiation, or the division of social functions. "Elias specifies the increasing division of social functions and state formation processes to be crucial for the sociogenesis of European civilizing processes" (Fletcher 1997: 53). State formation and the monopoly of violence broke down the traditional figurations and social relations through assuming control of resources and their distribution, turning what had been independent social functions into dependent ones.

The traditional self-sufficiency of the local community gave way to a more integrated, dependent situation. With the old, more restrictive social relations breaking down and new ones emerging, people found themselves in competition for a greater share of the power chances available, spurring greater differentiation. It is the social process of differentiation that is the characteristic common to all the societies of Elias's analysis. Within given societies, regardless whether one is looking at the courtier, the robin or lower 'bourgeois', or the peasant, again it is differentiation that remains the common thread. Fletcher confirms this with the following remarks when talking about drive and impulse controls (civilizing processes): "in the European case this was related to the competitive pressures increasing the division of social functions and the number of people dependent upon one another"(Fletcher 1997: 53). Clearly, this process of differentiation occurs at all levels as a result of competitive pressures; competition in pursuit of power chances. Competition spurring differentiation is what drives the civilizing process of the social theory of Norbert Elias. This will also be an important point of focus for Part Two of this thesis as Eliasian theory is taken to the Chinese world.

Manners

Early in his discussion of changing social behaviour, and manners in particular, Elias makes an important point for the analysis of the Chinese situation when he suggests that the traditional social order had been,

if not broken, extensively loosened and in a process of transformation.

Individuals of different social origins are thrown together. The social

circulation of ascending and descending groups and individuals speeds up (Elias 1994a: 64).

As the traditional social ties binding people into their figurations were altered by the social processes then occurring (state formation, integration, differentiation, extending chains of interdependence), different people from different classes and origins were interacting together in ways that they never had before. New figurations with more extended chains of interdependence were forming. He refers to new hierarchies forming after a time, and along with it a new upper class. As will be evidenced, the process Elias describes here is mirrored in the situation as it developed in China during the Post-Opening period after 1978. In this new situation in Europe, Elias talks of the unprecedented exposure of people from the new upper class to the pressures of others and to social control. This breaking down of the old social order was a more or less necessary step in (or possibly ‘precondition to’) the continuing civilizing process. As different relationships, and sets of relationships, were formed and became a regular part of people’s lives, different rules for interacting became necessary. These rules of conduct, of course, exist in all societies and go through periods of change, contributing to civilizing processes.

For Elias it was a matter of representing them in some fashion. In attempting to do so, he found an interesting, and quite powerful, starting point for putting forward his position on the historical nature of social development: For it was in the above mentioned social context that “the writings on manners of Erasmus, Castiglione, Della Casa, and others are produced. People, forced to live with one another in a new way, become more sensitive to the impulses of others” (Elias 1994a: 64). Elias points out that

these men were not the first to concern themselves with such issues. The important point is that there is always movement. There is no beginning or ending point, no start or point at which one can say the process is complete. Elias is simply choosing the medieval period as his point of analysis. Stephen Mennell refers to how in the manners books we see greater observation of conduct. Elias's point was that "preservation of one's social position under severe competitive pressure necessitated a more psychological view of people" (Mennell 1994: 186). At the time the manners books were produced, people's behaviour was more tightly prescribed. It was these restrictions that were put down in books for a wider audience.

Beginning with medieval manners books, Elias deals initially with manners at table. He is able to show an unmistakable trend over time as the manners books were first directed at the court aristocracy. They then became very popular with the rising 'bourgeois' as they at first attempted to imitate the court, and later came to interact on a relatively more level playing field. De Courtin's book, for example, was meant for a more 'well-bred' audience, but enjoyed "not inconsiderable success from the interest of the leading bourgeois strata" (Elias 1994a: 82). This diffusion to the 'bourgeois' occurred mainly in the eighteenth century. After that, "The church proves, as so often, one of the most important organs of the downward diffusion of behavioral models" (Elias 1994a: 83). Regardless of mode and method, the important point remains the diffusion from the model-setting class to the rest of society. Increasingly restrictive table manners were set at court and diffused through the population over time. The individuals at court continue to alter their own manners in order to stay ahead and apart from the lower classes, while the lower classes continued to try to keep up. Proper manners represent power chances and as mentioned above, all are competing for access to those chances.

From table manners, Elias moves on to examining the bodily functions with which all people necessarily have to contend in one fashion or another, and in so doing very effectively positions himself to further his argument. In his choice of subject matter, he examines

things that humans cannot biologically avoid doing, no matter what society, culture or age they live in. Moreover, infants are born in the same emotional condition everywhere, so the *lifetime* point of departure is always the same. Therefore, if change occurs in the way these functions are handled, it can be seen rather clearly. In so doing Elias was choosing strong ground from which to fight a battle with those who see the relationship between social personality and the structure of societies as merely random (Mennell 1989: 37).

He is able to show how, over time, people's response to bodily functions changed. In the parts of his study representing earlier time frames, "Neither the functions themselves, nor speaking about them or associations with them, are so intimate and private, so invested with feelings of shame and embarrassment, as they later become" (Elias 1994a: 110). With time, and due to changing social relations, Elias shows these bodily functions to have taken on a whole new range of meaning and significance. Only people 'in the know' and 'in touch' with power knew the proper ways of responding to such things. They set the precedents for the rest of society.

He starts with the blowing of one's nose. Here he shows how starting in the European Middle Ages when people used their hands/fingers whenever need arose, the behaviour gradually changed to being restricted at table as well as in terms of which hand could be used, to the use of a handkerchief first by the upper class, and finally to its use by the public at large – “at least among people who lay claim to ‘good behavior’” (Elias 1994a: 122). Over the course of the two centuries involved the blowing of one's nose became progressively more restricted and ‘hidden’ (though he does make the point that the use of the hands is not eliminated completely). Obviously, in most contexts in today's Western world, the idea of blowing one's nose into one's hand is not a very pleasant thought.

He also deals with both the bedroom and relations between the sexes. In both cases he is able to show the same general ‘civilizing’ process occurring in similar sequence and over similar timeframes. As greater shame is associated with the acts of sleeping and sex, they are gradually removed behind the scenes of daily life. This remains largely true today.¹⁰

At this point the discussion of bodily functions ends with the act of spitting. As part of simply being alive all people accumulate saliva in their mouths on an ongoing basis. That is a human universal. What a given person does in response to that biological situation is another matter. Elias points out that “since the [European] middle ages, behavior has changed in a particular direction. In the case of spitting, the movement was unmistakably of the kind we call ‘progress’” (Elias 1994a: 128). During the Middle Ages, spitting was thought both a normal and necessary part of everyday life. There

¹⁰ Elias does point to a relaxation of restrictions on such functions in modern times but claims this fits in with his ideas, in that this implies even greater self-control. This argument will not be dealt with in this thesis.

were few restrictions even at court. Beginning in the sixteenth century this started to change as more restrictions were placed on the act and spitting too, was gradually moved ‘behind the scenes.’¹¹

Spitting is an interesting case study with regard to the European and Chinese civilizing processes. Mennell makes a telling point when he says, “For instance, when spitting was accepted and frequent, it was said to be unhealthy to retain sputum; only *after* spitting became socially unacceptable was it declared unhygienic” (Mennell 1992: 46). The same initial attitude seems to hold true for at least some parts of China today.¹²

By choosing biological functions as the focus of his discussion on manners, Elias was able to empirically show how, over extended periods, what had been considered normal and acceptable social behaviour was gradually constrained through manners, how this constraint became accepted as normal for ever widening circles, and how these norms were eventually internalized, representing essentially a demonstrated shift in the human psyche.

¹¹ Things that are considered bad manners are removed behind the scenes, so to speak. By this he means simply that such behavior is taken out of the public view. Elias makes an interesting allusion to China here with regard to the use of the knife. The Chinese apparently thought of Western people as ‘barbaric’ because they used the knife in their eating. Whereas it had at least been “behind the scenes of social life” (Elias 1994: 99) in the West (carving still had to be done), in China it had been removed much earlier and more radically. It had been removed completely. He points out that “One may assume that this custom is connected with the fact that for a long time in China the model-making middle class has not been a warrior class but a class pacified to a particularly high degree, a society of scholar officials” (Elias 1994: 103). This observation has interesting implications that will not be explored in detail in this thesis but which will be included tangentially.

¹² In dealing with the issue of why different people from different people groups respond to the same stimulus so differently, Elias looks at their history and their social context. Interestingly enough, in today’s China we see a similar response with regard to spitting as that of the average person in the Western Middle Ages. Whether or not there is a direct correspondence between the civilizing processes of the two cultures in areas as specific as this is a question that will not be delved into in this project (except indirectly).

What is important is that in this change, in the inventions and fashions of courtly behavior, which are at first sight perhaps chaotic and accidental, over extended time spans certain directions or lines of development emerge. These include, for example, what may be described as an advance of the threshold of embarrassment and shame, as 'refinement' or as 'civilization.' A particular social dynamism triggers a particular psychological one, which has its own regularities (Elias 1994a: 82).

Social changes had effected psychic changes and these changes had occurred over significant spans of time. As such, choosing manners as they relate to bodily functions was a very effective focus for establishing his ideas on civilizing processes.

In the European Middle Ages manners had apparently been talked about a lot but they had not changed much or become lasting habits. With the new and/or changing social context, the new pattern of social relationships, people started to examine or reflect on their own behaviour more than in the past. This is not to say that the self suddenly became an object of intense and prolonged scrutiny, but that one's own behaviour was given more careful consideration than in the past, simply because it was now far more important. As a result, the standards of behaviour were set in motion.

The degree to which human life and behavior can be molded by historical processes remains to be determined in detail... all this shows how natural and historical processes interact almost inseparably. The formation of feelings of shame and revulsion and advances in the

threshold of delicacy are both at once natural and historical processes. These forms of feelings are manifestations of human nature under specific social conditions, and they react in their turn on the sociohistorical process as one of its elements (Elias 1994a: 131).

Elias mentions that the behaviour standards he talks about were first made by the court for the court. Speaking of eating behaviour, he says that up to about the fifteenth century, though there was some small movement in a civilizing direction, manners remained fairly consistent. There was not yet very great restraint in medieval society. As the civilizing process progresses, this begins to change. Wider and wider circles of society adopt the models set out at court. During roughly the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, manners at table “press constantly in one direction, toward a new standard of table manners” (Elias 1994a: 86). From this point on, something important began to happen that, while not removing daily conduct from view, pushed it into the background; the rise of the ‘bourgeois’ and the accompanying focus on achievement as opposed to manners (Elias 1994a: 86-87). While the importance of manners does not immediately disappear from view, their central defining authority diminishes from that of earlier times. This represents another significant change in the social context as the balances of power continue to shift with changing interdependencies.

Sociogenetic - Psychogenetic Change

Roland Robertson summarizes Elias’s understanding of the civilizing process in very simple terms; “For Elias, the civilizing process consisted in the way in which what had been, historically, constraints on human behaviour became internalized” (Robertson 2006: 421). Here he confirms for Elias what Mennell stated was the case for sociology

in general. Elias's view of sociology in terms of history and long-term social processes is tightly tied to his understanding of psychic change. He feels that we could not understand the connection between the psychic and the social unless we understood the psychic as 'in motion' in the same fashion as the social. In other words, while society was undergoing long term change, so too was the psyche. And Elias goes further in not only saying that these changes were related, but in providing fairly substantial empirical evidence to support his case (both *The Civilizing Process* and *The Germans* being good, but certainly not the only, examples).

Elias's feeling was that in order to understand changes in the human psyche one had to look at changes in human society. It was here, in the ongoing change in human society and social relations, that one could get to the roots of shifts in the human psyche.

Specifically, Elias shows how the process of internalization of restraints and the resulting transformation in behavioural codes (psychogenesis) was intimately connected with transformations in the division of labour, demographic shifts, processes of societal pacification, urbanization and the growth of trade and the money economy (sociogenesis) (Quilley 2005: 818).

Quilley and Loyal also argue that,

there are processual connections between the scale, internal organization and interdependence of those groupings around which people have 'we-images' and 'we-feelings' (which might be variously

families, clans, villages, tribes, empires, nation-states), the control and management of violence within and between such groupings, and individual processes of socialization and psychological formation (Quilley 2005: 819).

This, of course, goes to the very heart of all of Elias's work. That is not to say that the process is completely one way with social change dictating psychic change, but only that the one can not be understood without the other. There is clearly a link connecting the interdependencies between individuals to the psychic development of said individuals. Over the course of this process "the moulding of affects, the structure of drives and consciousness, in short the whole social personality structure and the social attitude of people are changed at the same time" (Mennell 1998: 141). In short, the social and the psychic are inseparable, moving not necessarily in tandem, but always in response to each other.

Internalization Process - The Formation of the Individual

According to Szakolczai, both Elias and Borkenau agreed with each other (and apparently also with Weber, Freud, and Simmel) that individualism "represents a precarious balance" in need of explanation and that it was "rooted in the collapse of the medieval order" (Szakolczai 2000: 59). While individualism is most often taken as a given in today's West, this position is not at all justified. The collapse of the earlier social order led men to search for a new order "guided by a new elite" (Szakolczai 2000: 60).

The centrality of the individual knowing subject in traditional epistemology can be shown to have arisen from the individual self-experience of people, particularly aristocratic and bourgeois intellectuals, during specific phases of the development of Western societies...This self-experience has produced the *homo clausus* individual analysed by Elias (Kilminster 1998: 17 Citing Elias).

Elias suggests they found the new elite in the courtly aristocracy. This development is fundamental to the civilizing process. For Elias the source of individualism was to be found in “the taming of violence by the courtization of warriors” (Szokolczai 2000: 60). It is held in this thesis that this relationship between individualism and its causes – the civilizing process – is a key element in understanding some of the major differences between European and Chinese culture. This is true in that it relates directly to their respective civilizing processes, which are quite different, and in that their levels of individualism are so radically different.

In attempting to come to an understanding of this process it is valuable to look at another closely related process – that of rationalization. Rationality is not an attribute of individuals.

The term ‘rationalization’ refers to changes in the way people habitually orient themselves in the world in which they live, and these changes are directly related to the way they are bonded with each other. In other words, the forms of behaviour we call rationality are produced within a

social figuration in which short-term impulses are subordinated to longer-term projects (Mennell 1998: 19).

Rationalization is part of the civilizing process and not the “principle propellant of long-term social development” (Mennell 1998: 19). Rationalization, the development of reason, is an integral aspect of the civilizing process. It is also true that Elias does not opt for an explanation of his civilizing process solely in terms of reason. Rational understanding is not the driving force behind the civilizing process. In fact, it is the civilizing process that explains rationalization. Exemplifying this point, Elias shows, according to Mennell, that the standards arose first and the justification later. The spitting reference from Mennell again serves as an informative example: the rationale for not spitting only surfaced *after* the act itself had become socially unacceptable (Mennell 1992: 46). Instead, an increase in rationality goes with the civilizing process in that greater control over affect and impulse is both rational and naturally occurs as part of the civilizing process. It is also worth noting that different social contexts undergoing different civilizing processes may have different forms of rationality. “Norbert Elias in his study of courtly society in France compared the ongoing evaluation of the courtiers social position to a stock exchange... such a configuration as the French court carried with it a specific type of rationality” (de Swaan 1977: 392). The implication is that the rationality of the German aristocracy, or, for that matter, the French ‘bourgeois’, may be significantly different from that of the French court. But they all remain examples of rationality nonetheless, developing out of the particular civilizing processes of the societies under consideration.

In talking about humanity's increasingly effective response to nature, Elias says that "their outlook as well as their actions, changed" (Elias 1987: 8). He goes on to relate this to the development of the sciences. "Throughout these developments the mastery of people over themselves, as expressed in their mental attitudes towards nature, and their mastery over natural forces by handling them, have grown together" (Elias 1987: 8). He reinforces the point by going on to say that the level of detachment with regard to nature is directly related to the human ability to control natural forces.

For a long time humans have been in a vicious circle with regard to nature where they were too emotionally involved largely because they had so little control, and because they were so insecure in this regard they could not develop the level of detachment necessary to gain control. People cannot become more detached without gaining more control over nature, and they cannot gain more control over nature without becoming more detached. Elias discusses the growth of understanding and control of natural forces as being "associated with specific changes in human relationships; it goes hand in hand with the growing interdependence of growing numbers of people" (Elias 1987: 10). Subsequently more detached dealings with nature, in turn, helped to spur on the changes in human relationships in a circular and mutually reinforcing process. "More and more groups, and with them more and more individuals, tend to become dependent on each other for their security and the satisfaction of their needs in ways which, for the greater part, surpass the comprehension of those involved" (Elias 1987: 10).

As relationships are stretched, people become more dependent on others for their safety and wellbeing. This dependency, in turn, fosters more self-reflective thought through the civilizing processes already discussed. "The same process which has made people less

dependent on the vagaries of nature has made them more dependent on each other” (Elias 1987: 10). The process itself clearly lies beyond just reason. At the same time people become less aware of their interdependence and the resulting forces upon them because the relations involved are increasingly dispersed and, in a sense, ‘invisible’. The relationship between rationalization and detachment for Elias is obvious.

When the ideas of process and interdependence are mentioned as central to the civilizing process, it is important to see this as going beyond simple interaction. People are often interdependent with others whom they have never met. This is, of course, what happens when the chains of interdependence get extended beyond the face to face. As interdependencies become more extended involving more people, each person must take account of how their own and other’s actions affect others in the chain, whether they have personal contact with them or not. They become more constrained, and more foresight is required.

Mennell talks about three aspects of increasing foresight:

1. Psychologization - “The habit of foresight over longer chains grows. And with this change also comes a change in the way of considering others” (Mennell 1989: 101).

With regard to life at court, “Preservation of one’s social position under severe competitive pressure necessitated a more ‘psychological’ view of people, involving a more precise observation of oneself and others in terms of longer series of motives and causal connections” (Mennell 1989: 102). He goes on to say this was not psychology in the modern sense in that it was “not concerned with the individual in isolation, but always with individual people in relation to others in a social context” (Mennell 1989:

102). Mennell then notes that the boundaries within which this happened were quite narrow at court, leaving significant room for growth with the continuation of the civilizing process.

2. Rationalization - According to Mennell, there was apparently also strong movement towards rationality in the sixteenth century, as noted by Weber, among others (Weber 1958). Of course Elias puts this in the “broader context of the transformation of personality structure and pressure towards habitual foresight” (Mennell 1989: 102).

Elias argues that rationality takes place only when external compulsions become internal compulsions. Interestingly enough, court rationality and ‘bourgeois’ rationality were quite different, and may even have been very irrational from each other’s point of view. Yet both remain products of rationalization and hence, for Elias, of the civilizing process. They both take a longer term view of reality over the shorter term, as dictated by the social interdependencies in which they are involved. “Both forms of rationality involve the control of behaviour directed towards competing for the means of power prestige and capital being the dominant means of power in the respective societies” (Mennell 1989: 103-104). They are all basically struggling for the same goals, it is the environment that dictates how the war is waged. Rationality varies with the structure of social reality but whatever the social situation, there must be foresight.

3. Advance in thresholds of shame and embarrassment - This too becomes more obvious after the sixteenth century. Shame occurs when there is a loss in social standing in the eyes of a social other with whom one has or has had a relationship. Embarrassment is similar except in that it is caused by another person when they violate social standards.

The fear of transgressions of social prohibitions takes on the character of shame and embarrassment, by definition, the more fully *Fremdzwang* has been converted into *Selbstzwang*. This fear is obviously related to vigilance and foresight in anticipating social dangers. That is why shame and embarrassment on the one hand and rationalization on the other represent two sides of the same coin (Mennell 1989: 105).

Elias held that prior to the emergence of the feudal courts, the habitus of the average person was quite different from that which would develop subsequently. Rational conduct presupposes the people involved to be adults capable of detaching themselves from immediate and pressing personal problems. He further suggests that people had no chance to become detached as long as they had no control over nature. The lack of control engendered fears that resulted in emotional response. According to Kilminster it is also difficult for people in an insecure position to be detached about “*social relations*” over which they have little control (Kilminster 2004: 33). An extension of this same problem is that “it is difficult for them to extend their understanding and control social processes as long as they cannot approach them with greater detachment, which entails greater control *over themselves*” (Kilminster 2004: 33).

In a situation that was both naturally and socially unpredictable and uncontrollable, people had little chance to develop the reason and detachment now considered the norm in modern society. The development of these psychic characteristics was an integral part of the civilizing process but in order to achieve it people had to have “a particularly well-developed and all-round capacity to regulate their drives and emotions internally” and the social environment in which they lived had to be “relatively pacified”

(Kilminster 2004: 31). This self-control was not an a priori characteristic but only forms “at a comparatively late stage of social development in people for whom, internally, a longer gap exists between impulse to act and the act itself, than existed in people in the [European] middle ages” (Kilminster 2004: 32). From this increasing gap comes “the characteristic feature of thinking-about-thinking so typical of learned and cultured people in western societies in particular” (Kilminster 2004: 32). Elias describes this as a circular sort of feedback mechanism with each aspect feeding into and spurring on the other.

In the competition between feudal lords and territories there were winners and losers. As ever more territory was consolidated in fewer hands (Elias is always careful to point out that this was not a smooth one-way process) more and more feudal warriors became ensconced at court where the social order was significantly different, thus changing the shape of the figurations of which one was likely to be a part. They were no longer independent masters of their own domain but had to attend to many significant others in their daily decisions. Consequently, they were forced to play a very different game by very different rules.

As the centralization process continued and the courts grew, violent outbursts were much more tightly regulated and ‘social prowess’ became the weapon of choice. Losing control meant losing status among one’s peers. The means of violence having been taken out of the hands of the former lords turned courtiers, they had to find another means of ‘doing battle’ within newly dependent social relations. Effective modes of behaviour in general had to change. Wouters points out that at about this time “Social constraints pressed towards stronger and more automatic self-supervision, the

subordination of short term impulses to the commandment of a habitual longer-term perspective, and the cultivation of a more stable, constant and differentiated self-regulation” (Wouters 2004: 199).

As with everything in Eliasian thought, this was an extended process spanning a significant period of time. The important point here is that as these interdependencies at court grew and became more intensely scrutinized by all the players in the game, the manipulation of the relationships themselves became the means for social advancement, or gaining control over whatever power chances were accessible to those involved.¹³

Kuzmics alludes both to the nature of the environment and the level of competence of the participants at court with the following contrast to the later ‘bourgeois’ environment. “The courtier, in contrast, was, day and night, tied into a social formation approximating a totalitarian system. He frequently achieved a level of skill in dealing with people that is staggering in contrast with late ‘bourgeois’ performances” (Kuzmics 1991: 27). Their lives depended on the sophistication of their interaction with the other courtiers. This required of them intense monitoring of every aspect of social intercourse, their own and that of all others with whom they interacted, naturally resulting in the honing of those social skills upon which they depended.¹⁴

There came to be clear rules, the breaking of which would cause embarrassment and/or shame. This, according to Elias, started off in the earlier courts as external coercion,

¹³ This is very much analogous to the traditional social situation in Imperial China which has been described in similar terms (Pye 1992: 173).

¹⁴ It will be shown in Part Two that Chinese society very early on reached a level of development roughly analogous to this point in European history. The descriptions of court society, with ‘social prowess’ being the key weapon, sounds in many ways very similar to the situation in much of China even today. Though not a focus in this thesis, the similarity between social life at court as described by Elias, and that in the traditional Chinese village is an area that strongly merits further research.

but with the actions of more and more persons becoming increasingly entangled in a wider figuration, they turned into forms of self-restraint. Eventually, self-restraint is not merely exercised in front of the high and mighty, or strangers or almost anyone, but in front of oneself (Kuzmics 1987: 521).¹⁵

As the courts grew and more people were drawn into dependency within the court figuration, the constraints became more intense, leading in the direction of the internalization of social constraint as self-restraint.

Duerr raises some important objections to Elias's analysis regarding the internalization process which merit discussion at this point as they play into this and later analysis. According to van Krieken, Duerr is arguing that Elias is combining two different arguments in the civilizing process, that restraints were internalized, and that they became more effective. Duerr thinks that while the first may be valid, the second is not borne out by the evidence. He stresses that the further back in time one goes one does *not* see societies less controlled or restrained. In fact, the opposite is often the case (van Krieken 1998: 121-122).

This observation certainly applies to the Chinese social context where restraint has long been a vital concern for all social interaction and the controls involved, primarily face, are very rigid and demanding. In fact, many of the descriptions of the constraints in court society could fairly accurately be applied to most Chinese social contexts.

¹⁵ If one wished to situate China of the twentieth century, with face as its external constraint, into Elias's description of the European civilizing process, it would be at about the transition point of the earlier courts with shame as their external constraint. It is only in the Post-Opening period after 1978 that there is evidenced a more bourgeois-like transitional environment.

Duerr argues that since 'the people in small, easy to survey 'traditional' societies were far more closely interwoven with the members of their own group than is the case with us today' this means that 'the direct social control to which people were subjected was more unavoidable and air-tight'. Whereas for Elias the lengthening chains of interdependence characterizing industrializing and urbanizing societies can result in only the demand for greater foresight and self-restraint, Duerr suggests that 'associating with many other people also means, a lack of 'bindedness' and thus a relational freedom'. Being bound to a larger number of people thus means that breaches of norms and social deviance are 'less consequential, the person concerned does not lose *the* face but *one* of their faces' (van Krieken 1998: 122).

As far as it goes, this would seem to be a fairly accurate description of the contrast between, for example, the more traditional Chinese society and modern industrialised societies. The question remains whether or not this is an effective criticism of Elias?

Duerr agrees that urbanization and the decline of feudal economic relations had made traditional forms of social control far less effective, and that the forms of social control which emerged from around the Reformation and Counter-Reformation were more effective than the older ones in some respects. However, in other senses, 'a certain degree of porosity arose, which was unknown to the forms of social control in

‘archaic’ times and which gave people opportunities for freedom which they had never had before’ (van Krieken 1998: 122).

So the emergent forms of social control were more effective, but only in some areas. In other presumably important areas they allowed for freedoms which had never existed before. At this point it is unclear whether Elias would disagree with Duerr.

Medieval villages and members of tribal societies are, for Duerr, subjected to considerably more restraint than inhabitants of a modern industrial city (van Krieken 1998: 123).

These villages consisted of much more tightly knit webs of relations and groups than modern society, according to Duerr, and therefore logically imposed far greater constraint on the individual.

This is the most telling objection to Elias’s account of the civilizing process. It also represents a fairly accurate description of the Chinese social situation. Yet, despite its force as an objection, van Krieken finds a way to overcome it, providing a pathway for this thesis. He states the problem thus:

Duerr argues that individuals were ‘subjected to an essentially more effective and inexorable social control than today’. This does not mean that in specific historical contexts there may not appear situations of relative behavioural freedom, but Duerr attributes this to the transition between one type of social regulation and another, from the ‘village

eye' to the self-constraint of urban industrial societies. For Duerr, the intensification of self-control is less a product of any *increased* demands on individuals of more socially differentiated societies, and more the form of social regulation suited to social relations where one encounters a larger variety of 'interaction partners' from diverse social and cultural backgrounds (van Krieken 1998: 123-124).

And then provides a way out:

most social historians would accept the rough outline of what Elias has argued: a gradual intensification of self-discipline, a shift from social control based on public humiliation, neighbourhood surveillance, priestly condemnation, fear and violence, to internalised norms and values, a quite demanding socialization process, what many would call 'ideology' (van Krieken 1989: 208).

Goudsblom points out that Weber too sensed a "profound historical change in mentality or habitus - a shift towards more regular and all-round self-restraint" (Goudsblom 2004: 267). Van Krieken takes this a step further in declaring that Elias was far from alone. In fact he has "the majority of historical social scientists on his side; if he was wrong about a development in personality structure, then so were Weber, Simmel, Horkheimer, Mannheim, Foucault, and just about every scholar who has turned their attention to the question" (van Krieken 1998: 124-125). The author of this thesis is satisfied that Elias is correct in his argument that there was a historical, psychological change in European man, and that his explanation for that change, whether right in all the details or not, is

worthy of application to another culture in attempting to further understand its development.

In summary, this thesis might be said to agree with some aspects of Duerr's objections to Eliasian theory and the internalization of constraint, but not to the extent that they could be said to refute Elias's account of the civilizing process. As will be argued in Part Two of this thesis, it is the very nature of the social relations and their effectiveness within traditional societies that, somewhat ironically, results in a lack of internalization in some, particularly the Chinese, social situations. It is held (generally in agreement with Duerr) that it is the ever-present nature of these constraints, based on face-to-face interactions within very tightly knit webs of social relations, that causes them to remain external. This is not to say that there is no internalization whatsoever, but that constraint in such contexts remains primarily external because of its very ubiquity. "If parents beat their children with a stick for every transgression, children will avoid transgressions as long as they cannot be concealed [sic] from their parents, but they will not by themselves learn to control the impulses leading to transgressions" (Wouters 1977: 446). Ever-present external constraint does not allow for internalization on the same level. For constraint to be internalized, the traditional social relations, the tight web of relations holding people firmly in place, needs to be broken down allowing face-to-face interdependencies and constraints to become more distant.

The strength of these external constraints relative to that of the internalised constraints in more modern industrialised societies is not the question being addressed in this thesis. Rather, the question is, can Elias's ideas on the process of internalization itself be applied to other societies where this did not happen in anywhere near the same degree or

in the same spans of time as it did in Europe; societies that remain, for whatever reason, more traditional in their social organization? The answer is yes, provided the focus is on the details of the traditional figuration in Chinese society.

Absent the civilizing forces initiated by the monopoly of violence in combination with the central control over the distribution of resources breaking down the traditional figuration, social constraints in more traditional societies remain largely face to face (and indeed highly effective) and the chains of interdependence never extend to the degree necessary for the internalization of social constraint. There is certainly change, but the details and pace will be different than it was in Europe, and possibly radically so. This is a central contention of Part Two of this thesis dealing with Chinese society.

There are a few other issues that should be elaborated upon before moving on to discuss Eliasian concepts. First, and probably most important, there are those who read Elias as advocating an a priori view of human nature. Maso is one who indicates as much in holding that the civilizing process is, for Elias, in effect the taming of innate untamed drives. While crediting Elias with furthering Cassirer's thinking on relationist principles by showing that they "could encompass all aspects of society" (Maso 1995a: 132), Maso argues that "the notion that 'drives' are to a large extent innate was one of the foundations of his civilizing theory" (Maso 1995b: 72).

Van Krieken refers to this general position in his study of Elias as a fairly common and a potentially effective criticism of Elias's work, if it were true.

Finally, many of the criticisms appear to arise in response to Elias's persistent use of the concepts 'restraint' and 'constraint'. Elias's own theoretical position is that human habitus is socially constituted, but the notion of restraint, emanating from either outside or within an individual, implies the existence of some presocial 'nature' which requires restraining (van Krieken 1998: 133).

The point is clearly and simply that the existence of innate drives (the idea of restraint implying pre-existing drives that need restraining) would seem to hint at the existence of a more or less Kantian a priori aspect of the human condition. But Elias is not left on the hook for long. The charge is rebutted.

Goudsblom says that this "allegation is as absurd as it is ponderous", pointing out that Elias's work, especially *The Civilizing Process*, belies this idea (Goudsblom 1995: 124). Contrary to Maso's observations, this was a very important element of Elias's whole theoretical stance. George Cavalletto sums up Elias's answer to this objection in *The Civilizing Process*, arguing that the aggressiveness of the knights is said by Elias to be *compelled* by Fremdszwang, and not *socially released*. He goes on to point out that in the synopsis Elias says "Drives... are 'always already socially processed.' 'In other words,' he adds, drives are 'sociogenetically transformed in their function and structure'" (Cavalletto 2007: 217 citing Elias). Elias clearly dismisses the idea of the innateness, or "pre-sociality of drives" (Cavalletto 2007: 217). "drives, while containing natural (i.e. physiological) 'raw materials' and 'elementary energies,' are from an individual's birth onward 'sociogenetically transformed' by social relations into what we, as social beings, experience as 'drives'" (Cavalletto 2007: 217).

One might still press for an answer here as to what exactly the ‘raw materials’ and ‘elementary energies’ referred to by Elias are. Cavalletto points out that Elias does indicate an answer to these questions, though it is often overlooked. “Drives... are constituted by processes identified with three separate but related fields, each of which contributes its own regularities ‘to a certain extent’ to this constitution: the processual fields of the soma, the psyche, and society” (Cavalletto 2007: 219).^{16 17}

¹⁶ For a more detailed discussion of this topic look to Cavalletto, *Crossing the Psycho-Social Divide: Freud, Weber, Adorno and Elias* starting on p. 215, or Elias’s introduction to the chapter on the changes in medieval aggressiveness in his *The Civilizing Process*. Also see Maso; ‘Elias and the Neo-Kantians’ as well as ‘The Different Theoretical Layers of *The Civilizing Process*’, and Kilminster and Wouters, ‘From Philosophy to Sociology’. This thesis is satisfied with Elias’s response to this criticism, and in that it is not central to this effort, it will not be delved into any further.

¹⁷ Kilminster suggests that the other recent criticisms of Elias are reducible to four categories: cultural relativism highlighted by Blok and Duerr, ‘stateless civilizations’ (van Velzen, Rasing, Jagers), the permissive society (Brinkgreve, Korzec), and the barbarism of the 20th century (Leach) (Kilminster 1991: 166). He goes on to point out that Elias established criteria for measuring progress and regress and it was these issues that these procedures were designed to deal with. As a crowning blow (in this author’s opinion) to these criticisms Kilminster further points out that Elias “would have had to have been monumentally naive or obtuse to have made such obvious blunders” (Kilminster 1991: 168). There is no reason to think that he was and in this author’s opinion the above objections do not represent a serious problem for Eliasian thought.

A final objection that this author feels is worthy of attention has been voiced by Bryan Turner. This is Elias’s lack of consideration of religion as a shaping influence in social life. “Religion has played a major part in shaping the restraints on social behavior that make social life orderly and predictable” (Turner 2004: 261). This is an important criticism of Elias’s work, one which Elias did respond to (in this author’s opinion not adequately), but one which also lies outside the scope of this thesis.

Chapter Two - Eliasian Concepts

A summary of Elias's account of the civilizing process has been presented as a background to prepare the reader for the analysis of the Chinese social situation in Part Two, but some concepts need further treatment before delving into an entirely different culture. Those concepts are: *homo clausus*, habitus, figurations, power, and finally competition.

Homo clausus

“Elias proposes a paradigm shift from ‘*homo clausus*’ to ‘*homines aperti*’, i.e. men situated in contexts, subject to constraints, and seeking to maximize control” (Arnason 1989: 51). For Elias, beginning with the individual in the sociological endeavour was methodologically pointless. Kilminster makes the point that *homo clausus* was a very important concept for Elias in that he seemed to see its influence everywhere (Kilminster 2007: 15).¹⁸ Mennell agrees with Kilminster in holding that sociology is of the opinion that humans bring a sort of self-identity to the collective. He goes on to say that this is more or less obviously incorrect. “We all know how misleading that is” (Mennell 1994: 176). For Mennell, and for Elias as well, humans have always been social and form their identities in interdependence.

Kilminster continues:

¹⁸ Kilminster points out that by not always acknowledging his intellectual debts Elias may have been inconsistent with the position he so strenuously held. The implication is that he may indeed have seen himself as an isolated individual in the sociological endeavour (Kilminster 2007: 15).

As a counterweight, Elias repeatedly stressed that because people lived in interdependence with each other they were inconceivable in isolation. Hence, starting sociological enquiries from the 'individual' and then trying to deduce 'society' was both misleading and futile. One had to start with interdependent people in the first place (Kilminster 2007: 15).

At the same time that Elias decried the idea of the isolated individual as an unsuitable starting point, he also pointed out that the whole notion of the individual was in itself a result of the civilizing process. As alluded to earlier, this notion of the isolated individual being a product of the civilizing process fits well with the tenor of this whole project with respect to the Chinese.

Insisting on the historicity of social and psychic development as Elias does, carries with it certain assumptions. One important consideration is that humans do not exist in a vacuum, separated from their social surroundings by an impenetrable ontological wall. In this sense, Elias is arguing against the very notions subsequently described as having been inscribed in the Western human self-perception since roughly the time of Descartes. Elias suggests that since that time man started to view himself as an individual, a rather new perspective in social history. In *The Society of Individuals*, Elias describes this changing/changed self-image of man in the following terms:

The self-perception of the person as observer and thinker was reified in speech and thought, giving rise to a notion of an entity within the human being which was cut off from everything going on outside itself by the walls of its bodily container, and which could gain information

about outside events only through the windows of the body, the sense organs (Elias 1991a: 107).

In other words, individuals existing somehow within the bodily container viewed the outside world, perceived it in the only way they could, through their senses, and reacted accordingly. This is the great dualism with which Elias (and many others) had so much difficulty and which he struggled so fervently against; what he termed *homo clausus*. A seemingly unbridgeable barrier had been erected between individuals and their surroundings.¹⁹

Blok makes an insightful contribution to this conversation in referring to the concept of freedom. He says that the modern idea of freedom is ‘freedom to.’ In medieval times it was ‘freedom from.’²⁰ He adds that the plural is rarely seen now. Blok feels this represents a problem for “sociological insight, as the plural usage brings out more clearly the interdependence, that is, the alliances and oppositions between people, whereas the singular conjures up the metaphysical image of human beings as windowless monads, as *homines clausi*” (Blok 1977: 184). This is a good example of a perception having changed due to a historical change from an understanding of people as interdependent to their being understood as isolated individuals; a perception that is itself a result of the civilizing process (It might also be worth noting here that the

¹⁹ In rejecting the idea of *homo clausus* Elias was not advocating a thorough social determinism as he is sometimes accused of doing, but only that society and the individual are so interconnected as to be incomprehensible in isolation. Each impacts the other to a degree that to look at either in isolation is ludicrous.

²⁰ Isaiah Berlin made the distinction between the positive ‘freedom from’ and the negative ‘freedom to’, though it originally can be traced to Kant.

distinction between the positive freedom to and the negative freedom from can be attributed to Isaiah Berlin, and possibly even traced back to Kant).

Elias argues that humans are personally impacted by their immediate social environment and therefore by historical development as well, in that their personal environment is considered necessarily a product of historical social development. Society and the individual are integrally related, as are, in an extension of that point, socio- and psychogenetic changes. For Elias, the whole notion of the classic dualism, of an entity existing somehow separately within the human head, cut off from the outside world, was one of the primary sources of misunderstanding within the fields of philosophy and the social sciences (Elias 1994a). This notion had to be re-thought in order to develop a more accurate model of humanity and society.

Social development continued in more or less the same direction (the already acknowledged short-term changes in direction not affecting the longer term trend) through the absolutist state courts and into 'bourgeois' society. Throughout, with the changing social order's growing differentiation and extending chains of interdependence first in the court and later in wider society, people were forced to view life with both greater reflection and more effective foresight and anticipation (Elias 1994a). If they wanted not only to thrive, but even to survive in this changing social environment, they had no choice.

As individuals come to experience more overlapping and possible contradictory sets of interests and allegiances, their actions become correspondingly constrained. That is to say, the increasing likelihood of

unforeseen 'boomerang' effects, constrains individuals to reflect upon, preconsider or otherwise exercise restraint in the conduct of daily life (Loyal 2004: 134).

Simply put, as people became interdependent with more other people there were more, and increasingly varied, demands upon their own behaviour. The old order of social relations was breaking down in favour of a new one that was making different demands and requiring different responses. In order to interact effectively within their growing figurations, they had to be able to see the 'bigger picture' with all the different players, and all their different agendas. What this really represented was greater detachment of the individual from his environment in the sense of being able to view it 'from afar' and respond more objectively. This was something new. A person's social interdependencies, which had previously been for the most part restricted to those that were personal and face to face, were now being stretched well beyond 'visual' limits. According to Elias, this increasingly detached perspective was ultimately to be the precursor of modern individualism, or what became his '*homo clausus*.'

If specific balances between involvement and detachment are part of what is learned by every child in each particular society, the question is how the public standards available for learning are themselves formed and changed over time. It is here that Elias forges the link between the theory of involvement and detachment and the sociogenetic and psychogenetic theory expounded in *The Civilising Process*: rising standards of detachment of knowledge require a similar rise over many generations in the standards of self-control that have to be learned in the

course of growing up, the same transformation of personality structure (Mennell 1992: 163).

In a very real sense the civilizing process itself was therefore responsible for constructing the wall that emerged between individuals and their social surroundings (van Krieken 1998: 55).²¹ But as Burkitt explains with the following comments, and as was touched upon earlier, Elias effectively showed through his *Civilizing Process* that the individual cannot be separated from the surrounding society, or the history of that society, and in this sense, while *homo clausus* is itself a product of the civilizing process, it is nothing more than a myth.

All aspects of the self, then are socially formed. They are not regions within separate and self-contained personalities, but are moments in the network of social relations and activities ... There is no division between the individual and the social. We cannot say that the boundary of the personality is the skin, or any other membrane – physical or psychological – which acts as a barrier within which to contain individuality. Indeed, the whole concept of ‘individuality’ as a self-contained and pre-given entity is now undermined. We must begin to see

²¹ As a brief aside, it is this very perspective of a radical separation between the individual and society which Elias claims has made sociology fall woefully short of its potential. Elias seems to be saying that sociologists, who have grown up and been nurtured in this social environment and assume a more or less clear idea of *homo clausus*, are unable to see that same environment in any other way but from an individualistic perspective. The individual/society issue has already been discussed in greater detail at the beginning of this thesis.

personality as social in all its aspects and understand individuals as social selves (Burkitt 1991: 212-213).²²

With these words, Burkitt brings down the curtain on the concept of *homo clausus* within the social sciences (as opposed to its use with regard to the self-experience of people in general) and, though its demise is probably not yet certain, there does seem to be a shift away from *homo clausus* and toward *homines aperti*.

Therefore the *psychogenesis* of the adult personality make-up in our ‘civilized’ society cannot be understood in isolation from the *sociogenesis* of our ‘civilization’ (Mennell 1989: 50).

To conclude this brief discussion of the internalization process and the formation of the individual, while the notion of the individual has become a fundamental Western assumption, the idea itself, according to Elias, is ironically merely a product of long term social processes; of the civilizing process. In societies where the civilizing process has followed a different course, it is reasonable to expect a different understanding of the individual.

Moving a little further in the direction of person formation, and in establishing the foundation for the forthcoming examination of the Chinese context, the obvious next place to look is at Elias’s concept of habitus.

²² As will become clear later, this is an argument that would be intuitively obvious to the Chinese. Their culture never developed the conception of such a membrane around the individual. Again, the derivation of the Chinese word *ren* mentioned earlier provides valuable insight on this point.

Habitus

That which was developing/changing in the individual(s) as they reacted to a changing social environment (the civilizing process) was what Elias came to refer to as the habitus, and here he means the individual habitus.

Habitus is a useful word in referring to the modes of conduct, taste, and feeling which predominate among members of particular groups. It can refer to shared traits of which the people who share them may be largely unconscious; for the meaning of the technical term 'habitus' is, as Norbert Elias used to remark, captured exactly in the everyday English expression second nature - an expression defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as 'an acquired tendency that has become instinctive.' ...

Habitus is closely related to the notion of identity. (Mennell 1994: 177).

Mennell further says that identity differs in that it may be more 'conscious' than habitus. He also points to the 'taken for grantedness' of the 'habitus' as being good for Elias's purposes because it helps in explaining the rightness of the self and members of one's group and the wrongness of others, further establishing the strength of the 'we image' phenomenon (Mennell 1994: 177). This, in turn, is obviously important because it is the 'we image' of the traditional figuration that must be broken down in some measure to allow for greater competition leading to further differentiation, extending chains of interdependence, and ultimately the internalization of constraint. These 'we images' that are so integral to the make-up of the habitus of a group or its constituent individuals are very difficult and slow to change. It therefore takes a powerful influence to cause this kind of change.

It is worthwhile here digging a little deeper into the use and meaning of the term. To quote Burkitt again in talking about what Elias is actually after:

Rather, what Elias wants us to contemplate is the entire restructuring of the personality and psychic economy in the process of historical change. To designate this level of the psychic economy and personality structure, Elias uses the term which is common to that used by Bourdieu - the social 'habitus'. That is, the characteristics and psychological dispositions shared by groups of people in a particular historical configuration, and in a particular position within their own social hierarchy (Burkitt 1991: 174).

Elias, in fact, used the term habitus "before its popularization by Bourdieu (1979)" (Dunning and Mennell 1998: 340-341). Bourdieu, in turn, makes the point that "the idea of *habitus* has a long tradition behind it. The Scholastics used it to translate Aristotle's *hexis*. You can find it in Durkheim... It's also in Marcel Mauss" (Bourdieu 1993: 86). For Bourdieu the habitus is something acquired through time and is not merely reproductive, but also generative. It reproduces what it has learned, but often changes it in the process (Bourdieu 1993: 87). Fowler, in discussing a similar aspect of the habitus, says, "Thus people (agents), collectively or individually, transform or reproduce their social structures, but they do so within specific social conditions, including those that are internalized as part of their habitus" (Fowler 1997: 23). The habitus works within the environment and is both reproductive and transformative. It operates within and according to the rules of the social environment in which it finds itself, but also acts

upon that environment. This is much in agreement with Elias's understanding and use of the term *habitus*. As such it is understandable why it was so important in his civilizing process, as well as his ideas on sociology in general. It is a very real entity, but one that is in a constant state of change, acting and being acted upon. And it is interacting with the civilizing process itself.

Having established the *habitus* as that which changes in the civilizing process, Elias's definition of the term might require further elaboration. Van Krieken refers to Elias's idea of *habitus* in the following terms:

The concept of habit or *habitus* refers to 'the durable and generalized disposition that suffuses a person's action throughout an entire domain of life, or in the extreme instance, throughout all of life - in which case the term comes to mean the whole manner, turn, mould, or cast of personality'. Elias called it 'second nature' (van Krieken 1998: 47 citing Elias).

He later notes that "The dynamics of figurations are also dependent on the formation of a shared social *habitus* or personality make-up which constitutes the collective basis of individual human conduct" (van Krieken 1998: 59). Van Krieken elaborates by quoting Elias:

This make-up, the social *habitus* of individuals, forms, as it were, the soil from which grow the personal characteristics through which an individual differs from other members of his society. In this way

something grows out of the common language which the individual shares with others and which is certainly a component of his social habitus – a more or less individual style, what might be called an unmistakable individual handwriting that grows out of the social script (van Krieken 1998: 59 citing Elias).

It is also appropriate to point out the difference between individual and social habitus here as Fletcher does with reference to this same passage:

One can distinguish between individual habitus, which refers to the learned emotional and behavioural dispositions which are specific to a particular person, and social habitus, which denotes the learned social dispositions shared by most members of a group or society (Fletcher 1997: 11).

Fletcher suggests that habitus is a way of understanding change at an individual level within the civilizing process. Again, the changing individual habitus is the changing psyche of the civilizing process. The social habitus is the social seedbed out of which the individual habitus grows. What the word provides, according to Fletcher, is a more or less value free way of dealing with the subject matter of the civilizing process. With this idea of habitus, Elias has gone beyond the notion of *homo clausus* to a notion of the ‘individual’ integrally tied to his social surroundings.

This whole notion of habitus is tightly bound up with, as the above implies, the habits of a person or social group. Several writers, including van Kreiken, point out that both

Durkheim and Weber saw a need to get at the habits of man in order to understand human conduct. In this sense Elias was following a similar path. Cavalletto sums up Durkheim thus:

As Durkheim wrote, anticipating Freud, 'it is not enough to direct our attention to the superficial portion of our consciousness; for the sentiments, the ideas which come to the surface are not, by far, those which have the most influence in our conduct. What must be reached are the habits... these are the real forces which govern us' (van Krieken 1998: 47 citing Durkheim).

Van Krieken goes on to talk about how Weber saw the same thing in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (Weber 1958). Our actions are fundamentally based on habit. The identity a person develops over time, from childhood moving forward, is their habitus which emerges from the habits of the figurations of which they are a part. "These social habits or dispositions are likely to be common to the social class or religious or ethnic group in which we are reared, as part of the social habitus of that group. Our tastes and distastes, the things we find acceptable and unacceptable, attractive or repulsive, are formed within this social habitus" (Burkitt 1991: 206-207).

For Elias people form their identity over the course of their lives, beginning in the earliest childhood. One learns it from their social environment, from birth to the point where they forget it was even learned, to the point where the learned habits are so ingrained that they are no longer a part of one's consciousness. They are internalized as

one's individual identity, formed through the figuration of which one is a part, which is itself historically specific and always changing.

Once again in explaining this Elias directs our attention to the medieval social transitions as his starting point for a changing habitus/psyche and ultimately an individualist perspective (Elias 1994a).

Figurations

Peter Seglow stresses the importance of Elias's use of the word "configuration". The word symbolises Elias's view of the world as a constantly shifting nexus of inter-dependent forces." (Seglow 1977b: 349). This avoids the problems that emerge when the model of the natural sciences is used for the social sciences.

According to Seglow, there are three reasons why emulating the natural sciences is a problem:

1. Nothing in the social world is constant.
2. Thinking in terms of constants causes us to "think in terms where the process of change is conceptually distinct from the supposedly static entity which is merely subject to it" (Seglow 1977b: 350). This causes us to think in a way such that we might think the institution exists independently of the process of change. "All social structures are composed of a configuration of characteristics whose precise composition exists only for an instant in time" (Seglow 1977b: 350).

3. Using the scientific model has led sociologists “into an almost irresistible temptation to count things” (Seglow 1977b: 350). For Seglow statistics are only a tool, and need to be understood as such and nothing more.

The idea of figurations effectively deals with all of the above potential problems. It is a concept so closely tied to interdependence that its importance in Elias’s overall program is unmistakable. As an introduction to the idea, a figuration might be thought of as that web of relations containing those individuals with whom one is interdependent.

Oloffson provides a more sophisticated, yet very concise definition of the concept:

“Networks of interdependent, i.e. reciprocally dependent individuals and groups, with shifting and asymmetrical power balances between them” (Oloffson 2000: 362). It is only here, for Elias, in these ‘webs of relationships’, that an accurate understanding of society can be gleaned. Where other sociologists talk about structure, Elias talks about figurations. “For Elias structures *are* figurations, they can only be understood as being *constituted* by acting human beings, and the concept of figuration is intended to *dissolve* the distinction between system and social integration, not take its place within it” (van Krieken 1998: 59). Cavalletto elaborates on the correspondence between structure and figuration in suggesting that Elias’s use of the term figuration shows the many ways the sociogenetic and psychogenetic can be related. *Social structure* for Elias is “a pattern of pressures exerted upon people by their relationship with others upon whom they are functionally dependent either directly or indirectly” (Cavalletto 2007: 212). This, of course, is making essentially the same point, that for Elias structures *are* figurations, and that really, the idea of ‘structure’ as it is commonly understood is a misrepresentation of

social reality.²³ This is a significant and very important shift in point of view within the discipline. For Elias it is also fundamental to understanding society; this is where the study of sociology must begin in order to be successful.

Given the importance of the idea Elias will again be quoted at some length here. In *What is Sociology*, Elias extends his understanding of figuration using his game (in this case, cards) analogy in the following way:

despite all the expressions which tend to objectify it, in this case the course taken by the game will obviously be the outcome of the actions of a group of interdependent individuals. It has been shown that the course of the game is relatively autonomous from every single player, given that all the players are approximately equal in strength. But it does not have substance; it has no being, no existence independently of the players, as the word 'game' might suggest. Nor is the game an idea or 'ideal type', constructed by a sociological observer through considering the separate behaviour of each individual player, abstracting the particular characteristics which several players have in common,

²³ Jackson makes a helpful point about the word 'structure' along the same lines as that made by Elias regarding culture and civilization. "Comparison with a building suggests something hard, permanent, and complete, as if it were built from solid materials and to a predetermined plan. Social structure would then enter economics as a rigid constraint that restricted human behavior. The static analogy is misleading and offers at best a partial view of structure. In its earliest English language uses, *structure* was a noun of process which referred to the act of building, not the end product; only later has structure become static... Even when seen as a state rather than a process, structure still has a capacity for change" (Jackson 2003: 728).

and deducing from them a regular pattern of individual behaviour (Elias 1978: 130).

The game is something other than any of the players themselves, but it has no existence apart from the players. No individual player determines the figuration. The figuration is in some sense a result of the combined interactions of the players in relation to each other.

The 'game' is no more an abstraction than the 'players'. The same applies to the four players sitting around the table. If the term 'concrete' means anything at all, we can say that the figuration formed by the players is as concrete as the players themselves. By figuration we mean the changing pattern created by the players as a whole - not only by their intellects but by their whole selves, the totality of their dealings in their relationships with each other. It can be seen that this figuration forms a flexible lattice-work of tensions. The interdependence of the players, which is a prerequisite of their forming a figuration, may be an interdependence of allies or of opponents (Elias 1978: 130).

The above provides valuable insight into Elias's meaning of the concept figuration. It was his intent in using the concept to move toward eliminating the opposition between the 'individual' and 'society.' For him, as has already been seen, this was a hurdle that sociology had to clear in order to provide an accurate and successful reflection of that which it purported to observe. The above quotation should make clearer how his thinking about figurations moves in that direction. The figuration (game) exists both

because of the actions of the players, tying the players and the game inextricably together, and as a 'changing pattern', in a sense beyond them.

When we look at social formations of whatever type, what we are actually seeing are figurations, or webs of human relationships consisting of any number of people who make up a given group for whatever reason. These figurations overlap extensively and pulsate with change and activity – hence Elias's oft cited dance metaphor to exemplify the term. They both influence and are influenced by the individuals that form them.

Individuals are not members, so to speak, of one and only one figuration to which they have somehow sworn an oath of allegiance. Instead, people act out their lives within any number of figurations, all of which are integral in their make-up. From moment to moment one might be reacting to or acting within the figurations of their family, their baseball team, their home town, their graduating class at university, or even their nation of origin. And within each of these different figurations, the individual has differing roles and, therefore, in a sense, differing identities. Van Krieken points out that the idea of figuration, for Elias, represents all types of relationships whether good, bad, or indifferent (van Krieken 1998: 57). A man can be loving father in the morning, vicious combatant in the afternoon, and peacemaking neighbour in the evening, all the while being entirely consistent within his set of roles dictated by the figurations of which he is a part. Importantly, in all of these roles he is acting out his position in relation to interdependent others, albeit different sometimes overlapping sets of others.

Composition of Figurations

For most of human existence “human beings have lived in small bands, based on kinship” (de Swaan 1995: 27). Only within the past 10,000 years with the emergence of sedentary agriculture has this changed. At that point people had identification by proximity, not based on kin, but on the village (de Swaan 1995: 27). With this change came the emergence of what are thought of as more traditional societies. Within most traditional contexts, the average person’s figurations will normally be limited first to their family, whether immediate or extended, and then to their village. The two may well be, and in fact often are, the same in that the village is nothing more than an extended family. The Chinese social context fitted this general description until quite recently, and in many locations still does. In these less complex societies, figurations tend to be relatively smaller, and for that reason interaction between the members thereof are more often than not, face-to-face. The chains of interdependence are, of course, short with people not normally venturing too far beyond village boundaries. Differentiation is relatively low with the community being largely self-sufficient. Over time (Elias thinks in terms of centuries), with the always and ever-present increasing differentiation and resultant extending chains of interdependence, the number and complexity of the figurations in which any one person is involved increases significantly. This is a lengthy process and, for reasons to be stipulated, can in some cases extend for millennia.

Examining societies considered more modern, one sees figurations that are far more extended where interaction is, more often than not, no longer face to face. These societies are far more complex. Individuals, instead of being part of one or, at most, a few figurations, may be interacting within a considerable number on an ongoing basis

and have different roles and response sets for each. And, very importantly in Eliasian theory, most of the people with whom one is interdependent are largely unknown to them. In Eliasian theory, this fact is integral in the internalization process, in that one is forced to look much farther down the chains of interdependence in considering the ramifications of their actions, whereas in simpler societies the constraint was much more 'local' and immediate, and therefore, external. In this changing situation, greater care in social interaction was forced on the individual in their own self-interest.

This clearly brings the argument back around to the issue of change. The shift from traditional to more modern societies can be reduced to the changing shape of the figurations in society over time. It was the nature of the interdependencies in the figuration that was changing. The chains between the individuals involved in the interdependencies were extending. More people were tied to the figuration in some fashion. The relations were becoming far less intimate.²⁴ The balances of power were becoming less graded. The act of relating socially within one's changing figuration was itself changing considerably. Elias argued that this type of change was ongoing, without a beginning or an end. For reasons to be explored, the above mentioned changes did not occur in the Chinese context in the imperial period.

Formation/Identification

“The dynamics of figurations also depend on the formation of a shared social habitus or personality makeup which constitutes the collective basis of individual human conduct” (van Krieken 2001: 356). Identification is the key to why people come together in groups, or figurations, around which they form 'we images'. Within these figurations

²⁴ The Chinese notion of *guanxi* will be used in Part Two of this thesis to explore similar developments in that context.

they feel, or come to feel, that they are more like each other than they are like the social 'other'. According to de Swaan,

Social identification is a process in which people come to feel that some other human beings are much 'the same' as they are and still others are more 'unlike' them. It occurs in the course of group formation, as part of the dialectics of inclusion and exclusion from which groups emerge in a dynamics of competition (de Swaan 1995: 25).

In Elias's study with John L. Scotson of the 'Winston Parva' social context, a community is observed in which there appear to be three relatively distinct groups of people; one that has lived in the community for an extended period, another that is relatively newer but made up of individuals and families who are considered professional, and a third that is newer to the area and of working class background (Elias 1994c). The people making up the group living in the community for a longer period are referred to as the established and as a result apparently only of their term of residence are in some sense considered to be of a higher class.

In Dunning's paper on race relations and figurations he describes four features of Elias's established – outsider relationships.

1. A tendency for the established group to perceive the outsiders as 'law-breakers' and 'standard-violators'
2. A tendency for the former to judge the latter in terms of a 'minority of the worst'

3. A tendency for the outsiders to accept the established group's stigmatization of them
 4. A tendency for the established to perceive the 'outsiders' as in some way 'unclean'
- (Dunning 2004: 82).

Though in the Winston Parva case it is decidedly not an issue of race relations, the above four features still apply. What are evidenced are figurations of people who, otherwise generally quite similar, have formed 'we images' based on their longevity of residence within the community. These 'we images' can be very powerful and enduring.

A member of the 'Established' figuration of Winston Parva is also a member of the 'Winston Parva' figuration which includes both the professionals and the 'Outsiders'.

As societies constantly change and grow more complex, with far longer chains of interdependence, 'we images' as they relate to figurations and the individuals that make them up grow progressively more ambiguous. The ties are less intense and / or intimate. For that reason too the ties to the older, more traditional figuration(s) lose their intensity and constraining influence.

Change as Inherent

Van Benthem van den Berg captures both the constant motion and the variety of figurations in saying that we see "human history and society as moving interconnected figurations of interdependent states, ruling and ruled groups, social classes, established and outsider groups, and in the last instance, of interdependent human beings, both in the plural and in the singular" (van Benthem van den Bergh 1977: 173). As figurations oscillate both within themselves and in responsive interaction with other figurations,

they themselves are constantly changing. Again, it is change that is the one constant for Elias.

In the concept of figuration he brings together the concepts of change, time and figuration in a way such that all three are fundamental to the sociological endeavour. “Figurations of interdependent individuals and groups can only be properly understood as existing over time, in a constant process of dynamic flux and greater or lesser transformation” (van Krieken 2001: 357). Elias regarded the natural state to be that of change, with stability as the aberration, much in contradistinction to his contemporaries. The figuration, the set of relationships existing above and in some sense beyond the individuals embodying it, remains contiguous, while still undergoing continual change, through time. In addition it is only through these changing figurations that one can understand one of the more basic questions in sociology – the internalization of constraint and the transition from traditional to modern society. For it is actually the figuration that is changing, the shape of the figuration and the social relations within the society as a whole.

Van Krieken quotes Elias in *The Court Society* to emphasize that figurations ““continue to exist even when all the individuals who formed them at a certain time have died and been replaced by others”” (van Krieken 2001: 356 citing Elias). While any given figuration is made up of individuals, and individuals certainly impact the figurations of which they are a part, figurations are not reducible to their constituent individuals. Figurations are in a sense independent of those individuals. In other words, a figuration’s existence is not dependent on a particular set of individuals, but it also cannot exist without the individuals forming it at any moment. The village continues to

exist notwithstanding the passing over the course of time of any or all the individuals in it at any given time. It may well continue for centuries in an ever-changing (in the sense that the individuals making it up change), but still recognizable (in terms of the figuration itself) form. This is certainly often exemplified in the Chinese social context where some villages have existed for millennia. Van Krieken goes on to point out that when the activity of a figuration stops, the figuration will indeed cease to exist. In this sense, the figuration exists independently of the specific individuals of whom it is composed, but not of individuals per se, for it is they who carry out the activity on which it is based. Van Krieken puts it simply: “they [figurations] only exist in and through the activity of their participants”(van Krieken 2001: 356). It is this activity that changes, along with the shape of the figuration, hence changing ‘the game.’

Elias would further say that it is this change in the figurations making up society that ultimately causes the psychic change that is the civilizing process. For Elias, nothing can accurately be seen as static. Nothing is motionless. Everything is in a state of change at all times. To think of social reality as otherwise is to misunderstand it. And it is these changing relationships that are the figuration, that, over time, effects change in the individual human psyche. Differing social relations (or balances of power) within the figuration in which one is integrated present a changing social reality to which one has to respond and with which one must come to terms. Changing figurations represent the sociogenetic aspect of his formulation. In order to better understand this process one needs to know *why* there is a constantly changing universe of figurations making up society.

Social Relations as Shifting Balances of Power

Both power and change are central to Elias's thinking. Both are also intimately connected to social relations in Elias's bigger picture. In getting a clear picture of how this works for Elias it is worthwhile first looking at how power was understood by Max Weber, and then relating Elias's ideas to this understanding.

Weber related power and authority in his writings. He defined power in the following way. "In general, we understand by 'power' the chance of a man or of a number of men to realize their own will in a communal action even against the resistance of others who are participating in the action" (Weber 1948: 180). Dunning, through Henderson and Parsons' translation, stresses that 'chance' exists within a social relationship (Dunning 1977: 229). Weber's understanding of authority, on the other hand is the expectation that a specific order will be obeyed by certain people. Dahrendorf says that the difference lies,

in the fact that whereas power is essentially tied to the personality of individuals, authority is always associated with social positions or roles... It is only another way of putting this difference if we say – as does Max Weber – that while power is merely a factual relation, authority is a legitimate relation of domination and subjection. In this sense authority can be described as legitimate power (Dahrendorf 1959: 166).

Dunning suggests that the important difference lies elsewhere. He sees the difference as being between resistance with regard to power and obedience with regard to authority

(Dunning 1977: 229). More important, with regard to Elias, however, is Weber's view of the nature of power. "Despite the reference to a social relationship, power is not conceived in this [Weber's] definition as a *relational* phenomenon, that is as a product of relationships *per se* which can only be understood in a relational context" (Dunning 1977: 230). Dunning goes on to reference Emerson as saying that the flaw with the discipline's treatment of power in general is that it seems to see power as being more or less a characteristic of individuals or groups when instead it should be seen as lying in people's dependency (Dunning 1977: 231).

By logical extension Emerson (and Dunning) would seem to be saying that power is an aspect of social relations. As such, the Eliasian connection is coming to the fore, for relation and dependency, as already discussed, are central ideas to the civilizing process. Dunning refers to Elias's chains of interdependence as an appropriate means of research beyond the laboratory. The important point for this effort is that as one seeks to control relations of dependency one is seeking to control power chances.

Despite their differences, Weber and Elias would seem, by implication at least, to be in agreement on one issue regarding power. Weber at one point in his writings claims that, "Power, including economic power, may be valued 'for its own sake'" (Weber 1948: 180). People desire either power itself, in Weber's terms, or what power represents (control of relational balances) in Elias's terms. Turning again to the word 'chance' in the passage from Weber, for him this is the chance for people to realize their own will in a given action even overcoming the resistance of others who are involved. In this, power, the chance for one to realize one's own will, would equate to having the relational balance tilted in one's own favour, or being in control of a dependency

situation, or having control of a power chance. This would seem to be the object of the competition that was so central to Elias, as will be discussed in the coming section. So, whether or not they are in agreement on the exact nature of power, Weber and Elias both seem to see power as it relates to, or is manifested in, interpersonal relations. Power is central to social development as well as to sociological research.

Emirbayer argues that both Foucault and Bourdieu also talk about power in terms of relational balance. He first draws on Foucault's point that power balances are an integral part of all relationships, that they are an effect of and internal to the unequal nature of all relations (Emirbayer 1997: 292). He quotes Bourdieu to show how much of a 'relational balance' thinker he is:

'By field of power I mean the relations of force that obtain between the social positions which guarantee their occupants a quantum of social force, or of capital, such that they are able to enter into the struggles over the monopoly of power' (Emirbayer 1997: 292 citing Bourdieu and Waquant).²⁵

Emirbayer says of this passage:

Far from being an attribute or property of actors, then, power is unthinkable outside matrices of force relations; it emerges out of the very way in which figurations of relationships – as we shall see, of a

²⁵ An interesting area of further research would be the way in which the rise of the Communist Party has affected Emirbayer's fields of power at the local level of Chinese society.

cultural, social structural, and social psychological nature – are patterned and operate (Emirbayer 1997: 292).

In other words power is simply an inherent characteristic of relationships, and so of figurations as well as society. Where relationships exist there are balances of power and where there are such balances, there is also this element of force, or constraint, for no relationship is truly equal.

Elias's Triad of Controls

Power for Elias “refers to mutual but asymmetric networks of control and constraint, based on varying combinations of multiple resources” (Arnason 1987: 433).

Interdependencies in terms of power relations are situated at the root of Elias's entire social theory. For Elias it is within these interdependencies, in the form of balances of power, that the social constraints on humans are to be found. It is therefore also within these power balances as they change, that is to be found the impetus to social constraint transitioning to internalized constraint (restraint) and hence a changing psyche – the civilizing process.

An understanding of Elias's theoretical ideas of controls and constraints will assist in leading into the next section on competition. Elias writes the following in *The Germans*:

If one wanted to try to reduce the key problem of any civilizing process to its simplest formula, then it could be said to be the problem of how people can manage to satisfy their elementary animalic needs in their

life together, without reciprocally destroying, frustrating, demeaning or in other ways harming each other time and time again in their search for this satisfaction – in other words, without fulfilment of the needs of one person or group of people being achieved at the cost of those of another person or group (Elias 1996: 31).

Arnason further elaborates on the relational nature of power for Elias:

For Elias, the concept of power can denote a relationship between men and natural objects, as well as between men; by implication, it is also applicable to the relationship between social individuals and their own malleable, but neither amorphous nor self-regulating nature. The manifestations of power in this general sense are synonymous with the exercise of control. Elias refers to a ‘triad of basic controls’: a society can be analyzed and its level of development defined in terms of its capacity to control natural processes and social relations, and to make its individual members capable of controlling their own behaviour (Arnason 1989: 48).

In *What Is Sociology* Elias describes the triad of basic controls by which a society’s social development can be judged.

First, by control over the physical environment, he means both “control over what are normally called ‘natural events’” (Elias 1978: 156), as well as “technological development” (Elias 1978: 157).

Second, Elias talks about the level of control over the power chances within one's figurations. He refers to this as "control-chances over interpersonal relationships... over what are usually called 'social relationships'" (Elias 1978: 156) and "development of social organization... increasing differentiation and increasing integration of social bonds" (Elias 1978: 156-157). These control chances are relational power chances, such that the feudal lord or, later, the monopolist at court, would score well, while the peasant would score poorly.

Third is "the extent to which each of its members has control over himself as an individual" (Elias 1978: 156), or "the 'civilizing process'" itself (Elias 1978: 157). This refers to self-control (self-restraint) and is what develops over the course of time through the civilizing process. Whereas early on constraint was external to the individual and therefore social, with time it was internalized, resulting in self-restraint.

The three are described as closely interrelated but not 'parallel' in terms of developing in tandem and/or at equal rates. Elias warns the reader not to make the mistake of thinking that they will develop in such a fashion, a caution that is very pertinent to this thesis in that the civilizing process in China has taken a very different course from that in Europe. Speaking of the first two, Elias says that "they do not increase at the same rate. For example, it is highly characteristic of modern societies that their control-chances over non-human natural nexuses are greater and increase faster than their control-chances over interpersonal social nexuses." (Elias 1978: 156)

Elias posits the triad of basic controls as a means of ascertaining “The stage of development attained by a society” (Elias 1978: 156). What these controls represent is a people’s ability to control those four constraints to which Elias says they are naturally subjected:

1. Constraints imposed on people by the characteristics of their animal nature... hunger or the sexual drive” (Elias 1996: 32).
2. Constraints due to “dependence on non-human natural circumstances” (Elias 1996: 32); shelter, need for food, etc.
3. “Constraints which people exercise over each other in the course of their social lives” (Elias 1996: 32); external constraints
4. Self-constraints or ‘self-control’ [selbstzwänge].” This arises from reason, or conscience. This is only potential, and the type that emerges in an individual depends mainly on where they are born and grow up (Elias 1996: 32).

Within the social realm these constraints and their controls are embodied in the balances of power which are intrinsically a part of every social situation.

If social constraint (number 3 above), or ‘*Fremdzwang*’, is about constraint by other people then it is really about the ability of others to cause or to force one to, or not to, do something or react in some way.²⁶ One acts as a constraint by virtue of their being in relation, entailing a balance of power between themselves and others. As one constrains the actions of another they can be said to ‘have’ power over them, though have is not the word Elias would use. It is this for which people compete within their social relations or

²⁶ It is also this external social constraint that remains by far the most important constraint in Chinese society, manifested primarily in the form of face.

figurations. And ultimately, it is this which forces both differentiation and the extension of the chains of interdependence. In other words, it is the competition for power chances that drives the civilizing process. It will be seen that the Chinese situation developed very differently in this regard, but that in the long run its development can readily be described in Eliasian terms.

Many have described power, or possibly more accurately, shifting balances of power, as the central moving ‘force’ of Elias’s thought. For example, Sampson argues that,

The central idea that animates this and all of Elias’s subsequent works is that changes in the matrix of social relationships of power and interdependency among people (and groups) alter first the behaviour and then the consciousness and ‘emotional economy’ of all those caught up in the transformation (Sampson 1984: 26).

For all intents and purposes Sampson is here summarizing the civilizing process. Changes in social relationships (interdependencies, figurations, social structure, or even society) effect changes in behaviour and then, over time, the consciousness of everyone involved. At the centre of these social relationships are balances of power. Social relations effectively *are* nothing other than balances of power. It is therefore the changing balances of power that result in the changes that Elias labels the civilizing process²⁷. Burkitt ties together the notions of figurations, interdependence and balances of power quite effectively. In *Social Selves* he says that as a result of being a part of a

²⁷ In referring to informalizing processes, Wouters says it is ‘very obvious’ that informalization is connected with changing power balances whether of the different classes or different generations. Regardless of where the civilizing process is heading at a given time, or whether the “long term process of informalization is part of the civilizing process”, power balances are the key (Wouters 1977: 443).

figuration our personalities and behaviour “are dependent on the processes within those figurations. Furthermore, these processes are formed by the changing historical network of interdependencies between individuals, which, in turn, is influenced by the fluctuating balances of power within the figuration over time” (Burkitt 1991: 163). These processual effects are essentially axiomatic. In that we exist necessarily as part of a figuration(s), we are impacted by the changing balances of power therein. In describing it thus Burkitt effectively positions the importance of power within Elias’s constellation of concepts. In terms of social change it is clearly basic.

An important characteristic of power within this matrix is its nature as a balance. According to Burkitt, “power is a relation between individuals or groups, and this always comes in the form of a balance” (Burkitt 1991: 164), a balance in which individuals are always and unavoidably involved. Burkitt continues, quoting Elias,

‘the concept of power has been transformed from a concept of substance to a concept of relationship. At the core of changing figurations - indeed the very hub of the figuration process - is a fluctuating, tensile equilibrium, a balance of power moving to and fro, inclining first to one side and then to the other. This kind of fluctuating balance of power is a structural characteristic of the flow of every figuration’ (Burkitt 1991: 165 citing Elias).

Power as Elias understands it, is not something that one person possesses and another does not. It is part of the relationship itself, part of all relationships. In every relationship where the players ‘have’ an amount of power, they ‘have’ it only relative to the others in

that relationship, or in that figuration. “For Elias, humans can never be considered as separate from the figuration of social relations they form between themselves, a figuration that is bounded and changed by varying balances of power between the different groups and individuals within it” (Burkitt 1991: 163). Whether enemies, friends or otherwise, the players in any given figuration are (must be) interdependent as they face each other across the fulcrum of their particular relational balance(s). People can not be separated, and cannot escape, from their relations with others, and these relations are necessarily in the form of a balance. With this conceptualization the importance of power in the overall figuration picture is clear. These balances of power making up every figuration are as well in a constant state of motion and change.

The point has been made several times that for Elias, nothing can accurately be seen as static. Nothing is motionless. Everything is in a state of change at all times. To understand anything about social reality as otherwise is to misunderstand it. As balances, teetering insecurely one way, then another, it is these changing relations of power, the changing relationships that make up the figuration, that, over time, effect change in the individual human psyche. Differing social relations, within the figuration in which one is integrated, present a changing social reality to which one must respond and with which one must come to terms. This, in a nutshell, is the account of the civilizing process of Norbert Elias. Changing balances of power over time force accommodation by individuals to a continually new social reality. These accommodations, as they are passed from generation to generation over extended periods of time, though in a continual state of change, become habit to the point that one

is no longer aware of them, and in this way they are eventually internalized as self-restraint, or superego in Freudian terms.²⁸

This is not to say that people are ever fully accommodated to their social reality, or their figuration - in so far as change is the only constant, that would be theoretically impossible - but only that the “patterns of... feeling and thinking” are always in motion as well (Burkitt 1991: 167).

For individuals, relations within the figuration are historically variable, changing as the balance of power and the nature of interdependencies alter. This necessitates the changing of individual strategies of action within the figuration, which also creates a different structure of personality formation: a change not only in the patterns of activity, but also in feeling and thinking (Burkitt 1991: 167).

It will be remembered that all these changes take place over relatively extended periods of time. They are not in any sense abrupt, forcing quick and dramatic shifts in one's modus operandi. In fact the individual's habitus always lags the changing figuration.

One might think of it in terms of a professional sport where minor rule changes force the

²⁸ It is important to keep in mind that this only seems to occur in societies where the chains of interdependence have become fairly extended. It is only here where the social other has become unseen, where the social constraint is no longer ‘face to face’, that Elias's internalization takes place. This is the change event that must take place within the figurations of a society for internalization of external (social) constraint to occur. For this to occur, the traditional social ties within the traditional figuration must be broken down, or at the very least weakened considerably. This relates specifically to the Chinese context, as will be seen in Part Two of this thesis. For this we have to look to state formation and the attending monopoly of violence that Elias posits.

players to adapt to a slowly changing game, and often ultimately change the type of player that will be successful as time goes on.

Early in the European civilizing process, in less complex pre feudal and feudal societies, differentiation was low, and the chains of interdependence were short. As society was significantly less complex, the members of a given figuration were far fewer. The average person was part of a limited number of figurations, and possibly only one, with far less in the way of opportunity for improving their own situation.²⁹ Social relations were, of course, in the form of balances of power but the balances tended to favour one side or the other rather heavily, leaving little point and far greater risk in attempting to shift that balance. And as these early figurations were mostly self-sufficient, with resources being controlled within the figuration and the figuration providing for its own needs, there was little need or reason to compete for power chances beyond their relatively tight borders. The 'we images' of these smaller figurations were secure and dealings with outsiders were minimal. As society began to centralize, by extension the control of resources was taken out of the hands of the more localised figuration and centralised as well. Simple sustenance dictated that greater numbers of people came into contact and grew interdependent with each other in growing and increasingly complex figurations. As this process continued, differentiation continued to increase, as did the length of the chains of interdependence. Dependencies were changing, growing far more numerous and levelling out. Elias describes this latter idea as functional democratization. As the number of balances of power increased and became more multi-polar, and as power differentials subsequently decreased, the chance of improving one's own situation (control over power chances), without necessarily incurring the loss of

²⁹ This also represents a fairly accurate description of the Chinese social context up through the revolution of 1911, and even today for much of the population, though this is changing significantly.

one's own, or someone else's, head, grew more realistic. With greater numbers of people in relatively more equitable, more secure positions, competition for control over balances of power (power chances – usually entailing in some fashion or other, the control of resources) naturally grew, further increasing differentiation, lengthening the chains of interdependence, and driving on the civilizing process.

From the start, Elias's civilizing process seems ultimately to be about, or at least to be driven by, competition – competition ultimately in the interest of securing power chances entailing the control over the distribution resources.

Competition

Stephen Mennell sums up the importance of competition:

Elias makes clear that the most fundamental and general structural process underlying the civilizing process is the progressive division of labour or, more broadly, division of social functions. From very early in the history of European society, social functions have become more and more differentiated under the pressure of competition... As we have seen, competition takes many forms; the monopoly mechanism is one manifestation, competition between firms another, competitive refinement in court society a third. The more differentiated social functions become, the larger the number of people on whom one depends in all his actions. More, and longer, and more intertwining chains of interdependence intersect, so to speak, within every individual. To fulfil his own functions at his node in the web, every

individual is constrained to take account of the effects of his own and other people's actions through a whole series of links in the social chains. And the denser becomes the web, the greater the division of social functions, and the brisker the competitive forces generated within the figuration, the more does this pressure *increase* (Mennell 1989: 95-96, italics his).

Where differentiation is the most basic process of the overall civilizing process, competition is the most basic driving force. In feudal warrior society it was competition for land and control over soldiers that were the main forms of competition. During the period of the absolutist state court society, competition for prestige and social rank in a constant struggle for social dominance became more important. In 'bourgeois' society it was, and is, competition for wealth and advantage in the struggle for economic dominance that has always been central. Winning the struggle in any and all of these competitions enables one to control power chances in the social relations in which they are involved, in their figurations.

Even the cases of frightful violence sometimes described by Elias are only examples of the competition common to all living organisms. Referring to *The Civilizing Process*, Cavalletto suggests that "all historical formations" are determined by the same competition that drives the changes in interdependencies. Cavalletto goes on to put the overarching nature of competition in appropriately stronger terms by quoting Elias: "As the synopsis adds, 'competitive pressure... permeates... [these social] networks, affecting directly or indirectly *every single individual act*'" (Cavalletto 2007: 237 citing Elias, italics and brackets his).

The whole of the civilizing process is about “historically specific structures of social competition” (Cavalletto 2007: 237). He elaborates on this by saying that:

In each case the social dynamics under study embody historically specific structures of social competition... the social dynamics examined in these studies are all, at root, manifestations of attempts by groups and individuals to secure and maintain an advantage over the other groups and individuals. Competition, thus, is the other side of social fear; at base, it is *the* social source of the fears that shape the behavior of the members of society (Cavalletto 2007: 237).

Focussing on competition is also helpful in understanding how the concept of power fits into the civilizing process. As figurations shift and change over time, relationships, and people’s responses to those relationships, change as well. As smaller groups compete for advantage and are either victorious or not, larger, or at least different, groups ultimately form, and in the process the individuals making up those groups must adapt to new social situations. As they do so they are in competition to shift the prevailing balances of power in their own favour. They are seeking to control a greater number of power chances.

While Elias talks about state formation, differentiation, and interdependence as the keys to civilizing processes, and indeed they are, all of those transformations are also all driven by the underlying spur of competition. And as the civilizing process progresses, competition increases. Fletcher notes that “the trajectory of a lifetime within competitive

relations or balances of power with others is Elias's unit of analysis" (Fletcher 1997: 26). Here Fletcher describes balances of power as competitive relations, thus implying that the shifting balance is dependent upon more or less successful competition for power/control. Based on the above observations the place of competition for Elias seems clear. Ultimately it is competition that is at the root of both social change and individual identity. As people compete for survival, they are ultimately embroiled in a competition over power chances, and the 'right', or chance, to control power chances. They are actually competing for a favourable balance of power. The more the balances in which they are involved are in their favour the more they control.

Ultimately, humans are most actively involved in this competition for power chances, for the ability to control the power balances within their figurations, to control the figurations themselves. As individuals compete for the ability to control power chances, and either succeed or fail, the balances of power themselves are changed. The relations that make up society, constantly change. Because they are in a state of constant flux, so too is each person's psychic makeup, in that they are in constant need of making adjustment to ever changing power balances that effect them on every level of their make-up.

De Swaan's observations about the formation of 'we images' based on apparent similarity and how this initially translated in Europe through competition into figurations based primarily on kinship and proximity have already been noted (de Swaan 1995: 25-27). At that point there existed both "familial ties or the bonds of clan, referring to a shared and known ancestry, and neighbourly ties referring to adjacent or shared lands and to collective efforts for defence, policing, irrigation, building and so

forth” (de Swann 1995: 27). Society before, and even throughout, the imperial period in China ran very much parallel to this description of early European society. Continuing with the European context, there were new identifications between people uniting against outsiders who were in competition with them. Clan relations were still very important, but they were no longer the only relations that were important. De Swann makes the point that in the dialectics of identification, as some are included, others are necessarily excluded (de Swann 1995: 26), but the criteria for deciding who was to fit into which category were always on the move. At this point, with these typically small figurations, the ties of identification were still very strong. The strength of the ‘we image’ tightly bound the individual to the group. Competition for the most part served to reinforce this. It was at this point in their own civilizing process that the Chinese can most accurately be described as remaining for over two millennia.

These were the social groupings represented early in Elias’s account of the civilizing process in Europe by the relatively undifferentiated, self-sufficient figurations of people with very short chains of interdependence. Their figurations were relatively small and most interaction was ‘face to face’. They existed prior to and at the onset of the process of centralization. For the most part, they produced and distributed what they needed for subsistence among themselves. Together, these figurations form a more or less cellular mosaic on a broader social canvas. In time elimination contests, competitions for physical survival and hence for control, commenced between different figurations, different groups of interrelated individuals. The process of centralization was underway. Some groups would win and more others would lose. As part of this process the ‘monopoly of violence’ started to take effect. This part of the civilizing process took

place much earlier in the Chinese context and led to the dynastic system of rule, as we shall see shortly.

In Europe, larger groupings eventually formed into what became the medieval courts. Over time these courts continued to compete for more, larger territory, some eventually winning and assuming command of the vanquished, absorbing them and all their members into new figurations. The losers were those for whom the balance of power within their new figuration had shifted decidedly against them. The winners now controlled the power chances of their social inferiors, formerly their relative equals, as they in turn competed with each other for the favour of the rulers of the given figurations and to shift the balance with their 'peers' to whatever degree possible back in their favour. Within these new larger figurations the effective behaviours (those actions maintaining the figurations, and on which they were based) determining success or failure had changed from those of earlier feudal society, but the fact of competition had not. Now it was a competition with a metaphorical dagger of social prowess, between rivals of a relatively lower rank currying the favour of their conquerors. The prize in these cases was prestige and social position, or social survival, as opposed to physical survival. Ultimately, it remained as it had always been, about control of power chances. At each 'step' along the way, the 'we images' of the individuals involved necessarily changed as well.

These courts continued to grow in a similar fashion, into what would become the absolutist state courts, at which point the number of people both within and existing in dependence upon the courts had expanded dramatically.

As this process continued the centralizing authority had both taken ownership of resources, and control of their distribution. This was important in its effect on life at the more localized level. In taking over the control of the distribution of resources, the monopolist had taken over functions formerly carried out by the feudal lords in their smaller, more localized figurations. In doing so he had broken down or at least considerably weakened much of the basis for the more traditional social relations, in that self-sufficiency of the local community had been reduced and dependence on the central authority increased. The people at the local level were now able, and in fact, had to form new 'we images' with different sets of social others as the old 'we images' were significantly weakened. With this changing social situation, people were necessarily interacting with others in very different social relation to themselves. The traditional 'we images' were changing. Along with these changes, competition among individuals was no longer restricted to the clan or village, but was fostered well beyond these formerly restrictive boundaries. It was this process leading to the assumption of the central control of the distribution of resources that did not occur in China. This is where the vital difference between the two civilizing processes lies. It is this final shift in competitive pressure that never occurred in China. For the Chinese what competition there was stayed almost exclusively within the boundaries of the local figuration.

Another important and obviously related consequence of competition and the breakdown of traditional social relations in Europe was its facilitation of the onset of functional democratization. According to Mennell,

Elias uses the term *functional democratization* to denote the process by which every individual is enmeshed in longer and denser webs of

interdependence with more and more others, leading to greater reciprocal dependency and more multi-polar control within and among groups... In the circulation of models, functional democratization is expressed in an overall trend towards *both diminishing contrasts and increasing varieties* (Mennell 1989: 109).

In other words, society was becoming flatter and more differentiated. Mennell elaborates on this when he relates the process as a whole to the democratization being discussed.

The hypothesis is that with the increasing scale and complexity of society - specifically, 'longer chains of interdependence' - people are subject to increasing pressure to exercise foresight and curb their impulses... What is more, it is suggested that longer chains of interdependence - *and especially more even power ratios between the links* - are associated with a 'widening circle of mutual identification'. In other words, people come to be able to 'feel the pain' of more and more other human beings (Mennell 2006: 430, italics mine).

The old social hierarchies within the formerly smaller, tighter figurations were largely broken down and as people continued to compete they were doing so in a different way, on a much broader basis and with different others (of course, without the use of weapons). In addition to this and as mentioned above, they were forming 'we images' with different, broader sets of social others. With this, there was the accompanying

increasing differentiation and lengthening chains of interdependence at the local level as well as at court.

In a sense, all of this facilitated the ensuing rise of the ‘bourgeois’³⁰, as they, too, competed for power, forcing further change in social figurations. The courtiers above them found themselves in competition both with themselves and with the ‘bourgeois’, while the ‘bourgeois’ below competed amongst themselves in a battle for economic power and survival, as well as with the workers below in the interest of maintaining their own position. In this way the models set at the court were gradually passed down the line to the rest of society.³¹ Van Krieken sums it up thus: “Competition also drove the spread of many aspects of courtly rationality first to the higher bourgeois strata, in their attempts to enter court society, and then in turn to the strata below them” (van Krieken 1998: 92).

Conclusion to Part One

As Elias describes the civilizing process, it is always ultimately headed toward the internalization of constraint. Through the state formation process (which was itself a competition for greater power chances) the emerging state, with its accompanying monopolization of the means of violence and through its assumption of control of the distribution of resources, affected a breakdown in the traditional figuration. This, in turn, spurred increasing competition for power chances on a broader scale, further driving the civilizing process, engendering increased differentiation and extended chains of interdependence. With them came further change in figurations (entailing changing social relations) and ultimately a changing psyche.

³⁰ Formerly the lower class finding the opportunity to compete for power through economic activity.

³¹ This represents Elias’s diffusion of the courtly model of etiquette.

The psychic transition of the civilizing process, according to Elias, begins with the relatively free range of emotion and response in the feudal period transitioning into the much more constrained environment of the courts where social prowess became the all-important skill. In this later context, external constraint in the form of shame (at least in its earlier manifestations) was a primary guiding social force. As the civilizing process progressed and with the rise of the 'bourgeois', interpersonal relations became greatly extended and one often no longer interacted directly with those with whom they were interdependent. This, according to Elias, resulted in the internalization of constraint.

In Part Two the focus is shifted to the Chinese social context which, until at least the second half of the nineteenth century, had remained highly resistant to social change for over two millennia. For reasons that should become clear, the Chinese social environment was strongly reminiscent of the court society that Elias describes as existing prior to the rise of the 'bourgeois' in Europe. In the Chinese context face has for long been the primary guiding social constraint and in this sense is analogous to shame as an external constraint in Elias's Europe.

It is argued that in the twentieth century the traditional order was finally impacted enough through the state's radical incursion into local society and assumption of control of the distribution of resources that civilizing trends could emerge. The highly localized and self-sufficient Chinese figurations began to change shape. Where in the past one's social position was fixed in a rigid hierarchy within a local environment, with loosened cultural and political constraints people began to move, both physically and socially, and interact with others with whom they never would, or even could have interacted in

the past. Figurations began to expand and the chains of interdependence began to extend in a fashion certainly more rapid, but also reminiscent of Elias's Europe at the time of the rise of the 'bourgeois'. In this new context different rules for interacting became a necessity, with the growth of *guanxi* being a manifestation of this fact.

Part Two will focus mainly on the process of the breaking down of the traditional social order over the course of about 150 years, to the point where the civilizing process could re-commence in the fashion to be described.

Part Two – An Eliasian Understanding of the Chinese Social Context

Chapter Three – Introduction to Part Two

Part Two of this thesis is a study of the Chinese cultural context using the Eliasian concepts examined in the Part One as a basic framework, showing how the use of Elias's understanding of power and competition can fruitfully assist in understanding a path of social development quite different from, yet in many ways analogous to, the European case. Ken Young, in his *State Formation in Southeast Asia* talks about the usefulness of Elias's monopoly mechanisms when applied to that region, in that they allow for "a dynamic of state formation prior to and not dependent on the growth of nationalism, and having its own momentum quite apart from the rise of the bourgeoisie" (Young 1997: 74). In this sense Elias's argument is quite valuable for the Chinese context, for China had neither a nationalist sentiment nor a 'bourgeois' class at the time when its state formed. It will be shown that the Chinese state developed very early on but the civilizing process did not progress beyond this initial stage for an extended period, a point that requires some explanation.

The question ultimately being addressed is whether the links Elias posited between state formation, the traditional social structure, the extent of differentiation, the length of the chains of interdependence, and the Chinese habitus in terms of external and internal constraint can reasonably be posited for the Chinese social context. The question is answered in the affirmative as it is posited that Elias's understanding of state formation and civilizing processes does, indeed fit the Chinese context.

As Elias describes it, the most basic source of the civilizing process at the interpersonal level is competition, both between groups (figurations) and between the individuals of a given society. It is competition first and foremost that engenders the process, ultimately forcing the internalization of constraint. In order to approach a conclusion to the initial question the broad focus of the thesis in Part Two will be on the changing nature of interpersonal relations; in Eliasian terms, the figurations and chains of interdependence at the local level. This approach is meant to parallel Elias's focus on the same things in his work in the European context.

Pre-1949, post-1949, and post-1978 China are the three periods examined. The pre-1949 period effectively covers China going back to its roots, but realistically looks at the early state formation period in showing first that through dominant orientations, the Chinese state system and social structure down to the local figurational level formed a remarkably stable symbiosis that lasted throughout imperial times. The examination is taken up again in the late Qing dynasty where the state-local society symbiosis remained in place but began to crumble, finally falling in the revolution of 1911. From there the Republican period is examined as it leads up to the Communist assumption of control in 1949. The Communist period will then be examined, followed by the Post-Opening period beginning in 1978.³² In the interest of making a case for Elias's civilizing process in China, those social concepts basic to Elias's model will be discussed as they existed and changed in each of the aforementioned periods.

Evidence will show that the traditional nature of Chinese society was continually reflected in the social environments of all the periods mentioned, mainly through the

³² 'Post-reform' is sometimes used for what here will be referred to as the Post-Opening period beginning after 1978.

ongoing existence of small, self-sufficient, and tightly knit figurations with relatively low levels of differentiation.³³ Though radical social change was imposed after the revolution of 1911, this observation continued to hold true. It was only after 1978 during the Post-Opening period that this began to change in a direction indicative of a civilizing process. In this final period there is a new, changed state–local society relationship that resulted in several Eliasian social trends, primarily increasing differentiation, extending chains of interdependence and changing local figurations, analogous to those of Elias’s Europe. The concepts of mobility and ‘*guanxi*’ will be used as barometers for these trends for the post revolutionary period. If the theories of Norbert Elias are applicable in the Chinese context, it is expected that there will be some significant change in each, in correspondence with any changes in the level of differentiation and interdependence.

It is also worth noting that through all the reform movements starting with the late Qing and through the Republic and Communist periods, there was a very conscious effort on the part of the central government to destroy the traditional social order in an effort to modernize China. This, of course brings to mind Elias’s theoretical position on unintended consequences. “Elias does not give much weight to the success of intentions and plans in this framework. Nor does he check to see when the planning of associations of action has been successful” (Haferkamp 1987: 556). This is an issue worthy of further research in the Chinese context but one which is beyond the scope of this project.

The Population

The Chinese people - called the ‘Han,’ to distinguish them from the numerous minority nationalities living in China - had emerged from the

³³ The ongoing importance of face as external constraint is inherent to the traditional Chinese social order and will be discussed in a manner meant to cover all three periods.

mists of prehistory in the loess plains of north China, close to present day Sian, near the great bend of the Yellow river. As late as about 1000 B. C., these Han, these early Chinese, inhabited an area that is only about 10% of what is today China proper (Eastman 1988: 8-9).

Surrounded by many culturally and ethnically distinct groups (Yue, Shu, Li, Zhuang, among others) the Han expanded dramatically over the next 3000 years, and continue to do so today in places like Tibet and Sinkiang (Eastman 1988: 8-9). These same Han with their agrarian, Confucian culture came to dominate what is today China proper. When talking about the ‘Chinese’ it is they who are usually being discussed.

In pursuing the above mentioned research goals, the rural Chinese population will be the centre of focus for the simple reason that it is within the rural communities of China that the overwhelming majority of Chinese are to be found. Hsu says that historically the farmers “constituted some 80 % of the population” (Hsu 1970: 97). While these statistics have changed over the past few decades (largely due to ‘accounting’ changes), and the exact numbers vary depending on source, through the mid-eighties 82% (Xiaolin 1998: 83) of the Chinese population lived in rural areas and 71% worked in agriculture (Kaichen 1991: 56). Feuerwerker notes similar statistics (as do Fei Hsiao-tung (Fei 1962), Zuo Xuejin (Xuejin 2000), and others) and suggests that “To find figures even remotely close to those of China in 1933, one would need to look at America in 1820 or 1830 when 70% of the labor force worked in agriculture” (Feuerwerker 1977: 9). While these numbers have undoubtedly varied over time³⁴, the rural population has never comprised a much lower percentage of the overall population. This reflects the

³⁴ China has witnessed a significant increase in urban population beginning in the mid eighties, but some studies (Xuejin 2000) still show roughly the same percentage for rural population as when the reforms started in 1978.

traditional agrarian social structure that has dominated Chinese culture until quite recently.

Even those who do reside in cities often do not consider their urban residence to be 'home'. It is more common for Chinese people to refer to their village of origin as their 'native place.' Stockman says "The traditional village was a cultural entity of which one was either a member or not, an insider or an outsider" (Stockman 2000: 60). He is implying here the intense nature of the social ties and relations incumbent on one in their village. The importance of this point will become apparent later. At this point it is sufficient to say that people had relationships with their fellow villagers, but generally not with those outside their village. Generally, the boundaries of their world were the same as those of their village. Until recently, and often still, people living in cities did not identify with them as such. Their village, as their 'native place' was simply far more important mainly because of the relationships involved. One's village was where their figuration was to be found, whether considered in terms of their nuclear family, or the entire clan. Rarely did their figuration, at any level, extend beyond village boundaries.

This Chinese figuration has until quite recently, been considerably smaller and more tightly woven than the European figuration. It has more closely resembled that of Elias's medieval Europe. Much like the Europe of the Middle Ages that formed the backbone of Elias's research, China, until recently has been an agrarian society, changing little in that regard for millennia. China has always been a culture/society/nation of villages; more or less cellular units loosely integrated into the larger framework of the state. When in cities people have tended to group along village lines anyway, and do business accordingly, so it seems, even when in the city, people have remained in their village.

Even if forcibly relocated, as so many were under the Communist regime, they would often send most of the resources they acquired back to their native village (this might serve as evidence that even after they no longer lived in the village, control over whatever resources they managed to acquire remained within their native village). Their village, the locus of their network of relationships – their figuration – has always had primacy. The urban situation will be examined primarily as it has impacted and been impacted by rural change. It is among the rural population that the important change is to be found. If one wants to look at China from an Eliasian perspective, it is held that it is to the village that one must look. This is exactly where an interesting proving ground for Elias's ideas is to be found.

Two premises are set forward here in order to lay the foundation for the following argument. *First*, it is held that there are a number of cultural threads woven into the historical fabric of traditional Chinese culture that have allowed it to remain so relatively stable over such a long period, and it is these threads that have come, and are continuing to come, under the greatest stress in the post-revolutionary period. This is not by any means to suggest that Chinese society remained in some kind of stasis for an extended period, that it remained in a sort of undisturbed time capsule, but only that there have been some important elements of the culture that have remained intact over the entire period. As Dirk Bodde said regarding the Qin unifiers of China, “The social, political and economic movements which were inaugurated under this dynasty were so profound and far-reaching that their study should destroy forever, I hope, the mistaken but persistent belief that in the East nothing changes” (Bodde 1967: v). The Han carried on with these changes.

The four and a half centuries that separated the proclamation of the Ch'in Empire in 221 B.C. and the abdication of the last Han emperors in A.D. 220 witnessed major evolutionary changes in almost every aspect of China's history. At the beginning of the period there could be no certainty that a centralized empire would be recognized as the ideal norm for governing mankind; by the end of Han its preservation had become the natural and accepted aim of every ambitious statesman, and educated officials could be expected to offer it their loyalty and services (Twitchett 1986: 14).

While the Qin and Han may have been the most radical, they were certainly not the only significant innovators in Chinese history. Despite these periodic movements, however, there have also been the aforementioned consistent threads, or orientations, which are deemed basic to understanding the process that China has undergone, and is undergoing. For this reason, it is necessary to first briefly examine pre-revolutionary China, where evidence of differentiation and the relative length of chains of interdependence will be sought, in order, ultimately, to contrast this period with the society emerging out of the modernizing efforts after 1911 and, more specifically, after 1978. It is argued that this latter period marks the 'restart' of China's civilizing process.

Second, it is held that statehood in the Eliasian sense of a government acquiring a monopoly of violence and taxation was achieved in China at a very early date. The crucial difference with the Europe Elias describes lies in the Chinese state's lack of intrusiveness into the lives of the people. It will be argued that the state had the capability to intervene in and control the lives of the people to a far greater degree than

it did, but this significant intrusion only occurred with the original unifiers, the Qin dynasty (sometimes written as Ch'in, which is as it is pronounced) which was quickly toppled from its position of power, and subsequently only with the advent of the Communist regime. Prior to 1911, and more especially 1949, the central government was not generally something the people, the masses for lack of a better word, needed to be overly concerned about. The timing of the shift in the level of state intrusiveness (and the reasons for it) is a crucial difference in terms of statehood and the civilizing process between Elias's Europe and Imperial China.

The Traditional Chinese Social Structure - Social Stagnation

The Chinese culture is, obviously, a target of immense proportions for any broad sociological analysis. It could almost be said to have for an extended period encompassed a whole civilization - Confucian - within its borders. "A civilization constitutes a kind of moral milieu encompassing a certain number of nations, each national culture being only a particular form of the whole." (Durkheim and Mauss 1998: 153). In the Chinese case this description is turned very nearly on its head. China can be described as both a state and a civilization. "M. Granet has rightly spoken of 'Chinese civilization' within the boundaries of China; he is equally right to describe as Chinese certain traits outside those boundaries" (Mauss 1998: 156). This provides some insight into the problems that the size of the Chinese culture represents for a researcher.

Until recently, Chinese culture has been approached with a view to its static nature over time. It has often been seen as a monolithic cultural block that has continued through time largely unaffected by either external or internal influences. Amaury de Reincourt made the case in the late 1950s that China, after the Tang and Sung dynasties, had

become socially petrified. The Confucian patterning of social relations dated to well before the time of Confucius but it was really with Han rule that Confucian orthodoxy became enshrined as the organising system for the people of this newly formed entity, the empire. As this Chinese state went through some considerable growing pains,

below the apparent instability of Chinese politics, a civilization kept expanding and growing to full maturity during the four hundred years of Han rule, to achieve the maximum of its potentialities under the following T'ang and Sung dynasties. Thereafter, the growth slowed down and stopped, Civilization became petrified, China went on living on its carefully transmitted stock forms but created no more. (de Reincourt 1965: 63).

For de Reincourt, the Confucian system was to be both the source of Han, and Chinese, success, as well as of its eventual stagnation. Others have agreed with him on this point. In fact, Bergere says that historians have “worked in the shadow of Weber’s thesis that Confucianism posed an obstacle to creativity, competition and development” implying that this was a commonly held position (Bergere 1984: 327). She believes this argument is not adequate, however (Bergere 1984: 327). Adequate or not, the point remains that, while Confucianism may have been generative in some areas, it was a stumbling block in many others.

De Reincourt continues in saying that through the course of the Han dynasty the realm prospered and wealth multiplied quickly. The gentry grew in wealth and influence and effectively became their own class.

They began to identify themselves mentally with the noble lords depicted by Confucius, imitated their polite manners and acquired their discriminating tastes. As the gentry provided most of the government officials, Confucianism crept back into the administration and the political world, becoming gradually the sole moral code of China's ruling elite (de Reincourt 1965: 65).

This is in ways reminiscent of the Europe Elias describes, where the rising 'bourgeois' imitated the manners of the courtly nobility in an effort to enhance their own status. De Reincourt later describes a situation where a new way of recruiting the ruling class was needed. As society was stagnating, and with all else falling by the wayside, the social situation left

government service as the only prestige-bestowing, face-giving occupation... With the crystallization of Chinese civilization, this learning was progressively codified by laws and regulations and became indispensable to all who aspired to government service. The examination system grew out of this typically Chinese yearning and admiration for scholarly knowledge (de Reincourt 1965: 67).

He goes on to say something especially important here. "All those who did, finally, rise to the top by scaling the examination ladder lost whatever originality and personality they might have had in their youth" (de Reincourt 1965: 68). According to de Reincourt,

in order to pass one had to become completely moulded to the system, and through this process, creative thought was eliminated (de Reincourt 1965: 70).

While there is undoubtedly some truth to the conclusions presented above, recent research has indicated that stagnation and petrification overstate the case. In fact, change, as always (and especially in Eliasian terms), is the one constant. It is also true however that even from an Eliasian perspective Chinese culture has, in many ways, remained remarkably stable over time. Despite feudalism having ended and the state having formed, the traditional figurational complex for individuals within Chinese society has remained intact for millennia. It has not been integrated into the larger state apparatus. Nor has the state tried to subsume the social functions of the local figurations under its own auspices. Competition has remained restricted to within the traditional figuration, and differentiation has remained relatively low; the chains of interdependence have not extended appreciably. Possibly most significantly in Eliasian terms, it is still a culture guided by external constraint. DeSwann summarizes Elias as saying of Europe that pacification occurred through “state monopolization of violence and the attendant growth of interdependence between human beings... As these forms spread across the continent people were able to see each other as more similar - they were becoming more alike.” (de Swaan 1995: 35). For some reason this is exactly what did *not* happen in China. The state formed but the ‘growth of interdependence between human beings’ did not. De Swann describes the European society of some distant past in the following way: “Beyond the circle of the family and village, identifications as a rule were much weaker, since they applied to strangers, who were different and with whom one was much less concerned” (de Swaan 1995: 29). This is a description that could appropriately be applied to much of China even today. Given that there has been change

in China, but also significant stagnation, what is it about this traditional culture that has presumably remained so stable and, in a sense so contrary to Eliasian thought, relatively unchanging?

Dominant Orientations - Schwartz

The explanation, for the purposes of this thesis, lies in what Schwartz calls “dominant orientations” (Schwartz 1985: 3). He introduces his thoughts on the subject by acknowledging that there are a lot of reservations about “a static cultural approach” but asks the question of whether there is anything to be said for “the notion of dominant orientations... within a given culture that persist over time” (Schwartz 1985: 3). He says that ancient cultures share certain characteristics yet “they remain different from each other in very significant ways” (Schwartz 1985: 3). These shared characteristics may be what he is referring to as dominant orientations, having resulted from similar responses to similar circumstances, but the cultures differ as a result of the differing ways they have dealt with changing environments and social circumstances over time. The shared characteristics, however, often remain common threads within and between cultures through time. Schwartz’s final point on dominant orientations is that they are “by no means incompatible with... historic change” (Schwartz 1985: 4).

In dealing with the dominant orientations spanning the ages of Chinese culture, allowance has also to be made for the significant change which did occur. China is not the monolithic and unchanging colossus it has so often been seen to be. But there have been very strong cultural threads running through its history. These orientations provide consistent points of reference upon which to base one’s analysis. Schwartz suggests that much of what was to result in the Chinese habitus has been in place for millennia in the

form of the dominant orientations to be discussed. Smith provides support for this in saying that,

Archaeological discoveries made in the early decades of this century have shown very clearly that by the fourteenth and thirteenth centuries B.C. many of the distinctive elements of Chinese civilization and religion were already in being. These were later to form an integral part of the Confucian inheritance... What we understand today as Confucianism... is in large measure a development of ideas and practices which were already in being in the Shang dynasty a thousand years before Confucius was born (Smith 1974: 22).

These ideas and practises were, if anything, even more firmly established prior to the political unification of the Chinese people under the Qin (221 B.C.) and Han (202 B.C.) dynasties. Ancestor worship, a central feature of Chinese culture over the centuries, provides a useful illustration of his point:

ancestor worship remains a central religious orientation within Chinese culture down to the present. What we have here is the notion that the past, present, and future members of a family are bound up in the same community over time... What is involved above all is the proper piety toward relationships of familial status (Schwartz 1985: 6).

This ancestor worship, an integral aspect of the Confucian social system, has held sway in the Chinese world from a time long prior to its inclusion in the Confucian canon. As

part of the Confucian system, ancestor worship traversed Chinese culture through its millennia of both change and stability, and remained largely as it has always been; a system unifying the culture over the span of generations and the breadth of given social environments.

Traditional Chinese society was composed of numerous semi-autonomous local units, each of which was structured around the kinship system as its core, and each was only loosely related to the others. As a national social system, these units were integrated not so much by extensive functional interdependence and centralized control as by a fairly uniform institutional framework which enabled Chinese people everywhere to act together as a group on the basis of a common system of basic values. (Yang 1959: 20).

This ongoing lack of 'functional interdependence' requires explanation in an Eliasian analysis. If the state in an Eliasian sense formed very early on, why was there still so little functional interdependence evidenced in wider Chinese society even well into the twentieth century? This is a very important question, and one that goes to the centre of this thesis. Rischauer and Fairbank elaborate on the development of the relationship between central and local governments during the Han, the period when the pattern was set for most of Chinese history.

By the first century B.C. the bureaucracy is said to have consisted of 130,285 officials... Although the Han bureaucracy can rightly be described as huge, it was actually very small when compared with the

population over which it ruled; perhaps one person in 400 or 500 (Reischauer 1960: 96).

He continues in saying that this would remain true for all subsequent dynasties. The government was not set up to provide services to the people in the fashion expected by Westerners today (Reischauer 1960: 96). It had contact with the people at the local level but it was not a very intimate contact. As long as the people paid their taxes, supplied the required labour and avoided disturbances they were left alone. “The government thus was a relatively small, highly centralized body that floated on a sea of isolated peasant communities” (Reischauer 1960: 96). In this sense the Chinese state remained quite aloof from the people. There was very little integration of local society into the larger social unit of the state. This was as it was intended to be in the Confucian world; this was the proper relationship between government and the governed. This was also a fundamental difference between China and the Europe Elias describes.

In this environment it was the kinship system that provided both the stability and the social functions for an enduring Chinese civilization (Yang 1959: 20). One of the primary socio-economic functions of the kinship system was the distribution of resources so important to the civilizing process Elias describes. As these semi-autonomous units retained their self-sufficiency they were integrated only loosely into the greater whole through the cultural system, the dominant orientations then prevalent. Their control over the distribution of resources remained internal to the figurations. The cultural norms that form this common identity as they affect social relations at the local level are at the centre of this effort.

C.K. Yang observes that over the past two millennia of “recurring dynastic cycles” there has been a continuous line of development of Chinese society. There had been change but it was generally so widely dispersed and limited that it was fairly easily assimilated into the existing system (Yang 1959: 3-4). This was true even in those cases where rapid change took place, possibly leading to the impression that major change simply did not occur. Leading examples of what Yang is referring to might start with the first unifiers of China, the Qin, who instituted a draconian ‘Legalist’ rule from the centre that was not well suited to the existing Chinese culture. After only 15 years (221 – 206 B.C.) of stretching the Chinese people beyond their limits, the dynasty fell, eventually being replaced by the Han in 202 B.C. Also included might be both the Mongol ‘Yuan’ dynasty (1276–1367) and the Manchu ‘Qing’ dynasty (1645–1911). Both of the latter two were examples of foreign invaders who were more or less assimilated into the Chinese world, becoming as ‘Chinese’ as the subjects they ruled. Even when the state was invaded and overthrown, in time the dominant orientations, staying intact, overthrew the barbarian invaders. China and the Chinese remained as they had been. That is, until the twentieth century.

In the modern scene, the immediate vital effect of the Republican revolution of 1911 was limited mainly to the disintegration of the traditional system of central political control; there was no sweeping introduction of any new pattern of society. The subsequent four decades of the republican period brought a gradual disintegration of China’s traditional institutions and a rather chaotic beginning of a new social pattern, but these came largely by the spontaneous process of social

change and not by the coordinated and conscious planning of an organized political power (Yang 1959: 3-4).

The change that did occur in the traditional order was more along the lines of reducing the old order to a state of confusion. No new organizing pattern was introduced to take its place. According to Yang, the Communist regime intensified this effort at destroying the old order. “The declared purpose of the regime is the remaking of the total structure of China’s political, economic, and social life” (Yang 1959: 3-4).

Levy makes the important Eliasian connection. While there have been many revolutions in China, “these have inevitably aimed at renovation of the old social structure rather than its abolition and replacement. The social movements of the last hundred years have increasingly sought a new social organization rather than a renovation of the old” (Levy 1971: 318). This is highly significant for an Eliasian analysis. Earlier revolutionary change never sought to alter anything fundamental in imperial China, any of the dominant orientations of Chinese society. In fact, the opposite was normally the case. The protagonists of this new period, however, were clearly intent on exactly that.

Elias talks about the period after a dominion has formed the institutions for ruling and maintaining monopolies of taxation and violence as the period of statehood.

And only when this complex apparatus has evolved does the control over army and taxation take on its full monopoly character. Only then is the fiscal and military monopoly firmly established. From now on social conflicts are not concerned with removing monopoly rule but only with

the question of who are to control it, from whom they are to be recruited and how the burdens and benefits of the monopoly are to be distributed. It is only with the emergence of this continuing monopoly of the central authority and this specialized apparatus for ruling that dominions take on the character of 'states' (Elias 1994a: 346).

This is an apt description of the Chinese situation from the Han through the Republican Revolution of 1911 – well over two millennia. The Confucian canon (which was very closely connected to the Chinese system of empire – in fact, the two depended upon each other) that formed the dominant orientations and provided the basis for Eliasian monopoly-based statehood through Chinese history was not that which was challenged with the change of dynasties. That the monopoly should continue to exist in something closely resembling its then current form at a given time never seemed to be in question; hence the phenomenal stability of the Chinese system. With events of the twentieth century the situation changed, however.

The important point for right now is that the dominant Confucian orientations winding their way consistently through Chinese social history seem only to have begun to change to any appreciable degree after the Republican Revolution in 1911. More realistically this is probably truer after the Communist assumption of power, and even the subsequent opening, which began only in 1978.

Confucianism

A basic understanding of the highlights of Confucianism will be useful in analysing the development of Chinese culture in Eliasian terms. It is out of Confucianism that the

overwhelming importance of interpersonal relations in Chinese culture emerged. It is held that China is an ideal candidate to be spoken of in terms of dominant orientations primarily because of the historically central position of Confucianism within its ideological pantheon. Confucius (551 – 479 B.C.) lived toward the end of the Zhou dynasty (1122 – 221 B.C.) just prior to “the era of Warring States (403-221 BC)”, a period of great social disruption (Fairbank 1992: 49). The process of state formation that Elias describes as operating through the monopoly mechanism, with more or less feudal entities vying for control over larger areas, had already begun.

Power had already mostly passed into the hands of the rulers of large states who were independent of a central authority, whilst within the states themselves constant changes were taking place in a power structure as the ‘haves’ sought to hold on to what they possessed, whilst the ‘have nots’ sought to wrest it from them (Smith 1974: 15).

According to Mark Elvin, “Experience and reflection had bred a measure of scepticism” among the people as they called the old mores and superstitions into question (Elvin 1996: 269). Largely because of this, “He insisted on the practical primacy of the human world” (Elvin 1996: 270).

The teaching of Confucius was wholly concerned with practical ethics, the ways in which human beings may live together in harmony and good order. Asked about good and evil spirits in nature, he replied, ‘We have first to know how to serve mankind, then we shall understand about serving the spirits’ (Martin 1972: 7).

For Confucius it was not so much that the spiritual world did not exist or even did not matter. It was more that human affairs were far more important. For people to live life as it was meant to be lived, human relations had to be properly ordered first and foremost. Not having achieved this ordered state, concerning oneself with things beyond was pointless. In this he was very pragmatic, and this is thought to be a primary source of the renowned Chinese pragmatism.

Confucius himself insisted that he was not advocating anything new but was only a transmitter of the ideas he put forward. Essentially what he did was to organize a number of ideas then prevalent into a system of social organization. “Sociologists and anthropologists have often seen Confucian writing as an intellectual elaboration on basic cultural traits of the Chinese people, whose everyday life can be seen as governed by Confucian morality” (Stockman 2000: 70). The Chinese culture of the time was already strongly relationship oriented and hierarchical. According to Fei “The task of Confucius was to set down for each social status its canon of correct behaviour” (Fei 1983: 141). This cross fertilization between the culture and Confucianism is important in that it reinforces the notion of the strength of dominant orientations through time. Yang is here examining the impact of the balance between culture at the more localised level and the influence of ‘Confucianism’ as a thought system on the development of the Chinese culture as a whole. The focus is on the development of the bureaucracy that effectively supplanted feudalism as the organizational structure for Chinese society. He starts by saying basically that the bureaucracy had to adapt itself to the requirements of the social environment in which it existed.

In China, the bureaucracy developed in a social system characterized by a diffuse social pattern, local self-sufficiency, local homogeneity but national heterogeneity, emphasis on the primary group with its network of intimate personal relations, and the importance of an informal moral order (Yang 1959b: 135).

The Chinese bureaucracy was adapting to an already existing social order with many Confucian-like characteristics, and in so doing, reinforcing that same order. In fact, the existing social organization was forcing the bureaucracy to change and conform to its needs and requirements.

Confucianism came to be adopted as the official ideology of the bureaucracy precisely because it was so well suited to such a social system as compared with Legalism, the formal and impersonal characteristics of which were ostensibly much more conducive to the development of an efficient bureaucracy (Yang 1959b: 135).

In this case it was the culture which was dictating the form the bureaucracy was to take, pushing aside the primacy of concerns for efficiency. For the bureaucracy to work at all, it had to conform to some degree with the cultural norms already in place. Confucianism did this.

In this sense, traditional China may be thought of as having two major structural components: a national bureaucratic superstructure... and a

vast substratum of heterogeneous local communities based on a morally oriented social order and the informal primary group. This huge conglomeration of local communities was tenuously held together by its common acceptance of Confucian ideology, a national bureaucracy, and a weakly organized national economy (Yang 1959b: 135).

This social organization based on Confucian values gave China characteristics of both the modern European state and medieval feudal Europe. There were both the strong (though limited) central authority, and the self-sufficient local communities. It also served to cement these seemingly contradictory, antagonistic characteristics in place with a remarkable stability.

In analysing Chinese culture it is inappropriate to say either that it is Confucian, or that it is merely a situation where Confucianism was an outgrowth of the existing culture. It is more accurately described as both. Yang makes this clear. In fact, Loewe even apologizes (as do others) for his use of the term 'Confucianism'. "The term Confucianism is here used solely as a matter of convenience, and denotes developments of very different periods which have been ascribed to the same origin" (Loewe 1966: 96). The same should be stipulated for the present effort. This should indicate the extent to which this social system was an outgrowth of many sources within the environment over an extended period, as opposed to the thinking of one man. It was through the bureaucracy that the Confucian code became the dominant system for ordering society, but it is equally true that it was strongly influenced by the surrounding culture. It provided the local population with the means of dealing with and relating to a centralised state, and the state with the means of ruling the local populations from the

centre. With this tacit Confucian understanding between the centre and the periphery, the self-sufficient local figurations have managed to successfully fend off state intrusions into their lives for over two millennia. The European-style state with monopolies of the means of violence and taxation had by this time formed in China, but, through Confucianism, the localized social relations were not overly impacted. From an Eliasian perspective this is the single most significant departure from European social development.

The Confucian classics were oriented toward the achievement of *t'ai-p'ing* (Great Peace) through knowledge of the general social order based on a harmonious system of human relations and moral norms...

In a broad sense, the system of Confucian knowledge may be said to centre upon the proper ordering of people and their activities as a means of achieving the main administrative goal, peace and harmony in an extensive empire (Yang 1959b: 138).

From either the central or the local perspective, Chinese society has, for all intents and purposes, remained anchored on the principle of the proper ordering of interpersonal relationships for at least the past two thousand years and probably significantly longer. It is argued here that this is still the case but that with recent social developments, the understanding of 'proper' has begun to change.

It was Confucius' belief that if interpersonal relations could be effectively ordered, if people would behave properly within their figuration, the longed for 't'ai p'ing' (Great Peace) would result.

Confucius had said (rather succinctly), ‘*jun jun chen chen fu fu zi zi,*’ which in its context meant, ‘Let the ruler rule as he should and the minister be a minister as he should. Let the father act as a father should and the son act as a son should.’ If everyone performed his role, the social order would be sustained (Fairbank 1992: 52).

It is also worth pointing out that Confucius was convinced that this state of harmony had been achieved at some point in the past and that his task was to regain something lost. This ‘rear view mirror’ perspective is thought to be one of the main reasons why the Confucian system has traditionally been so conservative.

Confucius’ understanding of the individual focuses on “the fully developed person using the term *ren*, a Chinese word that combines the characters for ‘human being’ and ‘two.’ A full person, therefore, is one who exists in society, in communication with others” (Renard 2002: 434). The fundamental importance of relationships to personhood, identity, and society is clear. This also represents a central aspect of the dominant orientations that have held the Chinese together throughout their history.

This social cohesiveness, what would ultimately push society toward t’ai p’ing, was to be achieved first and foremost through adherence to what Confucius called filial piety (*xiao*, [*hsiao*]) which is

more than simply an ethical virtue. It has in it almost a religious resonance. These relationships of persons in terms of their proper status

roles, which also include the proper relationship to ancestors, have in them a kind of numinous element... It provides almost a paradigm of a society where people are bound together by a network of proper behaviour and they are also bound to the world beyond in a way by this network of proper behaviour (Schwartz 1985: 7-8).

Schwartz thus provides helpful insight into the deeply profound nature in which filial piety is held by and affects the Chinese. To violate the mores of filial piety is to go against the very essence of what it is to be Chinese. And to do that is virtually unthinkable.

Renard discusses filial piety in the following more detailed terms:

Behind all the other virtues, what makes a good Confucian tick is 'filial devotion' or *xiao*. The Chinese term is composed of 'son' with 'old' placed above it. Confucius taught that all other moral virtue, and indeed civilization itself, flows from filial devotion... Filial devotion culminates in doing one's family proud... Lack of filial devotion was a most serious offense. Individuals could be put to death for cursing their elders. Filial devotion was the very bedrock of social order... without which there could be no exercise of authority in society at large.

(Renard 2002: 435 - 436).

Filial piety was what enabled people to connect to others, to society, and all the way up to the emperor. The means of displaying filial piety within the five cardinal relationships

was based on *Li*. Renard again effectively captures the essence of the responsibilities and duties within these relationships.

First and foremost is *li*, principle or propriety, consisting of a whole range of directives for human behavior. Much of *li* arises from the customs that embody the spirit of community. When people can rely on propriety in all relationships, as enshrined in time-honored practice, they experience assurance and freedom in their relationships... Of equal importance is the notion of *shu*, reciprocity in interpersonal relationships. Reciprocity is essential to putting *li* into action, for it governs the five principal human relationships and the ten associated virtues (Renard 2002: 434-435).

This whole issue of reciprocity was also clearly central to the Confucian system.

Reciprocity is based in the Chinese word '*pao*' (*bao*) which, according to Fairbank, has numerous meanings, all of which come back to 'response' or 'return.' So basic has it been that it has "served as one basis for social relations in China" (Fairbank 1957: 291). As in the quote below, relationships in the Confucian system are often defined in terms of their reciprocal obligations. Reciprocity also holds a very important place in this thesis, for it is closely connected to the development of the phenomenon of *guanxi*. The examination of *guanxi* will be used to establish that the chains of interdependence were extending in a fashion consistent with Elias's position through the Communist and Post-Opening periods. Importantly, within the Confucian canon reciprocity relates primarily to relationships within one's close-knit figuration. Those relations are described in the following fashion:

In the father-son relationship, the father must cultivate kindness, the son reverence. The elder brother must deal gently with his younger brother, who responds with respect. A mutuality of faithfulness and obedience should characterize husband-wife relationships. Let all elders be considerate of those younger, and expect deference in return. Finally, a ruler must strive to treat subjects with benevolence and benefit from their loyalty as a result (Renard 2002: 434, 435).

Filial piety and *Li* are the glue that holds the Chinese figuration together. The Chinese figuration has always been highly localized, as already discussed, and it is these two concepts that strictly order the relationships within this localized figuration, based primarily on the family, in a strongly traditional, hierarchical fashion. At the same time it also provides the means for the individual and their figuration to relate to the state, and the state to relate to them and it. With relationships properly ordered in the above terms, Confucius deemed that the entire empire would be effectively ordered. T'ai p'ing starts with the family and from there naturally extends outward to encompass all of society.

In China the distribution of resources had always been determined at the local level within the localized figuration. The state has not interfered overly much in these relationships. Social stability has depended on that fact. Both *li* and *shu* are primary contributing principles to this social organization. The overwhelming importance of these two ideas is what has kept the figurations so comparatively small and the chains of interdependence so short. They are also what have allowed the state to function

effectively from the centre of a comparatively vast empire while remaining fairly small and at a distance from local life, much in contrast to the Europe Elias describes.

Kinship System

The localized kinship system is, and always has been, a basic social structure in China. Confucianism has been fundamental in reinforcing the kinship system in China. In day to day social interaction or relations all of this was based on the lineage, clan, or family, which often shared the same borders as the village. The terms are to a large degree interchangeable in a Chinese context where the idea of family has long had a degree of flexibility. The most common word for family is *chia*. Cohen suggests that the *chia* “was actually a kin group that could display a great deal of variation in residential arrangements as well as in the economic ties that bound its members together” (Cohen 1978: 183). “Exactly what the term means has never been agreed upon and perhaps it is a variable which is subject to local variations” (Osgood 1963: 355). These social organizations (specifically in Ming and Qing China but also and more generally in traditional Chinese culture) in some cases lasted anywhere from 12 to 27 generations in one location, clearly indicating both their resilience and stability (Zhenman 2001). Many of them certainly must have been in place considerably longer than the dynasties themselves, possibly both the Ming and Qing dynasties in succession. It was within these structures that essentially all needs were met. Self-sufficiency was high and these figurations controlled the distribution of those resources they depended on.

It is also true that the kinship system was important in bringing about, or at the very least allowing for, the ascendancy of the Confucian tradition. As Yang noted, it was very much a two way process. At the time of Confucius the extended family system was

in place. This is not to say that the Chinese commonly lived together under one roof with all, or even most of their blood relations. “The notion that most Chinese lived in ‘joint’ or ‘large’ families has been thoroughly discredited by now” (Cohen 1978: 183). The important point is that the whole familial system was very tightly ordered and regulated, each person fitting snugly into their place with their appropriate title signifying their relationship to the others in the family.

The teaching of Confucius consolidated this system, making the family the all-important unit. A man’s first loyalty should be to his family, all his acts must accord with the interests of the family, so that a Chinese cannot think of himself as a separate individual apart from his family (Martin 1972: 8).

As stated earlier, even the word for person, *ren*, indicates the social nature of humanity. Man’s primary social relationships are to be found within the family. Performing well within these relations was a person’s means of establishing their own humanity. To fail in this area was to fail to be human. One’s relations within their family were the source of their own humanity. Separated from those relations they were lost in a most profound sense.

While this understanding of family started with the simple nuclear unit, it clearly extended beyond that to the wider kinship group. It also extended far back into one’s family tree. Referring to the development during Shang times of many important ideas that would become indelibly incorporated into the Chinese habitus, Gelber discusses ancestor worship:

after death the ancestors dwelt in heaven and would continue their active interest in the family. They were the proper people to intercede with the gods on behalf of their descendents. In return, families had obligations to those ancestors. If such obligations were neglected, the ancestors would be angry, stop their protection and disasters would ensue. (Gelber 2007: 10).

Ancestor worship has remained a very strong element of Chinese culture since at least the Zhou, and is still important today. It has had a significant long term impact and has been a dominant thread winding through Chinese social history.

Since it was important to know who one's ancestors were, families had to keep genealogies, and that activity in turn reinforced family interest... Ancestor worship was in effect the canonization of filial piety. While ancestor worship focused attention on the living in an important sense, it did so in terms of the institutional standards and patterns of the dead... little room was left for the exercise of discretion. This meant that the introduction of the new was inhibited to an important degree... it was a strong positive stimulus to the maintenance of the *status quo ante*, and, insofar as the *status quo ante* was stable, it aided the perpetuation of that stability (Levy 19971: 250).

Here we have an important connection between the thought of Confucius, ancestor worship, and the longevity of Chinese culture. It was Confucian thought applied to

ancestor worship that provided one of the primary supports for the dominant orientations that allowed for the extraordinary longevity and stability of Chinese social organization. This was so despite the advent of the monopolies of the means of violence and taxation, and the Eliasian state. The other closely related support was the Confucian understanding of the state already discussed. All of it was grounded fundamentally upon the proper ordering of, and behaviour within, the interpersonal relations of one's figuration, which clearly also included one's ancestors. Where, in Elias's understanding of Europe, control over the distribution of resources moved steadily into the hands of the state, in China it remained highly localized.

Describing the impact of this family/kinship system after the chaotic Warring States period (403-221 B.C.), Chu suggests the actions taken by the first Qin (Ch'in) emperor returned China to order "largely because underlying the different political regimes of the Warring States period was a common sociocultural institution begun in the early years of the Chou Dynasty (1066-771 B.C.)" (Chu 1983a: 6). The system was clearly in place before the Qin. It was sufficiently broad based to include the people of the various states involved in the general conflict of the preceding period. And according to Chu, it was central in bringing about order after an extended period of confusion.

Much praised by Confucius (552-479 B. C.), this was a communal foundation built upon the clan system, which the founders of the Chou Dynasty had codified in order to strengthen their family-based imperial rule... Task-related cooperation, allocation of rewards, resolution of local conflict, and socialization took place largely in the institution of clan relations, for which the Chou rulers had developed elaborate rites

and rules. The predominantly rural communities were more or less self-contained miniature social systems with close-knit communication within themselves. They were held together by a political-administrative structure that maintained only marginal points of contact with grassroots areas. It was a system of strong local ties and loose centralized control (Chu 1983a: 6).

The Chinese kinship system (what Elias might call the Chinese figuration), steeped in Confucianism, was the bedrock supporting the whole social superstructure of Chinese culture. Chu discusses the cyclical nature of Chinese social development as it has historically swung from long periods of relative stability, through periods of confusion when the local structural organization was undermined, and back to the more familiar and stable situation where the 'local communal foundation' was again allowed to prosper (Chu 1983a: 7). Within this kinship system, 'the local communal foundation,' all roles and relationships were clearly demarcated and understood by everyone involved. It was a very tightly regimented, hierarchical structure with little room for change and/or mobility. People generally died where they were born, having lived the same life as their predecessors for generations before them. If this kinship system is posited as the primary figuration for the average Chinese person, as indeed it was, the self-sufficiency and all that flows out of that from an Eliasian perspective (low differentiation, short chains of interdependence, local control of distribution of resources, restricted competition, and restricted mobility) comes into view. It was a very traditional social structure. The important fact is that this form of social organization was a consistent and powerful element of Chinese culture throughout its long history, and it directly impacted (hindered) development in a civilizing direction.

Chapter Four – Central Concepts as Manifested in Traditional China

Mobility

Though Elias did discuss mobility with regard to the European upper class in the Renaissance, it is not an issue of central importance to Eliasian thought as a whole. It will, however, prove fundamental to applying and understanding his ideas in the Chinese context.

High mobility has not historically been a common characteristic of Chinese society. People have for the most part been tied to the land, their figuration, their family, and their ancestors. To move outside of their figuration entailed leaving all of this, one of the gravest of sins. It would be to renounce not only one's heritage and family, but their very identity. For this reason, in that mobility was so tightly restricted by one's figuration, any change in mobility in society as a whole might represent a change in the social relations making up the figuration.

There are several different aspects of mobility in the traditional Chinese social structure that are worth noting in this regard. Rozman states that there is little research on the topic of migration in pre-modern China but observes from the level of urbanization that it is safe to say, due largely to a lack of primogeniture and the strength of local bonds, rural-urban migration was minimal (Rozman 1981: 175).

The lack of primogeniture also encouraged families to stay together in order to ensure there was enough food on everyone's table. With the passage of time it became increasingly difficult to do this without help on diminishing allotments of land.

Probably related to the above, Eberhard makes clear in his study on the subject that pre-modern thinkers were strongly opposed to migration (Eberhard 1962: 19). One could not fulfil their relational duties to family and ancestors if one migrated. Possibly for these reasons also, migration has been against the law at many points in Chinese history.

Levy notes that for the traditional Chinese social structure to continue to exist, the family needed some means to keep its members in place;

for if they could have fled an unpleasant situation, the power position of the family would have been severely limited. As has been suggested above, this means lay in the inability of the average individual to find an acceptable alternative method of making a living (Levy 1971: 329).

That family members should stay together was never in question. Given that there was no realistic alternative gainful employment, according to Levy, there was effectively nowhere else to go anyway. There simply was little, if any, choice.

Another perspective holds that the “immobility of the peasant majority on the land is a convenience to the government that allows it to tax without delivering any administrative services in return” (Stover 1974: 19). There is probably some truth to this in that it was in a sense a convenience, but probably not just to the government. From the perspective of the present analysis, it was more likely a convenience to all parties concerned. The immobility of the peasants may well have made tax collection far easier for the government, but in so doing it also facilitated the government staying out of the

local communities. There was little need to encroach on local territory and, as discussed, there was incentive not to do so. The government may not have provided much in the way of administrative services, but that was exactly the way the villagers, in their localized self-sufficiency, seemed to want it.

All of this is not to say that migration did not occur. Both internal and external migrations have occurred throughout Chinese history but they were usually only engaged in as a last resort in times of dire need. The low rate of internal migration has already been noted. In terms of external migration “China has been a net exporter of people over history” (Wenzhen 2000: 192). Wenzhen qualifies this, however, by saying that the rate of international migration has been “extremely low” as a percentage of population (Wenzhen 2000: 192). Migration – internal or external – has historically been neither a viable nor a very attractive option.

Competition

It is worth noting the impact of this social structure on the competition and differentiation central to Elias’s framework both because this influence emanated from the traditionally small figurational nexus and because it lasted well into the twentieth century. Qiang is referring to the Chinese Confucian system of ordering society when he says that:

The most salient feature of a system where status is determined by ascribed features is the stress on rank and order. When status is determined by laws and regulations, it is almost impossible to change.

The limits of status are almost impassable. Every individual is

positioned at a fixed rank to keep the whole hierarchy in order. (Qiang 2002: 118).

Originality and social mobility were suppressed by a lack of “opportunities of equal competition” (Qiang 2002: 118). With achievement having little to do with diligence, the incentive to compete was greatly reduced. Qiang further points out that the continuing importance of this system indicates Chinese society’s enduring traditional nature. In his analysis Potter is talking about specific social situations, also in the twentieth century, but in terms of the same traditional social structure. There is a duality inherent in traditional Chinese culture which impinges on the issue of competition directly: “the hierarchical solidarity of the lineage, and the competitive struggle within the lineage stood in opposition to one another as poles of a cultural dialectic; with dialectical logic, the expression of these conflicting values was tolerated within a single institution” (Potter 1990: 253-254). As evidence of this he points to the organization of leadership in the specific social situation that he examined.

The opposition between formal hierarchy and competitive struggle was reflected on a duplicated pattern of leadership within the lineage... On the one hand were the village elders, leaders who had been chosen on the basis of formal kinship criteria such as age and seniority. These were often poor and inconsequential men. On the other were the effective leaders, who had achieved their position by competitive success (Potter 1990: 253)

In this case the traditional hierarchy is served through the elders, and the competitive edge through the ascendance of those who were more able. Importantly for the point being made here, both systems of leadership were simultaneously tolerated within the same system.

Everyone understood, according to Potter, that each lineage member “would use and exploit others for his own advantage. It was assumed, and borne out by experience, that powerful lineage members would do their best to use the collectively owned ancestral property for their own personal benefit” (Potter 1990: 253). So it was not that there was no competition. That was far from the case. But what competition there was, was anything but equal, and social position and status had more or less predetermined the outcome. Individuals had little opportunity to change their social position within their figuration through any effort of their own and to seek to compete individually beyond figurational boundaries was not an alternative. As long as the traditional social relations and structure were in place, the competition that drove the civilizing process in Europe - integration, increasing differentiation, extending chains of interdependence, and internalization of constraint – had little chance of emerging.

Competition between kin was at times intense but the important point here is that this competition was internal to the lineage, rarely extending beyond familial, figurational and, more often than not, village boundaries. Because the culture remained so intensely localized, so too did the competition. It was the same dialectical logic mentioned by Potter above that held competition within such relatively tight figurational boundaries. Order based on hierarchy was supported by an ideology stressing the solidarity of the lineage over competition. For this reason their personal/social or

professional/subsistence (normally there was little if any difference between the two) relations did not often extend beyond those same borders. There was little need to interact in any way with outsiders. Much in line with Elias's ideas in *The Established and the Outsiders* (Elias 1994c), outsiders were viewed with a degree of suspicion, and quite often even hostility, simply because they were 'outsiders.' Interacting with those outside one's community, one's primary figuration, was often strongly frowned upon as being improper.

In an important sense it was the family structure itself that encouraged competition, while also limiting its bounds. Ancestry and ancestor worship were very significant in this context. "Far from being opposed to the drive for competition the pattern of father-son identification actually encourages it. For every individual can add weight and content to this ancestral authority by his achievements" (Hsu 1948: 258-259). As this all-important transition from son to father to ancestor played out, achievement ensured glory both to the family and to oneself for the duration, as long as it was pursued within the proper limits.

Hsu follows this with a defining point that helps to cement in place the position being put forward in this thesis. Again, competition was acceptable and at times both encouraged and intense, but only so long as it stayed within the proper bounds which were limited by the family.

If we look, however, at the objects of these competitive efforts, we find that they all come within the framework closely defined by parental authority and ancestral tradition. As long as the ambition functions

within this framework, the individual has every encouragement to get ahead of everyone else (Hsu 1948: 259).

He reiterates this point in even stronger terms when he talks about competition with regard to the struggle of life.

This untiring struggle expresses itself, however, within the definite limits of tradition. Both the lines of progress taken and the final objectives desired are well confined within this framework... As a matter of fact, the starting point of competition is the household. Brothers, instead of trying to get ahead by independent paths, tend to begin by competing for their father's favor (Hsu 1948: 261-262).

There was one area of competition outside the confines of the family which was sometimes pursued. This was the examination system. This line of competition was in actuality quite limited in terms of the population as a whole, however. Fei Xiaotong (Hsiao-tung) affirms this point when he says that he is sceptical about the 'popular belief' that in the good old days everyone had a more or less equal chance to become an official through the examination (Hsiao-tung 1983: 144). Technically, everyone has a chance to be a member of next year's freshman class at Harvard as well, but the reality is far different. In that this was far and away the primary means of social mobility outside the family, and given the evidenced strength of family ties in locking one into the localized family structure as already discussed, it is understandable that competition outside the family must have been minimal. With no ties beyond the figuration, and all needs provided for within the figuration, there was neither the opportunity nor the need.

Even when competition through the ‘external’ avenue of the exams was pursued, the family structure remained decisive. While Rozman claims a more open society than Fei, or this thesis, would allow, he does say that, “The family set the immediate, and the lineage the outer limits of the social group within which cooperative behavior for realization of that goal was to be effected” (Rozman 1981: 94-95). In other words, if a child was destined to attempt the examination, he would do so only through, and with the help of, the family. In the event that he was successful, all glory would, in turn, reflect upon the family as a whole.³⁵

Suzanne Brandstadter, who has used Elias in analysing China, makes the following point flowing directly out of Eliasian thought.

The key words in Elias’ approach to society are interdependency, power and process. Human beings are inevitably always interdependent parts of what he terms social figurations of power. They can act only within these interdependencies, which shape both their actions and the goals of their actions. The link between social figurations of power and social change is the idea that these figurations are the unintended results of intentional, interdependent human action... Highly competitive situations lead to the emergence of ‘spontaneous structures’ which then shape people’s behaviour and, with time, their habitus (Brandstadter 2000: 9).

³⁵ It is also worth noting that when one was successful in the examination this provided him with perhaps the only opportunity in traditional Chinese society to develop social relations or interdependencies beyond the figuration defined by his family or village.

Within the traditional Chinese social system as a whole, however, the relations were so constraining, and at the same time mutually reinforcing, that a level of stability was achieved where all action, having been shaped within these interdependencies, served, unintentionally or otherwise, to recreate existing figurational forms. This of course included competition. As long as the traditional system remained stable, the state remained distant and uninvolved in local figurations, and as long as the state remained distant and uninvolved, the traditional social system remained stable. Until the social relations within the figurations were broken down in some fashion, this ‘stasis’ was unlikely to change overly much (indeed, there were cultural imperatives against it changing); the competition that is so fundamental to the differentiation, extending chains of interdependence³⁶, and all other aspects of the Eliasian civilizing process, could not occur.

Differentiation and Distribution of Resources

In that, for Elias, competition was the spur for differentiation, with so little in the way of competition in traditional Chinese society it should come as no surprise that differentiation was quite limited as well. The Confucian system, because it mandated such a highly restrictive and limited order of social relations also ultimately dictated a high level of self-sufficiency at the local level, militating against differentiation. In addition, the relative non-interference of the state in local society also contributed to the need of local society to be self-sufficient. The separation of the two and the self-sufficiency of the latter were part and parcel of the entire traditional Chinese social order. Differentiation in such a necessarily self-sufficient social arrangement as that of

³⁶ The Eliasian chains of interdependence remained comparatively short. People had relationships with those they also had direct contact with. Those beyond one’s line of sight were generally not to be trusted. The people did not need to, or usually want to, depend on or interact with those outside their figurations.

China was always understandably relatively low³⁷. Not only was there little need for specialization at the local level, there was very little opportunity for it. In that most of what was needed for life was provided by the local community, and for the most part by the family, and that this arrangement was thoroughly embedded in a considerable cultural edifice, any specialization would have amounted to a dangerous waste of time and resources. With the remarkable stability of Chinese culture being the key, this characteristic never significantly changed.

For differentiation to have occurred on the same scale as in Elias's Europe, something would have had to interfere with the traditional figurational structure, disrupting social relations at that level. Elias would have had it that the control of the distribution of resources would have had to have been removed from local figurational control. Tied to the whole dynamic of the Chinese figurational complex was the fact that what resources there were, were to be found within the local community. As the relations within the local figurations provided most of the resources and most of the social functions, as well as the fact that the state had little to contribute to, and strong incentive not to interfere with local affairs, the distribution of resources was controlled from within these localized figurations. This was dictated by the figurational arrangement and the strictly ordered social relations therein. As these social relations remained stable, and this was after all the highest goal of Chinese society, so too did the control of the distribution of whatever resources there were. Zheng Zhenman suggests that, "It would not be an exaggeration to say that in the local society of Ming and Qing Fujian there were no social functions which could not potentially be performed by families or lineages" (Zhenman 2001: 23). From the present investigation it is clear that this fact extends to

³⁷ Eastman's 1988 study (Eastman 1988) arguing that there was specialization as far back as the eighteenth century is noted, but again, if looked at objectively, it serves to confirm the point made here; relatively speaking, differentiation in China has always been limited.

most of the rest of Chinese society over most of the course of imperial history. Zheng further stipulates that Western studies of the lineage continue to be influenced by Maurice Freedman and his thinking that, “The Chinese lineage group was essentially an inheritance group characterized by lineage corporate property, and that its development therefore was rooted in issues of control and allocation of resources” (Zhenman 2001: 9 citing Freedman). This is a fundamental point, in that Freedman is confirming these local social figurations, the ones that the state by definition left untouched, as the same ones that controlled the distribution of resources, a function fundamental to the civilizing process. With the control of the distribution of resources left in local hands, it would be difficult for the Eliasian civilizing process to progress any further.

The state did not interfere at this level in China because of the Confucian tradition which dictated the symbiotic and distant relationship between the village environment as it existed and the state. The two were and remained interlocked and interdependent, mutually reinforcing and, in a sense, guaranteeing each other’s continuing existence and strength. The firmly fixed social organization and the ‘understanding’ between the state and the local figurations allowed for little shift in the social structure in terms of competition, differentiation and extending chains of interdependence. Hence, for Eliasian purposes, there has also been little movement, or even chance for movement, in a civilizing direction – the internalization of constraint. This remained largely true right up through the end of the Qing dynasty.

In all of this it has always been the tightness of the local figurations that has inhibited all those characteristics which are deemed vital to the eventual internalization of constraint, to the civilizing process. These figurations were tightly bound into a more or less

symbiotic state-local social formation that fed on itself, virtually guaranteeing its own continuance, and therefore as well, the continuance of the traditional localized social relations. Though Europe emerged from a past in many ways similar to that of China, this state-local society relationship so characteristic of China never developed in Europe.

Confucius elaborated on the social relations ultimately constituting this social order, and in so doing cemented them into the Chinese social structure. Chinese social order, and ultimately its stability and longevity, were centred around (though not limited to) the kinship structure. For the purposes of this thesis it is important to see that these ordered social relations, and the habitus associated with them, ostensibly made up the dominant orientations that have guided Chinese civilization for over two millennia. The figuration of the Chinese person was tightly bound within this set of ordered relations for essentially the entire period and, as far as has been determined this has been true in a universal sense within Chinese civilization. It was within these figurations that virtually all social functions, including the distribution of resources, took place. Given this,

if we take this Confucian view of life in its social and political context, we will see that its esteem for age over youth, for the past over the present, for established authority over innovation has in fact provided one of the great historic answers to the problem of social stability. It has been the most successful of all systems of conservatism (Fairbank 1992: 53).

Though coming from a slightly different perspective, Max Weber's thoughts on China as outlined in his 'The Religion of China' (Weber 1951) are much in agreement with Fairbank's (and for the purposes of this thesis, Elias's) observation about Chinese conservatism. Weber talks about Confucianism as being the source of, and tightly tied to, both the Chinese sib which might accurately be compared to the figuration for the average Chinese person, and the political system entailing the emperor's role in relation to Chinese society.

For Weber it was all founded on the Confucian principle of accepting the world as it was, and adapting to it, in contrast to the Puritan rejection of the world and looking to salvation in the world beyond. Confucianism defined the world according to the five cardinal relationships that for the average person were encompassed within the sib, and which in turn were a given, a part of the natural order of things. This resulted in very strict insider – outsider relations as opposed to the Puritan way, which was far more all-inclusive. A tightly monitored and antagonistic relationship between the individual and the outside world fed into a social system that strongly, and it must be said quite successfully, resisted change.

Weber also describes the emperor in familiar terms, with his authority and power being secure only as long as social order and harmony were maintained. If the social order were disrupted, he had failed, and was subject to removal. This, of course, happened repeatedly throughout Chinese history, all the while with the Chinese social order remaining relatively undisturbed.

In this situation, local Chinese society was largely self-governing and stable, centred on the healthy Confucian/Weberian sib. As such it tended, for the most part successfully, to hinder social development in the European sense, and to promote a backward-looking conservatism (hence the considerable importance of ancestor worship as both contributing cause and effect of this phenomenon). Over the course of centuries, none of the other social forces that arose in China were strong enough to overcome this established social order for any length of time. This comports quite well with the Eliasian analysis of this thesis.³⁸

Face and *Guanxi*

Elias's primary concern in his theory of the civilizing process was to show how the internalization of constraint occurred in the European context. The Chinese civilization took a decidedly different path from that of Europe in this regard. The most pressing evidence supporting this proposition is the importance of face in the Chinese world. Without digressing into which came first, it would seem that face and a Confucian system of social values are mutually reinforcing. The important point is that the Chinese culture is one still relying primarily upon external constraint, much as it is still Confucian, and this is represented in the centrality of the concept of face in everyday interaction. Internalization of constraint simply has not occurred to this point on the same scale seen in the West. It is argued that this has largely been a result of the highly successful Confucian system of conservatism highlighted earlier.

³⁸ This is obviously a highly simplified presentation of Weber's analysis of China, as it is fairly complex with numerous other factors involved, but it accurately captures the ideas most important to this thesis. It is also held to capture the most fundamental forces for conservatism in Weber's analysis of China.

As Elias discusses the German context, for people brought up with a code of honour, life is to a large degree guided by the opinion of other people, by external constraint (Elias 1996). Ruff explains that honour “embraces the value one places on oneself, but even more importantly it also represents the esteem in which society holds one” (Ruff 2001: 75). Speirenburg talks of honour as having “at least three layers: a person’s own feeling of self-worth, this person’s assessment of his or her worth in the eyes of others, and the actual opinion of others about her or him” (Speirenburg 1998: 2). As far as these definitions go, they bear a certain similarity to the Chinese situation with the external constraint of face.³⁹ Whether or not the social change China is currently undergoing ultimately leads beyond face to internalization will remain an open question. At this point, and by way of introduction, it will be worthwhile offering a brief discussion of both face and *guanxi* in order to situate what follows.

Face

Goffman states that:

face may be defined as the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact. Face is an image of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes – albeit an image that others may share, as when a person makes a good showing for his profession or religion by making a good showing for himself (Goffman 1967: 5).

He goes on to say that,

³⁹ A study of face with reference to Elias’s honour, as well as shame, is worthy of a thesis in itself, but will not be pursued in any further detail here.

face clearly is something that is not lodged in or on his body, but rather something that is diffusely located in the flow of events in the encounter and becomes manifest only when these events are read and interpreted for the appraisals expressed in them (Goffman 1967: 7).

It is clear in this work, however, that Goffman is proposing a conception of face that he intends to be cross-cultural, and therefore universal, in its application. Bond starts by asserting a similar idea but finishes with a qualification; “concern about face is a universal phenomenon. What constitutes a desirable face, however, is culturally more specific” (Bond 1986: 249). He goes on to say of this universalizing approach that it shows “face-work in anonymous and mobile societies of the western world... However, in order to generalize them to an oriental culture like that of the Chinese, the hierarchical structure of society with its permanency of statuses should be taken into consideration” (Bond 1986: 244). Exemplifying this idea, Bond goes on to talk about social situations in the U.S. where everyone starts from roughly the same place socially and more or less wrestles for position (Bond 1986: 245). In a similar social situation in China, everyone knows everyone else’s standing and is simply expected to behave appropriately according to their own relative position. The same can be said to hold true to a greater or lesser degree in other western cultures, as compared to China. The key to understanding the Chinese situation might be to think of face as a tool used primarily (though not only) in the maintenance of social harmony, whereas in the West it is used less in the interests of harmony than in the struggle for ascendancy. In that social harmony has always been a, if not the, primary concern in social interaction in China,

this distinction is pivotal. It also goes to the heart of understanding Chinese face as an external constraint.

Chinese Face

In his 1944 study, Hu highlights two clearly distinct ways that the idea of face is understood in Chinese culture. The first is *mianzi*, which “stands for the kind of prestige that is emphasized in this country [U.S.]: a reputation achieved through getting on in life, through success and ostentation. This is success that is accumulated by means of personal effort or clever maneuvering” (Hu 1944: 45). Drawing on past studies of face in China, Yan says that “social face is achieved and possessed mainly by people in the upper classes and that ordinary people do not care much about their social face” (Yan 1996: 138).⁴⁰ The other kind of face, referred to as *lian*, “represents the confidence of society in the integrity of ego’s moral character, the loss of which makes it impossible for him to function properly within the community. *Lian* is both a social sanction for enforcing moral standards and an internalized sanction” (Hu, 1944: 45). These moral standards are based on “faithful compliance to ritual and social norms” (Gabrenya 1996: 312). The norms involved come out of the doctrines of Li originally codified by Confucius well over two millennia ago (Freeman 1996: 89). In fact, according to Gabrenya, Hu goes on to indicate that, ‘the western concept of face corresponds to the Chinese *mianzi* but is wholly lacking in the connotations of *lian*’ (Gabrenya 1996: 312 citing Hu). With reference to the purposes of this paper, it is the socially (externally) constraining aspect of Chinese face, prevalent in both *mianzi* and *lian*, that is of primary concern.

⁴⁰ With the rapid economic expansion and now changeable social mobility in China one might logically conclude that this is changing. This specific issue will not be explored in this thesis.

As a reasonable starting point in understanding the notion of face in China it is a good idea to appreciate its universal importance. Redding and Wong explain the absolute centrality of face to all social interaction.

Many societies, and especially those of the Orient, have developed levels of sensitivity in interpersonal matters which are difficult for outsiders to comprehend or attain. It is as if the more collectivized a society becomes, the more sensitive must be the social mechanisms which maintain social harmony, as escape from the network is not an option, and the network must stay intact (Redding 1986: 286).

Chinese society ranks very highly in its collective orientation. The authors go on to say that “In the Chinese case, the social lubricant is ‘face’” (Redding 1986: 286). In other words, face is the primary tool that allows for the maintenance of social harmony at such a high level of sensitivity in the Chinese culture. This of course requires the constraint of any behaviour that might be construed as antisocial or disruptive, and as such it is accurately described as a social constraint. Citing Benedict, So points out that “the punishment for losing face is to feel shame” (So 2006: 92). “True shame cultures rely on external sanctions for good behavior... Shame is a reaction to other people’s criticism” (So 2006: 94 citing Benedict). It is worth remembering here “Elias’s assumption that the civilised habitus is rooted in the soil of shame” (Smith 2001: 161). The “sustained use of the concept of repression is one indication of... the importance Elias put on shame as an agent of social control in European history” (Scheff 2004: 233). This, of course is prior to the internalization of constraint through the civilizing process. Here lies an important connection between Chinese culture and that of Europe

prior to the internalization of constraint. For the Chinese, the ‘agent of social control’ has always been face, similarly to shame a predominantly external constraint, with the primary difference between China and the West being that for the Chinese this is *still* the case. Constraint in China never internalized to anywhere near the same degree as in the West.

This is where the social nature of face becomes important.

Social control is a village-wide affair; its chief instrument is public opinion. For the kind of behavior that is approved by most of the villagers, a person is everywhere honored and praised. Disapproval, therefore, is a powerful check... Social isolation is a terrible punishment (Yang 1945: 150).

Receiving approval and praise is to gain face while disapproval represents a loss of face. Either way it is expressed by one’s peers in the court of public opinion.

It is reasonable to describe face as a purely social phenomenon in China in the sense that it is for the most part, only manifested in situations where there are two or more people interacting. “The notion of face permeates every aspect of interpersonal relationships in Chinese culture because of the culture’s overarching relational orientation” (Ge Gao 1996: 289).⁴¹ In fact, relating back to Goffman’s understanding of face, it is best understood here too, more as a part of the interaction itself than an inherent part of any of the individuals involved in the interaction. It might best be visualized as a common

⁴¹ As has already been stipulated, the relational nature of Chinese culture is closely tied to its Confucian tradition which, in turn, is also closely tied to the formation and maintenance of the state in China.

but fundamentally necessary commodity, such as rice in Chinese culture, which is bought, sold, or traded. In this sense it is external to the participants in any interaction.

It is the threat of losing, and the anticipation of gaining face from others that motivates people to behave in certain ways. “All social encounters may be regarded as exchanges of resources” (Bond 1991: 58). The primary resource in all social interaction is face and it is the social other that grants and/or registers this gain or loss. Smith describes the operation of Elias’s external constraint in the following way: “When the judgements of others within a social network are crucial to one’s success or failure, then the shaping power of that figuration upon the psyche or social personality is very high” (Smith 2001: 162). In fact, in the Chinese case it is even today almost impossible to ‘succeed’ without the positive judgement of those in one’s figuration. It is posited here that face is the external constraint that Elias would look toward were he analysing Chinese society, and it is the ongoing importance of face that is held to exemplify China as a culture whose people are still largely guided by external constraint.

There are two important ideas here that must be kept in mind in grappling with this concept. First, face is a concern to everyone in Chinese society, and at virtually all times, and second, this fact is a logical result of interpersonal relationships being such a vital consideration at the individual interpersonal level. These facts in and of themselves are the very aspects of the Chinese notion of face that often make its use and effect incomprehensible to western people. They also make face an important link in understanding the Eliasian connection that is being proposed. This should become a little clearer in the following section on *guanxi*.

Guanxi

At its most basic level *guanxi* is simply an exchange relationship but is also defined as connections and sometimes simply as relationships. Tied to this exchange relationship in the Chinese context is an element of affect, which for the Chinese is a defining point. The reciprocal giving and receiving of gifts and favours generally serves to cement the relationship and the affect between the participants.

While *guanxi* is not quite as integral to daily life as the notion of face, its importance should not be underestimated. *Guanxi* and face might helpfully be thought of as two sides of the same coin. Some of the main tenets of *guanxi* are as follows:

The pre-eminent characteristic of personal relations in China today is instrumentalism. The principle that underlies it is *guanxi*, which means connectedness or particularistic ties, but it is best left untranslated. *Guanxi* is based on reciprocity, the traditional concept of *bao*, where one does favors for others as social “investments,” clearly expecting something in return. It is not a cold exchange, but is intertwined with *renqing* (human feelings, empathy) which raises it to a higher plane, and may also be based on a degree of *ganqing* (affect) (Gold 1985: 660).

This last mentioned sentimental aspect of *guanxi* is important and probably what makes it uniquely Chinese. “Chinese frequently stress that true *guanxi* must possess an affective component” (Gold 2002: 7). If it does not, it becomes something else.

As pointed out earlier, reciprocity is a fundamental aspect of interpersonal relations in the Chinese social context. “The Chinese believe that reciprocity of actions (favor and hatred, reward and punishment) between man and man... should be as certain as a cause-and-effect relationship, and, therefore, when a Chinese acts, he normally anticipates a response or return” (Fairbank 1957: 291). Fairbank suggests this even extends to supernatural relationships (Fairbank 1957: 291). People not only welcome the reciprocal give and take of social relations, but expect it to the point where, if it is not forthcoming, the relationship is not likely to last.

The technique of establishing and manipulating *guanxi* is *guanxixue*, literally, the study or art of *guanxi*. People exist in a *guanxiwang* or network of *guanxi*. Those individuals with whom they maintain a supply and demand relationship are *guanxihu*, literally, *guanxi* households. *Guanxi* is a power relationship as one’s control over a valuable good or access to it gives power over others, but a *guanxiwang* itself is composed of both vertical and horizontal connections, thereby differing from the standard patron-client relation, although the latter is an example of it (Gold 1985: 660).⁴²

In the traditional situation “villagers see their *guanxi* network as ‘society’, the local moral world in which they live. Within this world, their pursuit of personal interests is intermingled with the fulfillment of moral obligations” which play a vital role in all social interaction (Stockman 2000: 88 citing Yan Yunxiang). In those figurations of which one was a part in the past the boundaries usually did not extend beyond the

⁴² The connection between *guanxi* and Elias’s control over the distribution of resources comes to the fore here and will be made more obvious later in the thesis.

village. This was true for cultural reasons. With changing social circumstances, however, this appears to have been changing. One's *guanxiwang* is an extension of the more strictly family based traditional figuration in Chinese society. This new *guanxi* was "an 'extended form'" which fit Yang's description as much more instrumental (Stockman 2000: 88). In the developing situation one's *guanxiwang* was moving beyond traditional boundaries. Stockman cites Kipnes as saying that *guanxi* should be seen "as a set of practices of Chinese people responding to the varying social and political situations in which they find themselves" (Stockman 2000: 89 citing Kipnes). "Yan's distinction between primary and extended *guanxi* is an example of the well-known sociological distinction between primary and secondary groups, or between 'insiders' and 'outsiders'" (Stockman 2000: 89). The important distinction here is that where in the past 'outsiders' barely existed, in this new situation they were becoming a vital resource. This did not change the fact that the same moral obligations did not necessarily apply to 'outsiders' as to 'insiders'.

The more extensive the *guanxi* network one has the more face one is likely to have. Having as much as possible of both can only serve one's interest. In social interactions involving *guanxi*, face is given and taken, gained and lost. The more *guanxi* one has, and hence the more face, the more power and "self-determination" one has (Yang 1994: 196).

Establishing *guanxi* requires a great deal of posturing and dissembling to make the initial contact. One must invite the target to a meal or present a gift (*ginke songli*) or deliver an intangible favor to demonstrate sincerity and efficacy and thereby suggest future benefits

from having *guanxi* with him. One gets face (*mianzi*) or status from showing he can get things done and the amount of face is in direct proportion to the size of one's *guanxiwang*. Conversations abound with bragging about the extent of one's *guanxiwang* and the ends it can be mobilized to serve... *Guanxi* is an informal, unofficial relationship used to get things done, from simple tasks to major life choices (Gold 1985: 660).

Important for this analysis is the fact that face and *guanxi* are fairly closely related. It is also wise to keep in mind, however, that while face is closely tied to *guanxi*, it is not limited to it. Face is an aspect of social relations and social interaction, and social relations and interaction are fundamental to *guanxi*, but social relations are not *only guanxi-related*, and neither is face. All *guanxi* involves face, but not all face considerations involve *guanxi*. Face applies to a much broader range of social phenomena. Their connection comes out of their common emergence from a Confucian social system in which relationships were paramount. “*Guanxi* practice has been traced to the constraint of Chinese culture, which in turn has been shown to have developed in the context of the officially sanctioned ideology of Confucianism and the legal tradition of imperial China” (So 2006: 128). In fact, according to King, “Confucian social theory has the theoretical thrust of developing a person into a kuan-hsi [*guanxi*] oriented individual. The Chinese preoccupation with kuan-hsi... building has indeed a built-in cultural imperative behind it” (King 1994: 114). Within this social context as it currently exists: “The Chinese tend to see the manipulation of human relationships as the natural and normal approach for accomplishing most things in life” (Pye 1992: 173).

By extension, according to Pye, they are also very conscious of the need to be adept in such practises (Pye 1992: 174).

Face and *guanxi*, as they tie into and relate to each other, are all about the manipulation of relationships, which is essentially built into the Chinese culture and, from an Eliasian perspective, a part of the Chinese habitus. Yang states that “the Chinese relational construction of personhood represented by the importance of face provides the mechanism for the art of *guanxi* to constrain the actions of a gift recipient. Threats to one’s face represent threats to one’s identity” and a damaged face/identity makes social and/or *guanxi* dealings far more difficult (Yang 1994: 196). In other words, the potential of gaining and/or losing face through social interaction involving *guanxi*, as most meaningful social interaction does in China, is what acts to control or constrain, in an Eliasian sense, the actions of the people involved. In the above passage Yang demonstrates the already noted external nature of face as a constraint, as well as its connection to *guanxi* in the Chinese world. As So describes it it is one’s standing in their *guanxiwang*, represented by their face, that “provides collateral” for *guanxi* interaction (So 2006: 93). Face is essentially the controlling mechanism that makes *guanxi* work in modern China. “The larger one’s face, the more prestige and security one possesses and, therefore, the more self-determination one enjoys in social transactions” (Yang 1994: 196).

There is also a clear connection between *guanxi* and power. Gold noted earlier that *guanxi* is ‘a power relationship’ because one’s control of a given resource gives one power in relation to others. Gold also says something reminiscent of an issue raised in the Eliasian analysis in Part One: “*Guanxi* relationships are by definition unequal,

although the locus of power shifts and may never be in complete balance” (Gold 2002: 9 citing Hwang, Wang and Zhai). That all relationships are effectively balances of power and, in that they are constantly changing, never equal, holds true in the Chinese case as well. What the expansion of *guanxi* represented from an Eliasian perspective was an increase in competition for power chances, for control of balances of power. The weakening of the traditional order facilitated changing figurations whereby one could effectively enter these competitions.

In *guanxi* relations, one of the primary resources involved, and usually the one determining which way the balance leans, is face. Face is what is controlled/exchanged before anything else, and also what facilitates greater access to more resources through better *guanxi*.⁴³ On the same page Gold goes on to say: “Effective use of *guanxi* can provide face (*mianzi*)... that is, prestige and status” (Gold 2002: 9). This provision and/or exchange of face in *guanxi* dealings is integrally related to the power relations of the individuals involved. “By losing or giving away part of one’s substance in *guanxi* exchange, one paradoxically gains or increases one’s face. Conversely, the size of one’s face is inversely related to the amount and frequency one receives of another’s substance in the art of *guanxi*” (Yang 1994: 196). Giving in a *guanxi* exchange is tantamount to making an investment; what one gains is, or at least is potentially, significantly more valuable than what one has given up. The return on investment is essentially the resulting increase in face, and this increase comes, in effect, at the expense (but not normally in a hostile fashion) of the face of the recipient. This is true at least until the gift or favour is returned in appropriate fashion. The one who is giving is therefore actually the recipient of face (power), and the one receiving, the ‘loser’. This

⁴³ The reader is urged to bear in mind the ‘face as commodity’ analogy here.

results in a situation where people continuously try to manufacture the indebtedness of the powerful through gifts and favours, when in fact it is only the powerful (those with the most face) who have the ability and resources to do so effectively. There does, however, remain a realistic chance for mobility, and strong incentive to expand relational ties beyond traditional social networks.

It has been suggested that the emergence of *guanxi* in Chinese society was largely a result of a communist system in which resources were, for a number of reasons, hard to come by on a regular basis (Yang 1994, Gold 1985, Walder 1986). This may indeed be a significant contributing factor to the growth of the phenomenon, but emphasis is misplaced on their lack of availability, when from an Eliasian perspective it should be on their changing locus of control. Beyond that, the situation changes considerably with the more open economic environment after 1978 (at a time when resources were rapidly becoming more available) as *guanxixue* exploded in its use and importance.

So and Walker also describe Matteo Ricci as acknowledging what today would be called *guanxi* some 400 years ago among candidates for the exams (So 2006: 9). Specifically their point is the relatively long duration of *guanxi*, or what they call *guanxi* base, as a social phenomenon (by *guanxi* base he is referring to the basis for the *guanxi* relationship, such as native village, or same surname). Jacobs also acknowledges Ricci:

One of the first, (and yet finest) ethnographers of China, Matteo Ricci, described the classmate *guanxi* which he observed almost four hundred years ago: 'In this acquiring of degrees there really is something worthy of admiration in the relationship between candidates of the same year.

Those whom fortune has brought together in attaining a higher degree look upon one another as brothers for the rest of their lives. There is mutual agreement and sympathy among them, and they help each other and one another's relatives as well, in every possible way' (Jacobs 1982: 215 citing Ricci).

Based on this, it seems clear that some sort of relationship based system of reciprocity more or less equating to *guanxi* has existed for a relatively long period in China.

The Ricci quote above is typical of studies of or references to *guanxi* in the past in China which almost exclusively focus either on officials (whether military or otherwise) or graduates of the examination system. It should be remembered that for most of Chinese imperial history, success in the examinations or via other means in government represented far and away the primary means of mobility, whether social or geographical. Other than these two avenues, physical movement, except in times of crisis in which case it was not usually a matter of choice, was not a very realistic alternative. Nor was it generally desired, for more often than not it meant some level of social isolation. Relationships extending much beyond the highly localized boundaries already discussed simply were not an option for most Chinese. Therefore, neither was the formation of *guanxi* ties outside those same boundaries. This renders these past *guanxi* relations in a much different light than those of the later half of the twentieth century in which people of all walks and classes of life were engaged.

The phenomenon of *guanxi* is probably best understood as a case of an existing cultural trait (in its simplest terms, the paramount importance of relationships in Chinese society) adjusting to changing social circumstances.

The central idea is the primacy of social relationships. Sociologists often refer to Liang Shuming, a Confucian social reformer of the 1920s and 1930s, who stated that Chinese society is neither individual-based nor society-based but rather relationship-based... On the one hand, he claimed, China had only a weakly developed concept of the individual self. On the other hand, he argued that China had only a weakly developed notion of the group. What is central to Chinese society is the quality of human relationships (Stockman 2000: 72-73).

In the past the traditional values and the gift economy were based on *renqing* principles emerging primarily out of this notion of human relationships and the Confucian tradition (the two of which are difficult to separate, though it seems likely that the chicken of the primacy of social relationships came before the egg of Confucian theory). What social and/or economic expansion of relationships there might have been prior to the revolution of 1911 (and even, to a degree, 1949) stagnated in cultural precepts that promoted stability but sacrificed potential growth, and in this situation what gift economy might have existed had been comparatively much more restricted in its use. Generally it did not extend any further than the kinship community which normally meant the village boundary, and which can accurately be thought of in Eliasian terms as the primary figuration for most Chinese of that time.

***Guanxi* in recent times**

At this point the Eliasian connection becomes even clearer. *Guanxi* relations existed previously and clearly for a fairly extended period. It also seems to have grown in importance under the Communist regime for the reasons stipulated. But it is also the case that it only came into full bloom after China started opening up to the world, and life's task had shifted beyond just meeting basic subsistence requirements to pursuing more ambitious economic goals. For this reason, it would seem to make sense to look beyond the nature of traditional Chinese culture or the exigencies of communism for explanations of the explosive growth of *guanxi* in more recent times. While it is difficult to say exactly what the extent of the practise of *guanxi* was prior to 1949, and even prior to 1978, based on the already referred to reports of Walder's informants it is reasonable to say that it was not the seemingly all-pervasive social phenomena in either of those earlier times that it has become in today's China.

Fei's summary statement of one way of thinking about the Confucian system as it plays out in society is quite relevant to the discussion of *guanxi*; "Confucian ethics cannot be divorced from the idea of discrete centres fanning out into a weblike network" (Fei 1992: 68). Understood in this fashion, the Confucian tradition might be thought of as intended to order first one's family and members of one's primary figuration, and moving beyond that to include individuals of whatever other figurations one might be a part of, ultimately extending to the whole empire. In this way society could be properly ordered. Until recently, this web of relations was realistically restricted in terms of daily activity to those within one's kinship group or village. As pointed out, the reciprocal nature of social relations was simply a longstanding part of the existing culture, but in

the past this reciprocity was generally restricted to relationships within these narrow boundaries.

It is proposed that in conjunction with the impact of Revolutionary, and later Communist policies on the Confucian social structure, including the significant integration of local society as well as industrialization and the radical economic growth in post-1979 China (and the concomitant growth in competition and differentiation), very fertile ground was provided for the equally rapid growth of *guanxi*. As a result *guanxi* networks (*guanxiwangs*), figurations, then extended over a much wider area, even nationally and internationally. Seen in this light, *guanxi* networks are effectively understood in Eliasian terms as a type of figuration. For Elias, with European industrialization and the growing competition and differentiation that was its inevitable accompaniment, the figurations of the average individual expanded considerably. In other words, the number of people interacted with and/or relied upon, directly or indirectly, in meeting one's daily needs grew substantially. According to Elias, these same figurations were also the source and locale of constraint on the individual. It was the people in one's figuration who constrained, and for whom one ultimately restrained, one's behaviour as the chains of interdependence grew more extended. It was the lengthening of the chains of interdependence within one's figuration that ultimately resulted in the internalization of what had been external, social constraint.

In the past in China, one's *guanxiwang*, restricted to within one's figuration, was normally limited to the family/clan/village. What reciprocal give and take there was had been confined to within those relationships deemed appropriate within the traditional social structure. Given the explosive growth of *guanxi* phenomena during the

Communist and especially the Post-Opening periods something must have changed. Now that the peasants had been ‘allowed’ to compete for a better life, they did. This entailed the use not only of traditional values such as kinship ties but led to the expanding use of *guanxixue* well beyond traditionally acceptable bounds. It is posited that within these expanding *guanxiwang* there lies a good example of Elias’s extending chains of interdependence. This thesis will establish that this Eliasian phenomenon can be traced to Eliasian causes and, therefore, that a civilizing process is in motion in the Chinese world.

The basic groundwork has been laid against which the current Chinese social situation can be analysed from an Eliasian perspective. An examination of the evidence within Chinese culture should provide an answer to the question of whether a civilizing process analogous to that which occurred in Europe is occurring in Chinese society.

In order to appreciate the dominant orientations in a culture extending over the two and a half millennia that we are concerned with, it will be worthwhile working through a review of some of the relevant aspects of that rather extended period, and how the orientations we are concerned with were laced into the bigger picture. This will be done in the following section and should establish the necessary background for understanding what is being put forward in terms of Eliasian theory. This, in turn, will lead directly into the more detailed examination of the end of the Qing dynasty and into the Chinese transition into ‘modernity’ in the twentieth century with which we are primarily concerned.

Chapter Five - The State Formation Process in Ancient Imperial China

In China's state formation process we will be looking for the monopoly mechanism as well as the monopolies of violence and taxation, and the death of both the aristocracy and feudalism. In as much as the state that emerged in China was in many ways different from that in the West, we will also be looking for a means of explaining these differences. Integral to these explanations is the failure of Qin Legalism, reasons for the success of the subsequent Han dynasty (and hence succeeding dynasties), the advent of the Confucian literati, and differences in the way the state dealt with local social relations/figurations.

In *The Civilizing Process* Elias refers to two monopolies that are really two aspects of the same monopoly.

The society of what we call the modern age is characterized, above all in the West, by a certain level of monopolization. Free use of military weapons is denied the individual and reserved to a central authority of whatever kind, and likewise the taxation of the property or income of individuals is concentrated in the hands of a central social authority.

The financial means thus flowing into this central authority maintain its monopoly of military force, while this in turn maintains the monopoly of taxation. (Elias 1994a: 346).

Elias further says that neither can stand without the other. He is here giving a fairly clear description of what, for him, a domain needs to achieve before it can truly be called a

state: monopolies of violence and taxation, and the apparatus to administer them (Elias 1994a: 346). He also says that,

Forerunners of such monopoly control of taxes and the army over relatively large territories have previously existed in societies with a less advanced division of social functions, mainly as a result of military conquest. It takes a far advanced division of social functions before an enduring, specialized apparatus for administering the monopoly can emerge (Elias 1994a: 346).

Looking at the ancient imperial civilization of China, it looks at first glance as if Elias's ideas may not be adequate for this context. The Chinese system was certainly enduring, it had monopolies of violence and taxation, yet the division of social functions was very limited, and remained so for millennia. The first step in a discussion of a civilizing process in China, particularly of how these seemingly contradictory characteristics fit together, will have to be to answer the question of whether, and if so when, these Eliasian parameters actually did develop.

The Monopoly Mechanism Leading to Chinese Statehood

“The Shang are commonly described as the rulers of the first East Asian state” (Barnes 1999: 131). It would be a while before a state in Eliasian terms emerged in what is now China, however. Lucian Pye describes the long transition from a highly feudal agglomeration to a more unified entity that might qualify as a state. The Shang regime, beginning in roughly 1500 B.C., fell to the Chou in 1122 B.C. The Chou did little to alter the existing social order. According to Pye, “The Chou conquest did not bring

about a sharp break in social organization. The feudal aristocracy continued, and the Chou emperor could not effectively control his vassal lords, whose domains eventually became semiautonomous kingdoms and city-states” (Pye 1972: 36). Feudalism (of a sort) was clearly the dominant mode and would remain so for a while to come. While there was a definite unification of sorts, if we are to refer to it using the word state, it must be as a feudal state.

This unification (what is considered by most historians of China to be the ‘official’ unification under the Qin dynasty occurred later) occurred very early in Chinese history as compared with the Europe of Elias’s analysis.

As Jacques Gernet points out, at the end of the seventeenth century the first modern state, the kingdom of France, was just getting organized while China had long been a ‘great centralized empire governed by a uniform administrative system.’ Again, emperors have been quite different entities, East and West. Modern Europe, for example, at one time had emperors of France, Russia, Austria-Hungary, Germany and the British Empire plus the Pope at Rome all making history *simultaneously*. China ideally, and most of the time in fact, had only one emperor on earth, like one sun in the sky (Fairbank 1992: 46).

The two regions, Europe and China, clearly experienced two different time lines of social development. “Most of the European territory had, of course, once fallen under the control of a single empire governed from Rome... but by 1500 the territory had

broken up into hundreds of separate political units” (Tilly 1974: 277).⁴⁴ Tilly estimates the number to be over 500. Kapteyn also comments on this point; “whereas unity prevailed in ancient Egypt and other now-lost empires, as well as in China (the oldest state now existing), Disunity was the rule in Europe” (Kapteyn 2004: 177).

As this Chinese empire is examined more closely it should become clear that it qualified as a state in Elias’s terms from around the time of the first unification through most of the rest of its history. The process leading to Chinese statehood, as described by Fairbank, closely resembles that of the state formation process in the Europe of Elias’s work.

In 771 B.C the Zhou house moved its capital... thus inaugurating the Eastern Zhou. Already Zhou power was being gradually diminished by the growth of many aristocratic family-states out of its central control. By the so called Spring-and-Autumn period (771-481 BC) there were about 170 such states... The states formed alliances and leagues and engaged in a diplomatic-military free-for-all, some absorbing others. By the era of Warring States (403-221 BC) only seven major states remained in the competition (Fairbank 1992: 49).

The Zhou dynasty, a larger central state surrounded by smaller feudal states, lost its central importance as it lost control of the surrounding feudal domains in the Spring and Autumn Period. Throughout this period, however, Elias’s monopoly mechanism was inexorably moving the Chinese world toward a centralized authority. Twitchett suggests

⁴⁴ One might be tempted to pursue an Eliasian comparison between Europe and China with the starting point for Europe being the Roman Empire. This will not be explored here.

the nature of Chinese feudalism was already changing at this point. While the Chinese world might be referred to as feudal for the first four or five centuries of Zhou rule, thereafter the term should be used with more discretion. By the Warring States period the principalities “had become completely independent” (Twitchett 1986: 22).

Cotterell describes a very important aspect of the Spring and Autumn period that emerged out of this changing feudal situation; the emergence of the *shi*.

Many comprised little more than an enlarged feudal household, situated in the fortified city which housed the ancestral temple. In bigger territories the ruling house shared power with its chief supporters, who were granted lands and offices, and relied on the service of a knightly class, the *shi*, whose forefathers were officials or lords... They were usually small landlords holding minor appointments. The growth of this class from 770 BC, the consequence of the blurring of feudal distinctions and the disappearance of many states, altered the balance of society and led under the empire to the *shi* becoming along with the peasant-farmers (*nong*) the mainstay of Chinese civilization (Cotterell 1990: 45).

Through Confucian teaching the virtues of the *shi* became “the essential character of the educated man” (Cotterell 1990: 45). Twitchett elaborates on how the *shi* eventually developed; “(b)y the late Warring States period a new class of landlords and officeholders had already c(a)me into being - the direct ancestors of that class of scholar-gentry which was to continue as the dominant elite throughout Chinese imperial

history” (Twitchett 1986: 29). He further suggests that this growing class came out of the *shi*, mentioned above, and that in their teaching they focussed on the problems of the times. (Twitchett 1986: 29). The *shi* were forerunners of the scholar officials of Confucian bent who would have so much to do with the unique Chinese state development.

Here Fairbank makes an observation that relates to an earlier point. Talking about the Warring States period he points out that at about this same time:

Already visible were two components of the eventual Chinese imperial government - military rulers and scholar-teachers. Both were concerned with the performance of ritual and ceremonies to keep society in proper accord with the cosmic order of which it was a part. Our understanding of the ruler’s role has been recently advanced by Mark Edward Lewis’ ... study of sanctioned violence as a key to China’s state power and social order. He finds that the ruler’s authority in each state was based on ‘ritually directed violence in the form of sacrifices, warfare and hunting.’ Since hunting as violence against animals was practice for war against men, the two major state services were actually sacrifices and warfare. Both involved the ritualized taking of life, and this defined the realm of political power (Fairbank 1992: 49).

Simultaneously there was a growing interest in controlling violence within territories (as in the above quote) as well the growth of a means of administering them with the minor gentry entering the courts (having come from the earlier mentioned *shi* class). These are

the seeds of two related and very important developments, from an Eliasian perspective. The first is an early pointer toward the eventual monopoly of violence. The second and possibly more important development was the advent of the scholar teachers, as already noted a precursor to what would become the Confucian literati, whose impact would be so enormous in the ongoing stability and administration of the empire. Notice also that Fairbank's primary point with regard to the *shi* is that they were closely related to the ritual aspect of the sanctioned violence mentioned. In Eliasian terms they represent the pacified model providers of the Chinese context.⁴⁵ As will be suggested shortly, they may also be representative of the dividing line between the respective civilizing processes of China and the West. Long before Elias's monopoly mechanism unified China through the Qin dynasty, there is strong evidence of trends toward both the monopoly of violence and of taxation.

Qin

The Warring States Period saw the simultaneous slow destruction of the old feudal order, and the beginning of the end of the aristocracy that represented it. A number of more minor feudal states were engaged in fierce competition for control over more and more territory in a clear example of the monopoly mechanism that Elias described: "Medieval and early modern Europe resemble Warring States China in some respects - over centuries of warfare hundreds of independent political units were eliminated" (Kiser 2003: 524 citing Tilley). The large number of small family-centred domains originally numbering about 170 struggled against each other as the monopoly mechanism played out, consolidating into larger entities until there were only seven remaining. These are the seven 'major principalities' to which Twitchett referred

⁴⁵ This is an interesting and valuable line of inquiry in the Chinese context that merits further research, but will not be pursued directly in this thesis.

(Twitchett 1986: 22).⁴⁶ These larger groupings were the social units that would continue to struggle for dominance through the Warring States Period.

Destruction of Aristocratic Power over the Military

Gernet describes the centuries leading up to the Qin unification as a time of new ideas and economic growth, but also of social upheaval. “The old aristocratic society could resist neither the blows inflicted on it by the new heads of state seeking to monopolize power nor the deeper and more powerful influence of economic changes” (Gernet 1982: 73). One of the major blows to the aristocracy dealt out by the Qin in this period was their change in military organization. Whereas the aristocracy traditionally, as in Europe, held the military to be their own domain based on hereditary lines, the Qin had different ideas:

it was the Qin which first broke the power of the hereditary aristocracy in the army by promoting after 350 BC only the brave and the able to the highest ranks. Henceforth the army was simply a war-machine with no scope for noble display (Cotterell 1990: 49).

The military was becoming functional along different lines. Its sole purpose was to defeat the enemy with little regard for the nobility that had previously been so important. Continuing with the Gernet quote above:

The great families who traced their descent from remote antiquity were ruined, removed from their position of power and finally destroyed. The

⁴⁶ A feudalism of sorts continued to exist within them, though it was changing. In fact, it is arguable that some, or possibly all, of these principalities were Eliasian states in themselves toward the end of the Warring States period.

cults which they had preserved so jealously down the ages disappeared at the same time as their estates and cities (Gernet 1982: 73, 77).

Legalism Imposed

Another very important change occurred during the Warring States period. The Qin, under the leadership of Lord Shang (d. 338 B.C.), imposed the draconian Legalism for which it would become so well known. It was also in the interest of enforcing this Legalist system that the bureaucracy was initially fostered, making clear the connection between the *shi* class, the later scholar-teachers, and the government. This Legalism was directed specifically at weakening family ties in the interest of strengthening the state. Local social ties were being attacked with the hope of supplanting them with loyalty to the state.

Legalist doctrines of government aimed at enforcing laws to support agriculture and strengthen the state over the family. For example, group responsibility was decreed not only within each family but among units of five or ten families, so that all within each unit were collectively to answer for any individuals' wrongdoing. Under this system one's best protection was to inform on one's malefactors without delay. Group ties and loyalties were thus undermined in favor of obedience to the state (Fairbank 1992: 55).

This is a very significant development for a Chinese culture in which the family was so important. This attempt at undermining the family in the interests of the state and

enforcing failures to uphold the new law with strict negative sanctions was, for obvious reasons, not popular, and contributed to the eventual downfall of the regime.

Monopoly of Taxation

Kiser and Cai note how this household system was also used as a means of more effectively collecting taxes.

The household registration system created by Duke Xian was further developed and intensified by Lord Shang. This system was the main central database for the administration of taxation and for military recruits... Lord Shang introduced a poll tax in the Qin state, based on data from the household registration system, and created a centralized bureaucracy to collect it (Kiser 2003: 528).⁴⁷

The Qin successfully instituted a system of taxation as well as the means of collection, first within their own smaller state and later throughout all of China. A monopoly of taxation throughout the empire was coming into place. Furthermore:

people could not leave their locality without authorization... This kind of social control mechanism held everyone under fairly constant local supervision and thus made tax collection and military recruitment much easier (Kiser 2003: 528).

⁴⁷ According to Twitchett “the basic idea of dividing the population into small units for control purposes has, with variations and elaborations (the best known is the *pao-chia* system), been repeatedly carried out in imperial times and even as late as in republican China” (Twitchett 1986: 37).

The Legalist system was unparalleled in China in its focus on and success in controlling the population. It not only legally restricted an already culturally constrained mobility, but effectively allowed for the two monopolies that Elias held to be central to the existence of statehood; control of the means of violence and taxation.

Given the increasing centralization, the rolling destruction of the aristocracy, the rise of the new scholar class, the focus on peasant-farmers as fundamental to China, and the monopolization of the means of violence and taxation, a major social restructuring was occurring. “The appearance of the centralised state and the parallel destruction of the old society can best be described as a revolution” (Gernet 1982: 80). Gernet compares this to the advent of the Greek polis in the west in its significance. This restructuring was clearly headed a very different direction from that of the state formation process in Elias’s Europe, however.

At this time, during the Warring States period and prior to unification, Confucianism did not have the same status it would later achieve.

The philosophers of the various schools of thought in China did not quell the disorder, and Confucianism would become an important school of thought only later, under the Han. Yet the Warring States context of sanctioned violence, with its killings and its ceremonies, helps us understand how the Confucian teaching arose and why it was eventually embraced (Fairbank 1992: 51).

The massive social dislocation of the Warring States period imbued a longing for the social stability and security that the Confucian code promised. Much progress along these lines was being made by the large remaining states vying for overall control. In this sense the Qin were not really pioneers. “The Qin state was not the first to reform, but one of the last” (Kiser 2003: 527). But they were the most effective. “Able rulers had begun to build there a centralized administration with uniform taxes, law codes, a salt monopoly, and central army. Other states were comparable... However, the most powerful growth occurred in the state of Qin” (Fairbank 1992: 54).

All this was occurring long before the eventual unification under the Qin; the monopoly mechanism, and therefore state formation process, had long been in motion. The individual states, including the Qin, were steadily edging toward the Eliasian understanding of statehood with the closely related monopolies of taxation and violence. It was the speed and strength of the Qin growth in these areas in particular that allowed them to ultimately triumph in the centralizing struggle for dominance.

Qin Law

Gernet discusses Qin law as it formed during the Warring States period and how it is different from the old order with its new focus on supporting the state. This is valuable in understanding the brevity of Qin rule, as well as the subsequent direction of Chinese civilization.

Objective, public, and superior to all men and excluding any divergent interpretation, it [law] is the means of ordering individuals hierarchically in accordance with a general scale of dignities and

indignities, merits and demerits. At the same time it is the all-powerful instrument which makes it possible to guide everyone's activity in the direction most favourable to the power of the state and the public peace (Gernet 1982: 81).

A system based on the above precepts was destined from the outset to run into difficulty in the Chinese world. It must be remembered that the Confucian social order already in existence focussed more specifically on, and gave priority to, social relations at the local level, and primarily within the family. The idea of imposing social order through law and from the top down (essentially replacing the family with the state) was anathema to Confucianism. In the Confucian understanding, the emperor was to serve as the model for all Chinese, but that model was to be distant and aloof, one which the people were to follow simply because it was the right thing to do. If the emperor had to reach down and touch local social relations, he had, in fact, failed.

Herein lay the problem. In setting the law above man, and doing so in extremely harsh fashion, by making the aforementioned substitution the Qin were in effect denying the importance of the (primarily familial) social relations that had for so long ordered Chinese society. By requiring the people to inform even on relatives the government was asking them to violate norms that had been central to their existence for centuries. They were meddling in the most basic of figurations of the Chinese people. In strictly enforcing this new regime of laws, the Qin regime was setting themselves up for future troubles that weaker leadership would not overcome.

Prior to unification the Qin (as well as, in differing degrees, many of the other six remaining states) had already done much to destroy feudalism and the aristocracy, gained control of the means of violence and taxation, and established the means of administration that would facilitate these institutions staying in place. They had also instituted a legal system that intruded brutally into the lives of the people all the way down to the family level.

Monopolies of the Means of Violence and Taxation under the Qin Unifiers

That there were still many lines of thinking and many conflicting parties with different ideas about how things should be in 'China' is without doubt. "However that may be, it is clear that by the time the emperor of the first Chin [Qin] dynasty conquered the other warring states in 221 BC there had long been a common culture and aspirations to political unity" (Harrison 2001: 9).

The unification of China, ending the period of Warring States and creating the Qin Empire, was finally completed in 221 B.C. The administrative advances developed by the Qin in the Warring States era were further developed and extended to the rest of the country. The short-lived Qin Empire (221-206 B.C.) marks a second stage of significant bureaucratization. Creel concludes that this system produced 'a centralized control of the state that may well have been more systematic and effective than any that had previously existed elsewhere' (Kiser 2003: 528).

The Qin managed to extend their system of administration, of command and control, to the bounds of a then massive empire through their still developing bureaucracy. The innovation of the Qin was not restricted to the administrative sphere alone. Gernet here lists a number of important reforms.

These measures included the creation of one single type of copper coin with a square hole in the middle... the unification of the measures of length and capacity; the creation of new standard characters... and the standardization of the gauge of cart wheels. The ancient walls which the different kingdoms had built on their frontiers to defend themselves against their neighbours were pulled down and the possession of arms was made illegal (Gernet 1982: 106).

All of these innovations are important beyond their face value but most important from an Eliasian perspective was the banning of weapons. “The First Emperor also deprived all but his own soldiers of their weapons and collected the whole of the hereditary aristocracy of China, supposedly 120,000 families, at his capital, Hsien-yang, near the site of the ancient Chou capital of Hao” (Reischauer 1958: 87)⁴⁸. This represents an attempt by the First Emperor to bring the means of violence completely under his own control and, while the effectiveness of this effort cannot be fully assessed at this point, it can be assumed that between this, the emperor’s command of the military, and the rigorous penal system then in place, the means of violence at the local level was significantly constrained. The Qin rulers had long since controlled the military within their domain, and now they had taken the means of violence out of the hands of

⁴⁸ A parallel might be drawn between this situation and the ‘courtisation’ of a similar class of warrior nobility in Versailles, France during the reign on Louis XIV.

individual people. They can thus be accurately described as having a monopoly of violence.

Another nail in the coffin of feudalism was implemented by the Qin upon unification as well. From this, though rearing its head periodically in one form or another, feudalism would never fully recover. Bodde records the words of the original participants in interesting fashion, providing some insight into the thinking of the people and the time:

Of greater importance was Li Ssü's personal demand, made in the same year of 221, that feudalism be abolished, a demand which was to have far reaching consequences in China's history... 'The Grand Councillor, (Wang) Kuan, and others said: 'The feudal lords now for the first time have been destroyed. The territories of Yen, Ch'i and Ching (i.e. Chu) are far removed, and if kings are not established for them, there will be no means of keeping them in order. We beg that the sons of the imperial family be established in these positions. May it but please Your Majesty to give his consent' (Bodde 1967: 78).

Most of the new emperor's advisors were advocating setting up a feudal type system of governance for the empire. Li Ssü came forward and pointed out that a feudal system had not worked in the past, resulting in fragmentation and warfare between the different feudal lords, with the 'Son of Heaven' being unable to stop them. Shih-huang agreed with Li Ssü.

Shih-huang said: 'If the whole world has suffered from unceasing warfare, this comes from there having been feudal lords and kings. Thanks to the aid of my ancestors, the empire has now for the first time been pacified, and for me to restore (feudal) states would be to implant warfare. How difficult then to seek for peace and repose! The advice of the minister of justice is right'... '(Ch'in Shih-huang then) divided the empire into thirty-six commanderies, and in these commanderies he established Administrators, Military Governors and Overseers (Bodde 1967: 79).

With that, Shih-huang set in motion the means of the final destruction of the feudal system and the lords who benefited from it. Hereditary fiefs were to become a thing of the past, ultimately to be replaced by centrally appointed officials. Twitchett describes this move as central.

What was crucial about the 221 reform... was its unequivocal rejection of the idea of reestablishing separate kingdoms or principalities (*kuo*), with the indirect rule that this necessarily entailed, and its decision instead to universalize the commandery/county system, thus providing the instruments for a uniformly centralized jurisdiction over all parts of the empire (Twitchett 1986: 55).

This move, on top of the changes in the military, while not yet completely eliminating the aristocracy was another strong blow to their already weakened position and further dampened their chances as competitors for power within the Chinese state. The

subsequent relocation of the '120,000' feudal families to the capital area further entrenched this move away from feudalism and the aristocracy. This also mirrors to some extent, and in a much earlier era, the courtization of the formerly feudal warriors in Europe. Although the process as a whole was different, in the end result there is a comparison with the passing of the European aristocracy. This process was important in that it allowed for the Eliasian monopolies to more effectively form and become secure.

The virtual elimination of competitors for the throne was very important for later developments as well. So cites Fairbank in pointing out that where Europe had quite a few emperors and a pope, China really had only one under heaven (So 2006: 125 citing Fairbank). For the Europeans the pressure was much greater simply because there was far greater competition in Eliasian terms. In China, Elias's monopoly mechanism had effectively been brought to completion with Qin unification. Acknowledging the periodic historical breakdowns in social order after which the traditional system repeatedly snapped back into place, after unification the Chinese emperors generally had only to control their officials who were by and large, as part of the complex Confucian social order, fairly loyal. "For most of China's history, the weak internal competitors did not pose an important threat to the ruler's monopoly of power" (So 2006: 126). The distant peripheral areas rarely required military force to keep them in control. When the Chinese state was stable, as most of the time it was, this was the case. The pressure to revert to a more feudal like system that would almost certainly lead to fragmentation, simply ceased to be a part of the Chinese social equation.

Viewing a similar (but not identical) point from a different perspective, So argues: "As for competitors outside the state, China was in a powerful position because, unlike

Europe, it had enjoyed monopoly power for the most part throughout its history” (So 2006: 125). With unification under the Qin this became both the ideal and the reality. Where as in Europe the different national entities were surrounded by competitors, in China for most of its history there has been one social group, the Chinese, with one emperor, the Son of Heaven. Even when China was invaded and conquered by foreign groups, the foreigners ultimately became assimilated into, and at one with, the Chinese cultural world. When competitors did succeed in subduing China they were simply made Chinese. This complex social and political system would stand China in good stead for the next twenty one centuries.

Shi-huang’s brutally strict and intrusive rule was more than the people were able to bear for long, however.

Under the Qin, the First Emperor’s ruthless exactions of men and taxes year after year exhausted the people and the state’s other resources.

After 37 years as ruler of the Qin state, he suddenly died at age 49 in 210 BC. His empire quickly disintegrated (Fairbank 1992: 57).

Under his weaker successor, the Qin collapsed in 206 BC. The Han emerged victorious from the ensuing struggle for leadership four years later. The Qin rulership was short-lived, it is true. “Yet so vital were the political and cultural changes of these years that they gave the epoch an importance out of all proportion to its brevity” (Twitchett 1986: 20). The First Emperor of Qin, upon unification, had further established the monopolies of violence and taxation as well as effectively eliminating feudalism and all competition for imperial power. Had his empire lasted, something more closely resembling the

civilizing process of Europe might have occurred, yet it was not to be. The entire structure of his government was to have very long-lasting implications: “For the classical imperial system, for which Confucianism became the philosophy *par excellence*, was founded by Ch’in [Qin] (221 B.C.) on anti-Confucianist Legalist principles, and this paradox, right from the start, remained at the core of Chinese history” (Levenson 1959: 252). All of these revolutionary changes would generally hold true throughout the coming two millennia of imperial Chinese history.

In consciously attempting “to destroy all that recalled the old society” (Gernet 1982: 82), much of which was defined by the localized familial figurations, The First Emperor had encroached on sacred ground and hence overstepped his bounds. As a result, the Han would be welcomed as successors to the throne of the Son of Heaven.

The Han state was located in the area in which the Qin first implemented its bureaucratic system, and its administration retained some of Qin’s administrative techniques. Han gradually became more powerful and started to challenge Chu’s hegemony. With the support of other kingdoms, Han defeat(ed) Chu, and Liu Bang established the Han dynasty in 202 B.C. (Kiser 2003: 531).

Continuation of the Monopolies of the Means of Violence and Taxation during the Han Dynasty

The succeeding dynasty, the Han, learned an important lesson from the Qin failure. Legalism, at least the Qin understanding of it, no longer seemed a viable option for maintaining rule. There were certainly aspects of it that appealed to Han rulers, and that

they fully intended to keep. This effectively included both the monopolization of the means of violence and taxation. They knew, though, that they needed more than just the strong arm of the law to stay in power. It was clear to them that changes had to be made; some accommodation would have to take place if they wanted to stay in power longer than their predecessors.

Although it is clear that most of the components of Han political institutions were created in the Warring States and Qin periods... its bureaucratic administrative system was not adopted immediately by the Han state that succeeded it. The quick collapse of the Qin state inevitably made people question both the efficiency and the legitimacy of a centralized bureaucratic government... Clearly some modifications were necessary to maintain better security of rule. Early Han emperors reached the same conclusion as modern historians: '[H]ad the system been allowed to crystallize in its pristine legalist (Qin) form, with tight centralised control over every segment of the structure, it is unlikely that it could have lasted so long' (Kiser 2003: 530 citing Bodde, parentheses his).

The Han dynasty was established using many of the very Qin administrative techniques that they knew would not serve them in strict form for the longer term. The question for the Han seemed clearly to be what mixture of central control and local freedom was optimum for allowing them to rule unchallenged. That they would keep many of the Qin innovations was without doubt. The strong state that they engendered was as important as the longevity that equally mandated their loosening of state control. Accommodation

had to be made to the desires of the people in the interest of security of rule, but not to the point where that very security of rule would be threatened. Confucianism proved to be the solution.

At the cultural level, the transition from Qin to Han was marked by a move from Legalism to Confucianism as the main legitimising ideology. Confucianism argued that states should not (and cannot, as the Qin example showed) rule by force alone. Moral concern for the people and benevolent conduct were necessary for a regime to retain the 'Mandate of Heaven' (Kiser 2003: 531).

The implications of this decision are important from an Eliasian perspective because they ultimately left the control of the distribution of resources in the hands of the local figurations. This was a very important move *away* from the state-formation and civilizing processes that Elias described. This transition to a more distant central state took time, however. According to Gernet, it is wise not to overestimate this change, at least initially. "In spite of appearances, the First Han emperors were the heirs of the Ch'in [Qin] rulers and continued their work" (Gernet 1982: 110). He says further that this is not the traditional view of China scholars. "Although the Han founders considerably softened the extreme harshness of the penal laws of the first empire, the political and administrative system that Liu Pang put in place differed little from that of the Ch'in [Qin]" (Gernet 1982: 111). Importantly, they kept the administrative bureaucracy but just as important would be the 'softening' of the penal code, for this is where the system most directly impacted and disrupted local social relations. In this

sense they had started the process of removing the interference of the central government in local affairs.

Rischauer offers an interesting explanation of the softening of the penal code. The first Han rulers were not men who had emerged out of the old aristocracy, as was The First Emperor. They had much humbler beginnings, and this affected their approach to governing. In dealing with the peasant masses “they showed themselves more pragmatic and flexible” as well as being significantly less demanding (Reischauer 1960: 92).

That having been said, there was still a pronounced need for strong central authority.

The ideal of a perfectly ordered hierarchical society which is described as Confucian could not withstand the grim realities of crime, dissidence, or invasion without some effective measures of legalist controls. But a conspicuous change of balance is discernable in the Former Han period (Twitchett 1986: 106).

For the new regime to survive, a combination of value systems – Legalist and, as it turns out, Confucian – were a necessary adaptation to the Chinese social reality. It is this change that is central to understanding China’s civilizing process in Eliasian terms. According to Gernet the transition from Qin to Han was a more gradual shift to a combination of the Legalist and Confucian traditions than is sometimes thought; one that started quickly but which took at least most of the former Han (roughly two hundred years) to coalesce. Rischauer reiterates Gernet’s earlier assessment: “Han’s role in Chinese history, in actuality, was to consolidate the new imperial system that Ch’in

had started” (Reischauer 1960: 92). They did this over the course of the succeeding four centuries. But, again, the aspects that they consolidated relate mainly to the idea of central rule and the administrative bureaucracy.

But the foundations of Han power were no different in origin from those of the Ch'in [Qin] kingdom and empire. The same conceptions predominate in the philosophical and religious domain... It was only in the long run and as a result of a complex process of evolution that the Han empire departed further and further from its origins (Gernet 1982: 110-111).

In continuing with much of what was Qin, the Han allowed feudal-like fiefs, but they did not represent a return to the feudalism of old

In short the same ‘Legalist’ empire was perpetuated not only in the territories directly dependent on the central power but also in the ‘fiefs’ (*feng-kuo*) granted first to the founder’s companions-in-arms and later to relatives of the imperial family. Its power was based on the direct control of peoples and individuals by the state (Gernet 1982: 111).

Having feudal-like elements within such an expansive domain was probably unavoidable but a distinction should be made. “It would certainly be a mistake to see in the creation of these ‘kingdoms’ a sort of resurgence of the fiefs of antiquity; the ancient ‘feudalism’ had disappeared for good” (Gernet 1982: 115-116). Having said that, Gernet further points out that these kingdoms retained enough freedom to be a threat to the

centre and for this reason the centre continued to try to destroy them through the second century (Gernet 1982: 116).

After the crushing of a rebellion by seven of these local kings, “These private realms... were never again after 154 B.C. a threat to the central government” (Reischauer 1960: 94). The Han central authority sealed the fate of these kingdoms once and for all with a change in inheritance laws that was to last until the present day in China.

As early as 127 B.C. a law was adopted which was to lead to the final breakup of the fiefs and the downfall of the imperial nobility. It ended the rule by which the title and possessions were passed on to the sole legitimate heir and it enjoined that they should be shared out equally between all sons (Gernet 1982: 116).

This simple yet brilliant stroke prevented wealth from accumulating in any one family’s hands, thus preventing the rise of powerful families and a resurgence of feudalism.

Also seen in the Han is a continuation of the Qin taxation system – while possibly less demanding, at the same time more precise. Gernet describes the Han censuses of this period as being “among the most precise in history. Every subject was liable to a personal tax payable in coin (this tax was levied even on children of tender years), to annual stints of forced labour and military service.” (Gernet 1982: 111).

The level of social control was certainly impressive, even in being less oppressive than that of the Qin. Tight control was, in a sense, facilitated by the incorporation of a

Confucian structure that made it palatable to the people. The centralizing state was moving in the same direction as the Eliasian European states of a later time in gaining ever greater control over the domains that they ruled, but at the same time moving in a decidedly different direction in remaining structurally relatively small and non-intrusive. Sitting on his throne in the distant capital the emperor controlled things from afar, ensuring that all under heaven was in proper working order, while at the same time leaving the local population, for the most part, to their own devices. The integration that would be expected in an Eliasian analysis of this social situation was not occurring.

The Han Dynasty Adopts Confucianism

The adoption of Confucianism was a pivotal event in Chinese development.

The Han ruler's daily regimen of ceremonies and rites required the guidance of learned men at court. Han Wudi in particular fostered learning as one channel (in addition to recommendation) for recruitment of officials. He saw education as a way to strengthen his new upper class against the older aristocratic families, and he accepted Confucianism as the ideology in which the state's officials should be trained. To the despotic statecraft of Qin Legalism the Han added a monumental structure of ideas of largely Confucian origin that provided an all-encompassing state philosophy (Fairbank 1992: 62).

For Elias, a more realistic explanation for the 'choice' of Confucianism than it being the will of a given emperor might be that it was a better fit with (and may accurately be described as) the system by which the people largely already lived. The Confucianism

that was adopted was already practised in a less gentrified fashion by the people. For centuries they had already lived by the very hierarchical, tightly ordered social relations that it promoted. In addition, the Confucianism that emerged accommodated their other more localized beliefs. “The ideas that survived best were those which had the greatest appeal to the uneducated, superstitious masses. This is the clearest evidence of how completely the successive triumphs of Ch’in and Han had broken with the aristocratic past” (Reischauer 1960: 101-102). The system of governing had come a long way in adapting to the requirements and needs of the governed as opposed to forcing the opposite.

The essential point about the Legalist-Confucian amalgam was that Legalism was liked by rulers and Confucianism by bureaucrats. A ruler could use the material inducements of rewards and punishments... to keep the common people in order. But his administrators needed something more than benefits or intimidation to inspire their best efforts. (Fairbank 1992: 62).

Confucianism was the local social order, and its adoption allowed the bureaucrats to maintain that order even as the emperor continued his Legalist stance. The ruler seems to have had at this point an effective monopoly of violence (as well as taxation), but the ability to use violence, as well as the need, was held in check by the Confucian side of the philosophy that Fairbank described above as ‘all-encompassing.’ As pointed out earlier, the ruler needed something more than Confucianism to cope with the realities of ruling the empire, but he also needed more than an iron fist. He controlled the means of violence and could resort to its use if need arose but, if he were performing his role

satisfactorily and all was well, there should be no need. This was a widely understood ‘agreement’ between the state and the people, and in this sense, represents the most important difference in social development between China and Europe (in Eliasian terms).⁴⁹

Han Confucianism came into its own when the imperial academy was founded in 124 BC... The Han emperors, who had already asked for talented men to be recommended for examination and appointment, now added classical training to the criteria for official selection. By the mid-second century AD, 30,000 students were reported at the academy (Fairbank 1992: 67).

The Han emperors needed officials to help them govern and would from now on draw them from the ranks of officially certified Confucian scholars. The examination system over time slowly eliminated whatever was left of the hereditary aristocracy and therefore what had once been the most serious set of competitors for power. The Confucian literati, already having a fairly long history themselves, inherited much of aristocratic power, but without the independence to follow their own course. From the time of its official establishment Confucianism gained in stature and importance until it became the unquestioned centre of political, cultural and social control, a position it would hold until the beginning of the twentieth century. This edifice of Confucianism promoted a social order that by its nature didn’t allow the centre to encroach on local affairs, hence mandating a significant distance between the locality and the centre.

⁴⁹ An interesting line of inquiry that will not be explored in this thesis would be an analysis of the Confucian state with regard to that of Hobbes and the social contract.

“Thus the general tendency throughout the second century was towards increased centralization. The influence at court acquired by the literati as advisors and the toning down of the legislation inherited from the Ch’in rulers did not affect this basic orientation” (Gernet 1982: 116). This, too, was likely true for Confucian reasons. “China ideally, and most of the time in fact, had only one emperor on earth, like one sun in the sky” (Fairbank 1992: 46). Fairbank continues a little later on the next page with the following, “Unity was so strong an ideal because it promised stability, peace, and prosperity” (Fairbank 1992: 47). These were Confucian ideals for sure. Centralization continued but, crucial to an Eliaian analysis, it did so without integration. As part of ‘the deal’ of ruling the empire, this would remain the case. “For all the confusion and disruption of later Han times, not to mention the four confused centuries that followed, the great principles of China’s unity, which the Han consolidated, were never again entirely lost” (Gelber 2007: 22). “The Han dynasty bequeathed to China an ideal and a concept of empire that survived basically intact for two thousand years” (Twitchett 1986: 103). In that the system of governing was so tightly tied to the social system holding the empire together at the local level; that the local and the imperial had been so strongly linked, it might also correctly be said that the Han had bequeathed a social structure of equal duration to that of the empire.

Confucianism made for a highly effective blend with Legalism to govern a massive Chinese empire, and so it would remain until the twentieth century. Feudalism had been effectively destroyed. Confucianism was entrenched as the guiding moral and governing principle. The people were more or less pacified. The traditional social structure had survived the Legalist onslaught and remained, for the most part in place, entailing small, self-sufficient, tightly knit figurations, short chains of interdependence, and low

differentiation and integration (in Elias's European sense). The Confucian social system that had developed over the centuries by its nature consistently supported a strong but small and rather distant central state. The state, in turn, supported the traditional Confucian social order, it being seen to be beneficial to its own interests in maintaining peace, harmony, and stability, as well as its own central position at the top of the hierarchy. The traditional Chinese state/local social relationship might be called symbiotic in their mutual reinforcement of, and dependence upon, each other. Each, in the interests of maintaining its own ongoing position and existence ensured the continuing stability of the other. With the Eliasian monopolies in place and a stable, enduring social organization reinforcing the existing state/local society relations, any change that did occur, occurred within the system as opposed to changing the system itself. This brings us back to Elias's idea that once the monopolies are in place it is no longer a matter of changing the system as a whole but a matter of who will control it (Elias 1994a: 346). With these conditions in place, the Chinese culture understandably remained on a centralizing trend throughout its early development, a tendency that subsequently remained both the ideal and the fact throughout China's long imperial history (Fairbank 1992: 46).

Relationship between the State and Local Society and its Impact on Local Social Relations during the Han Dynasty

It takes a far advanced social division of functions before an enduring, specialized apparatus for administering the monopoly can emerge. And only when this complex apparatus has evolved does the control over army and taxation take on its full monopoly character. Only then is the fiscal and military monopoly firmly established. From now on social

conflicts are not concerned with removing monopoly rule but only with the question of who are to control it, from whom they are to be recruited and how the burdens and benefits are to be distributed. It is only with the emergence of this continuing monopoly of the central authority and the specialized apparatus for ruling that dominions take on the character of 'states' (Elias 1994a: 346).

This quote has been presented before. It is presented again here to highlight the central question of the thesis: how can this Eliasian understanding of state formation be reconciled with a Chinese context that appears to have been similar to that in Europe in some ways yet significantly different in others. The complex administrative apparatus had evolved and the control over taxation and the military were there but the 'advanced division of social functions' was decidedly not.

When the imperial political order arose to replace feudalism in China, rule based on the hereditary status system yielded to the development of a monocratic (centrally controlled) organization of appointed officials, a development which continued for the next two thousand years (Yang 1959: 134).

This occurred for the most part during the Han dynasty, over two millennia ago. Feudalism and the hereditary aristocracy largely disappeared after this, but the family institutions at the local familial/village level that went with it, did not. The Eliasian state existed, but so too did those social structures that the emergence of the state was theoretically to change.

According to de Reincourt, Confucianism remained the only code of ethics having “any chance of lasting success in the Celestial Empire” (de Reincourt 1965: 66). This was so because it had been for so long “congenial to the basic instincts of the Chinese people” (de Reincourt 1965: 66). And this code of ethics took the family as its absolute centre. So while feudalism may have disappeared in the political sense that the ruling class was now a bureaucratic officialdom, the social structure underpinning a feudalism of sorts, had not.

In China, one’s ethical familial duties had little to do with the state and sometimes even came into conflict with those legal duties to the state. It is also true that within the Confucian system each person had duties to both the family and the state. “Everyone thus had two roles, and was both a family member and a member of society with both an ethical and a social identity” (Zhu Yong 1997: 99). Their filial duties were generally considered to be more important, however.

The required unconditional observance of the law by all members of society was “acknowledged by generations of emperors and officials from the time an empire with a centralised government emerged” (Zhu Yong 1997: 100). But because of the importance of kinship, the law was biased in favour of family ethics. “Legal structures had to adjust to kinship relations and varied according to people’s kinship identities” (Zhu Yong 1997: 100). Zhu goes on to say that Chinese law was very cautious when dealing with issues where duty to family was in conflict with duty to the state. Because social life was so complex, situations often required compromise. For this reason, Zhu argues, compromise was well developed in Chinese law.

In Europe legal responsibilities shifted from the family to the state over time, where in China the situation was far different:

during the time of Xia, Shang and Zhou there was a mixture of the state and the family, the state could be viewed as an extended family, while the family was a minor state. Blood relations were closely enmeshed with political relations, and society became a network of blood and political ties centred on the family. Over a long period of time, an inner cohesion protected the family from state interference. All this was recognised by the law, which defined a family member as a bearer of both legal and kinship responsibilities (Zhu Yong 1997: 104).

This understanding of social and legal relations extended to the brink of modern times in China. It is clear that the state was limited in its capacity to interfere in family matters, and, by extension, local matters, in the sense that local society was thoroughly family and clan based. The state intrusiveness and control of resources necessary for the transformation of local social relations that is so important to Elias was not possible under these circumstances. "In China it was the family, and not the individual, which was the political and social unit. In reality the family clan was seen as a miniature State, a complete entity executing quasi-civil and judicial functions" (Patterson 1990: 54). Not only was the family the basic social unit but the functions it carried out obviated the need for state interference or state help. Chinese law also came to support this localized social understanding.

Ethical relationships formed a continuum from the least close to the closest, and kinship duties also varied along a corresponding scale. When two or more ethically related people were involved, the problem arose as to who one owed the major responsibility. As a solution to this conflict, a principle based on the closeness of the relationship was worked out under ancient Chinese law. That is to say, one was obliged only to the person with the closest relationship (Zhu Yong 1997: 103).

The state, being the most distant ethical relationship for the individual, occupied a fairly low position in this regard. “According to Tang law, one could conceal one’s knowledge of an offense committed by a family member” (Zhu Yong 1997: 103). There is probably no clearer example of the priority of family and clan over state. This is, of course, in direct opposition to the law imposed for a short time by the original unifiers of China, the Qin, whereby one was obligated to inform on even their closest relative if that person transgressed the law of the land, and not to do so was in itself severely punishable under Qin law.⁵⁰

Chu discusses the developing situation of relative non-interference. The First Emperor of Qin is given credit for abolishing the feudal system and restoring order but Chu points out that order returned quickly primarily because of the common “communal foundation built upon the clan system” (Chu 1983a: 6). He then refers to the ‘clan networks’ as the ‘backbone’ of the local communities, which “were held together by a political-administrative structure that maintained only marginal points of contact with grassroots areas. It was a system of strong local ties and loose

⁵⁰ An interesting and revealing parallel is the fact that it is also in direct opposition to the requirements of the Communist regime.

centralized control” (Chu 1983a: 6). The First Emperor’s demands on the local people had quickly become so onerous that his regime collapsed only three years after his own death. The Han introduced a different approach characterized by ‘nonaction’ where they “simply removed the interferences and excessive demands” on the local populace (Chu 1983a: 7). This seems to have initiated a repeating cycle of events in China that has continued until recent times.

This cyclical pattern of *i-chi i-luan* (chaos and order) has been repeated time and again in Chinese history, compounded on several occasions by invasions from northern barbarians. Before a dynasty collapsed, its local communal foundation first began to erode. Chaos followed. Then a new political order was established that allowed the local communities to recuperate and even prosper, until another round of administratively induced chaos gradually set in (Chu 1983a: 7).

It has always been the family/clan/kinship system that has held Chinese society together. Things remained stable as long as this structure was in place and there was not too much interference from the central government. Elsewhere, Chu asks what has held Chinese society together through all the turmoil since 1949: “Just as in the past, a major element is the local communities, now embodied in the communes, subdivided into production brigades and production teams” (Chu 1983b: 251). It seems that, as has already been noted in the discussion on dominant orientations, this underlying social fact has always been true in China.

Clan relations at the local community level were the warp and the weft of China’s social fabric. The systemic functional requisites were fulfilled largely in

the local community, and through that fulfilment the traditional Chinese system derived support for political integration. The latter was maintained through a national bureaucratic structure symbolized in the person of the emperor and buttressed by a written legal code and the cultural value of submission to authority. The system, which drew strength from local communities, functioned best with minimal interference from the central administration (Chu 1983a: 9-10).

When the system eventually broke down it was largely because of the decline of the local social structure. It was also the local structure that held it together both in good times, and through chaotic times. Finally, the localized system seemed to function most effectively when left alone. The Chinese state can be said to have early on achieved monopolies entailing the capability of intervening in subject's lives. In this sense it might be said that the ancient Chinese emperors had a monopoly of the means of violence (the corresponding existence of a monopoly of taxation has been evidenced as well), but that they generally chose not to use it to interfere too directly in the lives of the people. They were consciously careful to avoid impacting local social relations, the backbone of Chinese civilization, in too disruptive a fashion.

Confucius emphasized order and hierarchy, with the common people entirely subordinate to the just ruler. Heaven remains the key, not as a divine tyrant but as the provider and embodiment of a system of law based on universal norms. Given that, the Confucian system was based on the idea of harmony as the basic principle of cosmic and human order. The ruler should not interfere in day-to-day affairs. Instead, he

should rule by right conduct and by example. Right conduct was the basis not only of status but of power, and the ruler ought to be a father to his people (Gelber 2007: 15).

This non-interference on the part of the central government and the emperor was culturally, and later legally, mandated. The Confucian understanding of the state and its relation to the people was “one that emphasized a ‘light’ state” (Schwartz 1985: 16). This arrangement served both the people and the state.

Unique to the Chinese situation was a social structure that virtually mandated this arrangement. This significant distance between the local community and the state was integral to the way Chinese society was organized for most of imperial history:

whether or not state power (or a band of gallant men as its embryonic form) was supported by local society depended on the extent to which it acted as protector of local society. Local society and state power formed a kind of support-protection bond. *In this sense*, it is not necessarily unreasonable to understand the rationale for the state to lie in its function of preserving and sustaining local society. (Michio 1985: 84).

Central to this ‘protection’ was maintaining the form in which the local society already existed. Protecting that essentially meant being part of the order by staying out of the way. This was ‘preserving and sustaining’. The local communities took care of their own affairs. This included providing for one’s own needs without state interference. The

king should embody the proper role model but “he should not employ policies that encroach on the livelihood of the people” (Schwartz 1985: 16).

There were certainly other more aggressive views of the state and its prerogatives, but the important point is that while the state may have had ultimate authority (Schwartz 1985: 17), it was not an authority that was exercised with any regularity, and it is held here that it was not one that the people felt compelled to obey on a daily basis. It was always more a case of authority by moral example. In this sense it has long been the case in China that, “the distance between the ruler and his subjects is characterized by the saying ‘heaven is high and the emperor is far away’” (So 2006: 111 citing Fei).

From an Eliasian perspective this is an important idea. The monopoly of violence by the state exerted little direct constraining influence over the people. The state was to be avoided and, because it could be, it was. The social relations, or the figurations, at the local level were not overly affected by the state’s monopoly of violence. The people (and the bureaucracy) were already pacified by the Confucian order. For that reason, control over the distribution of resources was left untouched in the hands of the local figurations. The localised communities were relatively uninhibited by the state, and because of this, the traditional social relations that were so binding on the Chinese people remained exceptionally stable.

“The huge conglomeration of communities was tenuously held together by its common acceptance of the Confucian ideology” (Yang 1959b: 135). It was always the culture, and not the state, which held China together. This is probably the central insight explaining the state’s lack of intervention into the lives of the people. The state had a more or less well understood agreement with the people that it would not interfere

overly in their lives, or the people with the state, as long as each fulfilled their roles relative to each other. The Confucian system defined these roles in considerable detail. There was a fine balance between the extension of the authority of the state and those areas of figurational life at the local level in which the state was not welcome. This was mandated by the Confucian system, and over the centuries had become very much a part of the Chinese social and individual habitus. It was ideally the way society was to be organized. Stepping outside of or beyond these bounds except under extraordinary circumstances was unacceptable. To do so invited disaster, a lesson the Qin collapse and overthrow had instilled in the Han, and a lesson that, for the most part, remained firmly in place for all succeeding dynasties.

There has been little doubt that the Chinese extended family system has been a determining factor in the growth of a specifically Chinese society. The family was always conceived as the basic and indivisible unit of social organization, and all political philosophies stressed the importance of a stable and strong family system as the foundation for a stable social order (Twitchett 1959: 97).

The traditional family structure was not something to be overcome in building the state, but something on which the state should be built. And so it would be, to a greater or lesser degree, for the duration of the imperial order.

Chapter Six - Changing State-Local Relations: The Qing Dynasty and the Revolution of 1911

State Intrusiveness in Qing China

Governmental power was as centralized as the emperors could make it. Provincial officials were not local leaders; they were men who had passed the Civil Service examinations based on the Confucian classics, and had been appointed to office by the central government, usually in some location far from their original homes. However, this bureaucratic system did not stretch down below the county level. The county magistrate appointed by the emperor had to work through local people in actually running the villages (Moise 1986: 24).

The local communities continued to be beyond the centre's direct control in Qing China, much as had always been the case. There was a mediator in the form of the county magistrate who in turn had to deal with local leadership. There was thus a significant buffer between the local communities and the emperor. Hsu also mentions two groups of scholars, the official gentry who were a part of the bureaucracy, and the scholar gentry, who were not. He talks about the scholar gentry as being a more or less intermediary group between the ruling class and the local population. They usually lived in their native place, whereas the official gentry, as part of the bureaucracy, did not (Hsu 1970: 96). The local scholar gentry, in turn, represented the interests of the local people in their own home territory. "At any given time the number of people who had passed the lower examinations and thus acquired gentry status was much larger than the

number actually holding bureaucratic appointments; the ones not in office formed the leadership of local society” (Moise 1986: 25).

In any case the discussion is held in terms that are very similar to those used when referring to Han China after it solidified rule over the then Chinese empire, as well as to Imperial China in general. This governmental organization, the relationship between the government at the centre of the empire, and the empire at the local level, was still current two millennia later. It was still a ‘light’ government with as little contact as possible with local society, one where legitimate authority was maintained through moral example at the top. Mosher is talking specifically about the bureaucracy of the Qing government when he says that “the number of officials did not exceed 40,000” (Mosher 1983: 59). He goes on to say that it was only after the end of the Qing that the number of government employees “expanded rapidly” and after the advent of the communist regime that it “exploded” (Mosher 1983: 59).

Local Social Relations in Qing China - An Eliasian Perspective

Writing in 1970, Hsu says of Chinese society through the ages, and of Qing China in particular, “With their special status and functions, small wonder that the family and clan have been considered the characteristic institutions of the traditional kinship society of China” (Hsu 1970: 95). The traditional family centred structure of Chinese society, as dictated by the Confucian social order, was still very much intact through the Qing period. Both the family and the clan are described by Hsu in very similar terms to that which had existed through much of Chinese history.

Until the late Ch'ing [Qing], the traditional Chinese family resembled a miniature kingdom in which the head occupied the place of the sovereign, with authority to enact family law and make life and death decisions for its members. The government, recognizing this familial omnipotence, never intervened in the domestic relations between father and son, husband and wife, and brother and sister (Hsu 1970: 523).

The government pointedly refrained from interfering in local familial relations, thus remaining as far as ever from the control of the distribution of resources so important to the civilizing process. This was both because local social relations remained so strongly intact, and to ensure the continuance of that fact. Later, speaking of the farmers, who he says made up over 80% of the population at that point, Hsu says, "They lived in small villages rather than on separate homesteads, and as long as they paid their taxes, performed the *corvee* labor, and accepted the obligations of the *pao-chia* and *li-chia* systems, they were left pretty much to themselves" (Hsu 1970: 97). In the traditional, highly self-sufficient, cellular structure of the local communities the farmers were left to take care of their own affairs without interference from the central government. This was as it had always been and generally as it would remain throughout the Qing period.

With this social structure firmly in place, whatever competition there undoubtedly was remained within traditional spheres. Given both the hierarchical nature of their strictly ordered figurations, and the constraining economic conditions in which the peasants lived their lives, there was little chance or incentive to compete for a better life. "To understand the rural economy of China, one has to bear in mind the fact that, with a very small farm under cultivation, land is closed to ambition" (Hsiao-tung 1983: 134).

There was just nowhere to go beyond the spheres in which they already carried out their day to day activities. There was very little, if anything to compete for external to their figurations.

As would be expected under the circumstances, differentiation remained quite restricted throughout the Qing period. Rozman is talking about Qing China with reference to social development in Russia and Japan when he notes

the lack of growing occupational differentiation in China. Within a standard marketing area of twenty or thirty villages a variety of part-time and full-time activities met local needs, but submerged as they were in an overwhelmingly peasant environment, few actually severed their ties with the routine demands of the agricultural cycle. The local division of labor took almost complete ascendance over more broad-based specialization (Rozman 1981: 153).

In this sense the environment of Qing China that Rozman describes applies to most of traditional China throughout most of imperial history.

For Elias, with a lack of differentiation the chains of interdependence between people remained short. This was much in tune with the traditional society of China. The social organization had not changed very much, and certainly not in ways that would allow for significantly extended chains of interdependence. People in general simply had very limited contact with those beyond their native village boundary. When they did, say at a

market town, interactions there were relatively infrequent and the connections were of a different sort than those within their native village.

Understandably limited under the circumstances were both social and physical mobility. From an Eliasian perspective this is important because, were they more significant this would imply a weakening of traditional social ties and an environment where extending chains of interdependence would be more likely. Another important factor was thrown into the works toward the end of the Ming and through most of the Qing dynasty, however. The population of China expanded dramatically during this period. Estimates of Chinese population growth indicate that there were 143 million people in 1741, and 432 million in 1851 (Gernet 1982: 168). This was extraordinary population growth (some have referred to it as “too startling to be true” (Fairbank 1965: 89)) by any standard, and undoubtedly resulted in some of the movement evidenced at the time. Rozman has argued that despite this, rural-urban mobility remained relatively ‘slow’. He goes on to point out that the peasants were held in place by the village culture (Rozman 1981: 175). There was apparently not much to be found in the cities that could not also be found locally in a more familiar environment (Rozman 1981: 159). For the purposes of this thesis this type of movement is forced anyway, in the sense that there simply was not enough land available to feed and house a population growing at this rate. Historically, according to Rozman, this has generally been the case. “Only in famine conditions did poor people sometimes flock to the cities, and their march could usually be headed off by foresight in distributing relief to affected areas” (Rozman 1981: 175).

In this sense the above mentioned movement is far different from that evidenced after the opening in 1978, when people moved less in the interest of survival, but more because they chose to seek out better opportunities elsewhere. In terms of mobility resulting from changing social relations, the Qing period was little different from other dynastic periods. There was relatively little, despite the exceptional circumstances of population growth.

As mobility was low and the chains of interdependence were short, *guanxi*-type relations normally remained restricted within traditional boundaries. As always, relationships beyond those lines were a rare thing. There are examples of ‘exceptional’ *guanxi* relations, however. One example comes from Rozman: “*t’ung-hsiang* refers to the common local origins of persons who associated together. Second only to family and kinship ties, and accommodating nepotistic hiring practises, it established the main criterion for recruitment to organizations and associations through business relationships” (Rozman 1981: 169). He goes on to say that while the Chinese certainly did not have a monopoly on this phenomenon, it seemed to be more prevalent there than anywhere else. In traditional China this would apply in the cities and with regard to migration when one needs to find employment at their destination. Generally it serves to reinforce this thesis’s main idea on the issue; even when people did move beyond local figurations, an exception in itself, they still relied on traditional social relations.

The nature of the emperors’ dealings with the literati also provides good evidence that the social foundations were there during the Qing for the later emergence/expansion of *guanxi* relations.

The emperors tried to emphasize impersonal norms, but purely personal relationships played a tremendous role. The Chinese elite was bound together by a web of personal relationships (*guanxi*) based on kinship, shared educational background, and past favours given and received. Doing favours for one's friends often took precedence over adherence to imperial policy. The emperors made a point of not appointing Civil Servants to positions in their home provinces, because this was where they had the most and the closest personal relationships (Moise 1986: 24-25).

Not only does this show that the literati operated with *guanxi* principles, but also that the emperor was well aware of this fact and, in much the same fashion as had been done for centuries, took measures to deal with it.

Guanxi relations also existed among the gentry but they too were *guanxi* relations that would be expected in traditional Chinese society. The gentry were the only ones who had access to close social connections beyond the local community, and these relations were closest with other members of the gentry. In this case Lojewski is talking about the changing taxation system under the late Qing.

Those households that were able to evade their tax liabilities were known as the influential households (*ta-hu*). The majority of the influential households belonged to the official gentry, although some members of the scholar gentry (*chin*), and even commoners with wealth

and connections with the official gentry, could belong to the influential households (Lojewski 1976: 128-129).

These ‘connections’ could accurately be described as *guanxi* relations. Those involved were using their connections for instrumental purposes – primarily in this case to avoid tax liability. These connections were even more important than the law, or should we say, the threat that the law represented.

Because the gentry were small in number, they also tended to act together to protect each others’ interests and privileges (Lojewski 1976: 132). Together they formed a *guanxiwang* or, Elias would say, a figuration. These figurations among the literati, especially those who studied together or were from the same area, were quite strong. Yang refers to a novel written at the time that talks about them as being determinative of a career (Yang 1959b: 157 citing Li Pao-chia). They certainly extended well beyond village boundaries, but in this sense were ‘proof of the traditional rule’, so to speak. These figurations had long been a part of the traditional order and hence, for the purposes of this thesis, might be described as being ordered in a traditional fashion, within the traditionally acceptable set of social relations. They were also relatively rare in that it was only the literati, a small minority, who were in a position to take advantage of them.

“On the fringes of the empire as at its heart the ideals of culturalism permeated much of popular culture but were closely linked to elite values and practices” (Harrison 2001: 32). This ‘culturalism’ was still Confucian in nature. As we move toward the end of Qing rule and the beginning of modern times for China Confucianism remained the

dominant cultural system, as it had been for most of the previous two millennia. It was this social ordering mechanism – the backbone of Chinese civilization – that continued to hold China together.

Breakdown of the Qing - Arrival of the West

The following discussion of the impact of the West focuses on the reasons why the Chinese state ultimately became so aggressively intrusive. It was this eventuality that led to changes in the traditional order unlike anything previously experienced in China.

“The institutional deterioration of the Chinese state began before the close of the eighteenth century and did not end with the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1911” (Lupher 1996: 33). This was not due primarily to centrifugal feudal tendencies. The Qing had not acquiesced overly in this area. In fact, “when a memorial presented in 1768 again suggested the system of assigning official powers to the heads of large clan groups, the Ch’ien-lung emperor rejected it with a reprimand, pointing out that large clans often caused trouble” (Liu 1959: 76). The empire was apparently showing weakness in many areas, however. Lupher further suggests that the Chinese state would not show institutional strength on a traditional scale again until the Communist ascension to power (Lupher 1996: 33). It seems to have been a process which, once set in motion, accelerated through the nineteenth century, each new problem feeding and building on the ones before, and continued until the dynasty’s momentous collapse in 1911. “In the nineteenth century China slipped into the downward phase of a dynastic cycle, that oft-repeated pattern of initial vigor, subsequent stability, slow deterioration, and eventual collapse which had characterized the administrative and political history of most regimes” (Fairbank 1965: 80). According to Fairbank, in the 1800s it was obvious that

the Qing dynasty was on the downside of its long rule. There would be significant differences between this instance of dynastic decline and that of previous dynasties, however. For one, new players were entering the Chinese world:

Western powers began to beat upon the gates and demand the opening of the empire to Western diplomatic contact, trade, and evangelism, all of which were subversive of the old Chinese scheme of things... by mid-century the dynasty was in dire peril from the ancient twin evils of ‘internal disorder and external aggression,’ which had proved the undoing of so many dynasties before (Fairbank 1965: 80).

The end of the Qing dynasty is often thought to have brought about a shift which the traditional Chinese social system had long resisted, that from a traditional society to a modern one. “That the West altered the course of modern China is not in dispute” (Pong 1994: 12). Hsu refers to the resultant social change as an “epochal transition from traditional China to its modern counterpart” (Hsu 1970: 539). There continue to be diverging opinions on the extent of social change fostered by contact with the West during the Qing, and more particularly the late Qing. The impact of the Restoration movement, initiated in response to this contact with the West, is also understood in different ways.⁵¹ More important for this thesis are the changing Chinese *perceptions* of both the problem itself and the effectiveness of the solution.

⁵¹ Pong briefly outlines the differing positions on this issue, ranging from little, to quite significant (Pong 1994).

Throughout much of Qing rule, the traditional Confucian culture remained intact. To say, however, that China was untouched by events would be highly misleading. Probably more important was the unmistakable realization among the Chinese that the old social order not only had not kept them at the pinnacle of cultural achievement, but may, in fact, have been responsible for their precipitous fall. It was this realization that was to initiate the radical changes that would follow. The major upheaval during the Qing that would set the stage for everything to follow in the twentieth century, and into the twenty first, began primarily in the mid-nineteenth century. “Massive internal uprisings, defeat in two foreign wars, and continued external threats could have toppled the two century old Manchu ruling house” (Pong 1994: 1). That there was considerable internal struggle even without the arrival of Western power on the scene goes without saying, but it was this foreign incursion that was to have the most significant lasting impact.

Historically, foreign threats had come from nomads of the Asian interior. This new threat was coming from the sea, bringing with it the insidious opium, and with that an entirely different approach to ‘diplomacy.’

But now in the 1830s Indian opium rather quickly became a major import... Worse than that, British officials turned up at Canton for the first time demanding recognition as diplomats representing a sovereign power that claimed equality with the Son of Heaven. Worst of all, this incredible presumption was backed by superior naval gunpower (Fairbank 1987: 85).

This was apparently completely incomprehensible to the Chinese who for millennia had worked within a system that had, to their understanding, produced beneficial results for all involved. Who was this barbarian coming to the gates of China with absurd claims of equality when they could easily acquire all the benefits of Chinese civilization merely by admitting their rightful place and paying the proper tribute to the Son of Heaven? There had been others before them who came “to learn, to admire, to pay tribute. But not to negotiate, least of all as equals. The British, even the French and Americans, were therefore wholly new phenomena for the Chinese tradition of how to deal with foreigners” (Gelber 2007: 182).

Opium Wars

With the Chinese refusal to recognize Britain’s demands and their lack of understanding of the scope of the situation, the stage was set for events to unfold from which the dynastic system of over two millennia would never recover. “By the middle of 1842 Chinese forces had been humiliatingly defeated by relatively tiny British forces whose men had scant respect for most of the Chinese” (Gelber 2007: 189). Even now, however, in the face of a situation that had gone from bad to worse, where the emperor had gone from the pinnacle of civilization to becoming “a semicolonial anachronism” (Fairbank 1987: 85), the Qing continued to rely on the only ways that they knew to deal with outsiders.

Not terribly surprisingly, “The concessions following the British war on the seacoast were remarkably similar to the concessions made to militant Kokand on the Central Asian frontier a few years before” (Fairbank 1987: 93). For good or ill, the Chinese stuck to their tried and true methods of dealing with the ‘barbarians’. In this case they

had failed to take in the enormity of the problem, or the inadequacy of their response. The resulting defeat in the Opium War and the humiliating settlement foisted upon China was more than the Celestial Empire could bear... for long. It was a crippling blow to Qing prestige and by accepting opium imports they had provided unequivocal evidence that they “had put their own dynastic interest first” (Fairbank 1987: 93). “From this time the Manchu grip on China began to slip, though they were clever enough to get the foreigner’s support and survive for another seventy years, until 1911” (Fairbank 1987: 95).

It was not long before others, most notably the Americans, were jumping on the British bandwagon to take advantage of the new treaty concessions. “It meant conceding to the US a status of equality that would have been inconceivable five years earlier” (Gelber 2007: 191), and that to a country barely a century old, in comparison to China’s twenty centuries. Beyond that, the other European powers, and eventually Japan which was rapidly becoming a power in its own right largely through the Meiji restoration (ironically providing an excellent example of a course the Chinese might successfully have taken), were forging their own treaties and agreements. “After 1860 all these changes led to more, and more varied, demands on China from everywhere” (Gelber 2007: 209).

Throughout the course of this calamitous century, “The combined pressures of population growth, corruption, famines and floods, made worse by ineffective government, spawned the dark omens of dynastic decline: banditry, riots and rebellion” (Grasso 1991: 35). At this point the Qing government was clearly in trouble.

But something far larger and more important was happening as well. “While the Manchus were beginning their century-long fall from their throne in Beijing, all of China was beginning a far greater slide from its traditional historical perch” (Grasso 1991: 30-31). The inadequacy of rule of a declining dynasty was not the only thing being questioned and eventually rejected. Now, in a profound sense, it was China itself. Where in the past when the monopolies of the given dynasties weakened and came into question, in an Eliasian sense it was only a matter of who would replace them within the existing system. Now there was a growing uneasiness with the system itself as it was being questioned for the first time, and this went to the core of Chinese civilization; the very dominant orientations manifested in the local social order that had effectively *been* Chinese civilization for over two thousand years.

Restoration and Reform

Over the course of the remaining seventy years of rule as the Qing clung tenuously to power, the shape of Chinese society was to be scrutinized in more depth than ever before. Gelber suggests that it was not so much the loss of physical resources and treasure as it was contact with all things foreign, and especially ideas, that impacted China (Gelber 2007: 203). As the foreign presence had greater access to China and her people, it was inevitable that there would be at the very least a cross fertilization of ideas and influence. Given all the events leading up to the treaties and a more open China, and the resulting fact that China was now increasingly perceived by the Chinese as weak, it is understandable that they would question their own position in the world. Gelber mentions three ‘forces’ at work pointing toward the need for modernization: “First... there was the enormous shock and affront to deep-seated assumptions of

Chinese superiority. Second, there was the evidence of Chinese inadequacies in the modern world... Third, there was the position of the Qing court” (Gelber 2007: 212).

After about 1861 there was a growing response to all the problems China was facing. This was to take the form of the ‘T’ung-chih Restoration’ (Tongzhi Restoration) which was basically an earnest attempt on the part of those in positions of power to refit China for the exigencies of the moment. Unfortunately, the reformers of this period were looking in the wrong direction for solutions. “The premise that a revival of Confucian values and institutions, modified or not, could provide strength and stability was erroneous because China was slowly being Westernized in spite of bureaucratic decisions” (Beckmann 1962: 147). The Opium Wars in particular, and all that came with those humiliating defeats, spawned a central aspect of the Restoration that was to have ironic implications for future developments. This was dubbed the ‘Self-Strengthening’ movement, and referred mainly, but not exclusively, to the military aspect of the reform. The whole idea was to make China stronger in the face of her circling adversaries.

By using the term ‘self-strengthening,’ Li was deliberately appealing to tradition... It was considered necessary, on certain occasions, for mankind to strengthen itself so as to maintain harmony with celestial rhythms... Such circumstances allowed the utilization of barbarian strengths (Western technology) to build up the wealth and power of the state so it could protect itself. Yet it was important not to alter the basic framework of Chinese culture... In other words, practical Western

knowledge could be used as a 'means' to reach Chinese 'ends,' namely to conserve Confucian tradition (Grasso 1991: 53).

Once again the Chinese were resorting to tactics that had always worked for them in the past, tactics grounded in the Confucian tradition: "it is important to understand that the main intent of the court-sanctioned restoration... was not to create a new order but was rather an intrinsically conservative response to dynastic decline" (Grasso 1991: 54).

These were methods which had been used time and again to rejuvenate declining Chinese dynasties. Some aspects of the West, those which apparently made it so strong, were to be adopted. This had primarily to do with military technology. Spence is referring to the military changes being proposed and made at the time with reference to the overall policy objectives the leadership had in mind. "But all that was mere preamble to what was considered the great central task: the Tongzhi Restoration statesmen sought nothing less than the re-establishment of the basic values of Confucian government" (Spence 1990: 195). As had so often been the case in the past the institutions of Chinese rule were not seen to be the problem, and, therefore, in classic Eliasian fashion, were not to be changed. There was no need to change them. In fact, they should be strengthened. The problem was a failure to rule in the manner prescribed by tradition and by those institutions.

Never was it assumed that dynastic decline was caused by inadequate institutions... Throughout China's history issues of social, economic, and political structure were overlooked as sources of dysfunction; in fact, it was assumed that each new dynasty had to continue the institutions of its predecessor (Grasso 1991: 55).

At least among these statesmen the opinion was that if the Confucian tradition were strengthened and purified, all would be well again. As Elias points out, once any state and its monopolies are functioning effectively, there should be no need, real or perceived, to change the institutions themselves. The people would not seek to change the monopolies of power, but only those who controlled them (Elias 1994a: 346). This, in the Chinese case, had been true for thousands of years. The problem in this new situation was that these tactics were wholly inadequate for the task confronting the Chinese, and, in fact, may have made things even worse.

The great aim of the T'ung-chih Restoration was the revival of Confucian values and institutions, but so *modified* that they might endure... Restoration statesmen had no desire to create a new society. They wanted to restore a society that they confidently believed had been based on immutable truth and that could therefore, with adjustments, flourish in any age (Wright 1966: 63).

Later in the same work Wright says that the success of the Restoration depended on how well the local traditional culture could be reintegrated without getting in the way of military and diplomatic modernization. Some of the reformers had wanted to professionalize the subadministrative levels of government, to give them salaries and make them part of the bureaucracy, hence bringing them more under the control of the central state. This was never carried through "For a variety of reasons" but, again, the need was quite visible to those seeking to make what they felt were the necessary changes (Duara 1988: 60). The main idea was to extend the reach of the central

government into the local community but because of the nature of local control it could not succeed (Wright 1966: 125). In response to Wright, Pong asserts, “That the Restoration failed is not the question – the degree of the failure is” (Pong 1994: 2). This desire on the part of central authorities, however, continued into the next century as China moved toward dynastic collapse and the formation of the Republic.

Sino-Japanese War and the Failure of the Restoration

The reasons for the failure of the Restoration are not easy to pin down. It remains clear, however, that the reforms did not achieve the desired goal of restoring China to her ‘rightful place’. While some progress was seen as being made, the truth of the situation, at least as the people understood it, soon became apparent. In July 1894 the crowning blow came with the Sino-Japanese war. Japan’s victory was quick and complete. It was now unmistakably clear that whatever knowledge the Chinese had; social, cultural, scientific, military, was, in Wilterdink’s terms, “relatively inadequate” for the situation (Wilterdink 1977: 111). The Japanese had proven their membership in a club in which the Chinese did not belong.

Japan’s decisive victory was a great blow to China’s national pride. It was bad enough that the emperor had to give way to Europeans. Being crushed by the ‘dwarf bandits’ of Japan, inhabitants of an island backwater that had always sat in the celestial shadow of the peacock throne and had borrowed heavily from Chinese civilization, was a humiliation beyond endurance (Grasso 1991: 56).

According to Gelber the very “nature and swiftness of the Japanese victory made Japan the very country to emulate” (Gelber 2007: 232).

From the loss to the Japanese onwards, the demand for change grew in intensity. Now pressure to change the system itself was starting to be voiced much more openly for the first time. The nature of the monopolies, which had not been questioned for millennia, were coming under increasing scrutiny. It would no longer be perceived as acceptable to change only those who ruled within the traditional Chinese structure. Now the structure itself would have to change. Given the established existence of the monopolies of violence and taxation this is in contrast to the way Elias would have had it; but given also the simultaneous existence of the traditional social relations, it was necessary in order for the civilizing process to continue. This also represented the driving force behind the central government’s subsequent focus on gaining direct control over local society. Now, for the first time since the Qin, the Chinese leadership was moving in an Eliasian direction, the continuation of a civilizing process.

Hsu suggests that it was during the Qing that China entered modernity: “The Confucian state and society and the old ways of life which persisted during the early and middle stages of the dynasty went through a radical transformation under the Western impact after the mid-19th century” (Hsu 1970: 539). Many events led up to this transition, all mainly resulting from nineteenth century contact and conflict with the West. It was these Western incursions that forced the modernizing responses from the Qing and later rulers. “For the holders of power, China’s great revolution began in the 1830s. The Chinese place in the world rather suddenly began to turn inside out” as the realization of their own inadequacies was forced upon them (Fairbank 1987: 84).

Beginning the Assault on the Traditional Order - Qing Reform

Many in the government had come to realize the need for change. At the same time there were many reform movements springing up among the gentry (Grasso 1991: 57). The change now being called for, however, was of a different nature. It was not a call for restoration of the old but one closer to revolution – of throwing out the old and bringing in the new. “By the turn of the twentieth century the demand for change permeated Chinese society” (Grasso 1991: 70). In searching for answers to their pressing needs, there seemed to be an awareness among the reformers that even the traditional social relationships at the local level had to be altered. To put the matter in Eliasian terms, the hold of the traditional figuration needed to be broken. The very core of Chinese civilization had to be re-examined, and possibly even discarded.

“There were varying ideas on how China could achieve a position equal to that of Japan and thereby enable herself to control her own affairs” (Stokes 1964: 275). At this point even the Empress Dowager, a strenuous opponent of reform in the past, came to acknowledge the need for change. She finally “came to understand that nothing short of new policies could save the dynasty. She was not converted to reform in principle, but she did realize that the dynasty would have to make concessions to reform proposals” (Beckmann 1962: 198). With this realization came a frantic dash to catch up, before the race was lost and the dynasty finished. “Even the Manchu court was awake. Tz’u Hsi was a changed woman, a convert, though perhaps an unwilling one, to reform. She had made a complete *volte-face*, as the leaders of Japan had done some forty years earlier” (Stokes 1964: 277). Regardless of her motivation, this was a radical turnabout as she affirmed “that it was no longer sufficient to learn foreign languages and how to

manufacture weapons – to do so was only to change the skin and hair of China whereas changes in the vital organs were essential” (Stokes 1964: 283).

Reform, some of which was to prove highly significant, was initiated through the remainder of the dynasty and, though it would prove too little too late for the sake of the dynasty itself, the trend was set. This process would ultimately focus on the very traditional social relations that had proven so intractable a stumbling block to the continuation of a civilizing process.

The military was reorganized and brought more firmly under central control. Probably most important in this regard, the occupation of soldier was no longer looked upon with contempt. “Many who took officers’ courses were men of good family - the soldier was no longer to be scorned in China” (Stokes 1964: 279). Steps were taken to reorganize the government (Fairbank 1992: 242). There was a new legal code abolishing collective responsibility, a new constitution encouraging greater representation of elected officials was put forward, foot binding and slavery were banned, young people deemed capable were sent overseas to study for officialdom (Stokes 1964: 280-285). Changes to the education system were perhaps the most important of all. “In 1901 an imperial edict called for the building of a national school system, and in 1903 a ministry of education was established. In the following year the new ministry produced a plan for a system based on that of Japan.” (Beckmann 1962: 203).

Central to the education reforms was the abolition of the examination system. “In 1905 the total abolition of the ancient examinations was decreed... It may be considered that the abolition of the examination system in 1905 was in the long run of greater

significance than the overthrow of the Ch'ing in 1911" (Stokes 1964: 284-285). Since Han times the Chinese had relied upon these examinations to provide its officialdom, and thus, they were a centrepiece of the entire civilizational framework. Now, with this one act, they were to disappear from the social scene in startling fashion. In their place a completely new system was to emerge, and do so rather quickly in historical terms.

In 1904 elaborate plans for a system of government schools were drawn up. These schools, controlled by a board of Education, were to range upwards from kindergarten and primary schools to high schools and universities. 'Western' subjects were to be taught, though the Chinese classics were not to be ignored... In 1905 only about 100,000 students were receiving a 'modern' education; however, by 1910 there were probably a million and a half children at western-style schools (Stokes 1964: 284).

This was radical not only in that it struck at the very nature of officialdom, but also in that it pointed toward a far more universal education based on Western content. It would be difficult to overestimate the importance of this shift in social organization. By eliminating the examination system the relationship of the state to the local community was necessarily changed and hence, so too was local society. Important new social groups were forming.

Broadly speaking these were the *yang-wu* experts, comprising those who had knowledge of foreign languages and learning, those with managerial capacities, those who had acquired Western technical skills

– military and so forth – and those who started modern businesses

(Bastid 1976: 124).

Bastid follows this up by saying of their impact on society that, “in long-run terms, their role can only be construed as marginal” (Bastid 1976: 124-125). From the perspective of the present thesis it is argued that this conclusion is wrong. This change was, in fact, very significant. Nevertheless, Bastid’s research remains important to this thesis

For example, she puts forward an important ‘working hypothesis’ in arguing that when looking at this period the important point is that we indeed see a change “from a traditional agrarian society into a modern agrarian society... The important thing is the notion of a different type of agrarian society” (Bastid 1976: 125). She follows this idea by positing the formation of an ‘agrarian bourgeois’ that was no longer beholden to “the central government’s bestowal of titles and degrees” and whose power no longer rested on the performing of certain duties and “the upholding of customary bonds” (Bastid 1976: 126). Their power was based instead in wealth and strength, sometimes military. These people made up the new social groups referred to above. Fairbank refers to a group resembling, but not yet quite, an agrarian ‘bourgeois’ that was no longer based in the countryside but in the treaty ports from where they had their rents collected (Fairbank 1992: 244). All of this is insightful in pointing toward the breaking of traditional bonds, those which had always been so important in holding Chinese society together. In this case, the position of the officialdom that had effectively formed for millennia the middlemen between the state and local society was coming under threat by this rising new class. The newly-threatened gentry had been the very group that had always been so important in enabling local society to remain self-sufficient and cellular,

and with the state so distant, the one group in China that had always been virtually untouchable. Add to this the elimination of the exams, and the entire traditional arrangement between the state and local society was changed beyond recognition. “This great turning point stopped production of the degree holding elite, the gentry class” (Fairbank 1992: 243). The void being created would have to be filled.

State Intrusiveness during the Qing Reform Period

Duara describes what he calls the cultural nexus of the period. It was to be this ‘cultural nexus’ that had come under attack as being at the centre of China’s failure. This thesis argues that the ‘culture’ aspect of his ‘cultural nexus’ was largely determined by the Confucian tradition, the dominant orientations of Chinese society, and that the local figurations were one (the most important) ‘institution’ in the framework. In attacking this ‘cultural nexus’ the government was attacking the roots of their own civilization, as was their intent.

Hierarchical institutions, such as those of the market, kinship, religion, and water control, and networks, such as those between patrons and clients or among affines, provided a framework within which power and authority were exercised. The term ‘culture’ in ‘cultural nexus’ refers to the symbols and norms embedded in organizations that were meaningful to their members. These norms encoded religious beliefs, sentiments of reciprocity, kinship bonds, and the like, which were transmitted and sustained by the institutions and networks of the nexus (Duara 1988: 5).

He elaborates in somewhat more detail on these networks in the following way: “Also part of the nexus are informal networks of interpersonal relationships found, for example, between affines, patrons and clients, or religious teachers and disciples” (Duara 1988: 16). It is these ‘informal networks,’ especially within kinship groups and between affines that form the bulwark of local figurations.

not only local power structures but the imperial state itself had relied significantly on the cultural nexus to establish their authority among the rural communities of North China through at least the end of the 19th century. The fateful efforts of the 20th-century state to penetrate rural society through means outside the cultural nexus and to destroy parts of it would ultimately undermine the state itself (Duara 1988: 5-6).

The state had always relied on the traditional Confucian local relations for recognition of its authority (and the localities had relied on the state’s Confucian obligations), and a significant part of that was the gentry elite. Where the European state had to overcome and take control of the localized feudal figurations, the state in China relied upon them (though true feudalism had passed from the scene) for its own ongoing existence. As long as the traditional Confucian order remained stable and strong, so, too, did the state. This was clearly changing in response to the arrival of the West and the decline of the Qing. Having said this, however, it is also clear that it was not a smooth transition. Qing society remained, for the most part, a traditional Chinese society to the very end.

Up to the time of reform the state’s presence in rural areas was still typically limited. This was the proper way of ordering things in traditional China, hence Rozman argues

that traditional Chinese society was alive and well at the end of the Qing Dynasty even as reform measures were being implemented to bring it to an end (Rozman 1981: 167). Duara talks about the change in approach in late Qing policy toward the countryside. Basic to the whole reform movement, he argues, was the centre's involvement in rural society. This was symptomatic of the situation as well as of the radical nature of the change being called for. Referring to the turn of the century, he argues that

this moment dramatizes the notion of a state moving to break with the past and begin a new epoch. Much of what happens in the next half-century originates in the historical events of the time... These developments culminated in the modernizing drive known as the late Qing reforms (*xinzheng*), which attempted to transform the relatively weak institutional involvement of the nineteenth century Qing state in rural society (Duara 1988: 58).

Duara talks about two processes at about this time, one economic and the other “the efforts of the state to deepen and strengthen its command over rural society” (Duara 1988: 1). It was the state's efforts to gain greater control of the rural population that had the greatest impact. In pursuing this initiative they would be attacking exactly those local figurations, the breakdown of which Elias sees as vital for the civilizing process. For Elias, only as these traditional social links are broken down do the chains of interdependence between people extend, ultimately forcing the internalization of constraint.

In most of this area, however, state strengthening, which had also been taking place since the turn of the century, had, by the 1940s, greatly transformed local society - indeed it had changed the links between politics, culture, and society in rural north China. The subsequent, seemingly irreversible course of development of this state resembled the process in early modern Europe that Charles Tilley and others have called 'state making.' (Duara 1988: 1-2).

“The task of the reformist state included more than bureaucratizing subordinate personnel at the county level. It would also have to formalize the apparatus of subcounty government in order to make it more amenable to state interests” (Duara 1988: 60). This need was the other arm of the local modernization process, and given the resilience of the traditional social structure it would be no easy task. The interests of the locality would have to be subordinated to those of the centre, hence mandating that they forfeit a considerable amount of their autonomy and self-sufficiency in becoming more formally a cog in the wheel of the larger state government apparatus. This would be to turn the traditional social order on its head.

The earliest reports suggest that subcounty police and education facilities were first established around 1901 in Shandong and 1903 in Hebei. The taxes levied on the villages for these expenses began to accelerate with the formation of local assemblies dominated by the gentry. As Philip Kuhn has shown, gentry management of local community projects had been common since at least the late 19th

century, but the practice was legitimated by the official constitutional movement in 1908-09 (Duara 1988: 61).

This thesis holds that the state had essentially formed with the original Qin unifiers of China, and certainly with the Han dynasty, but the intrusion of the state into local society characteristic of the European civilizing process had not occurred. With this self-strengthening movement made in desperation by the Qing, the intrusion had begun in earnest. Early in the twentieth century the Chinese state changed rapidly. “But in North China, one of the most important aspects of state strengthening - the ability to penetrate and absorb the resources of local society - continued more or less uninterrupted during the entire period” (Duara 1988: 3). In other words, the Qing government set in motion a trend toward central control over resources at the local level, thus violating the long-standing state-local society arrangement that had been integral to the traditional Chinese social order. This control is, of course, a pillar of the civilizing process described by Elias allowing it to gain its full momentum.

Change at the Local Figurational Level.

Hsu talks about change at the local level as being quite significant.

The kinship society of China, with its age-old customs, values, and emphasis upon the family and clan as basic units, was shaken to its foundations during the last decade of the dynasty. The Confucian concepts of family loyalty, filial piety, chastity, Three Bonds, and Five Relationships gave way to the Western ideas of individualism, freedom, and equality of the sexes (Hsu 1970: 523).

All of this change struck squarely at the foundations of what had always made Chinese society unique, at its very identity, and therefore at the identity of those making up that society. While at the moment in time of the first decade of the twentieth century the relationships traditionally making up local society were not as yet changed all that much, the trend was set. A new way of thinking, of seeing the world, was in place. Hsu continues in talking about the Western ideas that,

striking at the very roots of family relations, won currency among the young. Furthermore, the opening of modern schools at the turn of the century in effect meant that the government had taken over from the family the responsibility for educating the youth. Thus, when the state intervened in family relationships, it struck away the political prop for a kinship society... Concomitantly, the legal support of the family-centered society also crumbled. (Hsu 1970: 523).

Here again we see the importance of the implementation of the new education system and the radical nature of the change involved. For the first time in the history of imperial China, young people were to be educated by those outside the family. The change itself was quite radical and it promised to deeply impact traditional social relations in the future. Not only were the young being influenced by ideas from afar, but they were now often being taught those ideas in schools by people from outside their primary figuration.

From the middle of the nineteenth century through the revolution of 1911, there were lost wars, the not inconsiderable influence of opium, numerous internal rebellions (including the hugely destructive Taiping), significant economic stress, increasing contact (and conflict) with western peoples and ideas, and the growing, if not always eagerly accepted, realization that change was both necessary and inevitable. This led first to what came to be referred to as the 'Restoration.' Later it transitioned into more realistic reform efforts during the last decade of the Qing, and it would be followed in the Republican period and the Communist period after that, by an increasingly intense assault on the traditional Chinese culture in wave after wave of reform. The Chinese were driven in this direction by a myriad of causes, but most of all by the inescapable realization of their own failure in the face of a seemingly universal foreign onslaught. According to Perdue, "the 1911 revolution which created Republican China had profound roots in the long-term trends of Chinese society; it was not merely the result of a faddish fascination with Western parliamentary government" (Perdue 1988: 286). Whether viewed as a negative (or even hostile) reaction to their own tradition, or as a continuation of it in one form or another, this fact holds true and is as Elias would see it.

Chapter Seven - Assault on the Traditional Order under the Republic

The politics of the period between the collapse of the Qing dynasty and the advent of the communist regime are beyond the scope of this thesis. A summary description will suffice in situating what follows. After the fall of the Qing dynasty there was a failed attempt to create a republic, during which there was a great deal of 'warlord' and regional fighting and confusion, followed by pseudo-unification under the Nationalists in Nanjing in 1927, and finally civil war leading to the advent of the Communist regime in 1949 and the expulsion of the Nationalist Regime to Taiwan. The entire period will be referred to as the Republican period, while acknowledging that it encompasses far more than just that. The primary goal of this section is to outline the social change that was occurring during this period with reference to those areas already deemed important to the Chinese civilizing process. The issue of primary importance continues to be the steady encroachment of the centre on local autonomy and self-sufficiency, and its possible effect on traditional social relations.

In effect... the 1911 Revolution was an elite Revolution, whose tale is told in the activities of the elite. But elitist Revolutions still have implications for the masses, and the problem becomes one of determining from the scattered and fragmentary sources just what those implications were (Esherick 1976: 250).

The Republican Revolution was indeed an elite revolution, but this thesis holds that its impact on the peasantry in social terms was significant. This is true even if one only looks at the fact that it was this revolution that finally broke the political backbone of

traditional China and allowed for social change to commence. In this sense the lives of the peasants were perhaps impacted as much as at any other time in Chinese history.

Ramon Myers provides a good example of exactly this point. He argues that after the fall of the Qing dynasty, “Patron-client relationships rapidly deteriorated. Tenants struggled to hold on to their traditional subsistence rights, but they could no longer depend on the former imperial government to check patron expectation and honor patron obligations to their clients” (Myers 1980: 244-245). Under the traditional situation the tenant could depend on the right to both employment and subsistence. “These conditions existed prior to 1911, but afterwards tenant rights to subsistence eroded away... Landlords withdrew such traditional obligations as to fetch a doctor and pay medical fees when their tenants became ill” (Myers 1980: 245). These aspects of traditional society in the village, the obligations between landlord and peasant, had a long history in China. They were a very important part of the social and political order that had remained so stable for so long in that through them many of the functions were performed that allowed the state to remain so distant and small. The alteration of this landlord-peasant relationship was a momentous event. With the perceived changing needs of Chinese civilization and the changing notions of government, actions were being taken that were affecting social relations at fundamental levels.

Labor Allocation Patterns

Fei-Ling Wang’s study focussed on what were called Labor Allocation Patterns, or LAPs, which are easily understood as part of the dominant orientations and changing social organization of this thesis. In this perspective, Wang is talking about “the patterns and the norms that guide the organization of labor in production, that is, the allocation

and the reallocation of labor force across the boundaries of industry, institution, rank and profession, and geography” (Wang 1998: 59). This is relevant because of its correlation to the control of the distribution of resources in traditional China. Labour, as a major resource itself, is allocated to those activities which produce the greatest return in resources for those concerned to take advantage of them. The area of control of the allocation of labour is highly correlated with the area of control of the allocation of resources. In the traditional structure this was done primarily within the family. Wang points out that with the changing economic and social context from roughly the middle of the nineteenth century through the middle of the twentieth there was a significant shift in LAP toward an emerging ‘market LAP’ (mainly in the urban areas).⁵² This new structure was different in many ways than anything that had come before and both reflected and resulted in significant changes in social structure.

First, the workers employed and managed under this LAP were usually permanent workers, although many of them had a strong desire to retire to their old villages – a dream that was gradually broken. Second, despite the widespread existence of ultra-economic ties between the workers and their employers, economic considerations were generally the main concern of both (Wang 1998: 90).

The two points made here are relevant to what this thesis is arguing. First, in the past when one moved to the city or somewhere else to work (in itself a rare occurrence), it was strictly temporary and always with the intent to return to one’s home and family as

⁵² This process had started in the 1840s and 50s. By the 1890s there were 100,000 in industry. In the 1920s there were about 3.8 million people employed in industry. By the 1940s there were 8-10 million (Wang 1998: 89).

soon as possible. According to Wang this was changing. The age old ties to one's home village were apparently loosening. The second point also implies a significant shift in the very way that relationships were viewed and understood. In this case economic considerations were beginning to take precedence over personal ones. Considering the nature of the historically very negative Chinese view of commerce, and the sacrosanct perspective on personal and familial relationships, this too, is quite significant.⁵³

Though relatively small in absolute terms (in that it was primarily an urban phenomenon), it was happening on a fairly broad basis. It should also be said that some rural areas near the large industrial cities were impacted as well. Wang goes on to suggest that these developments set the stage for the Post-Opening success stories like the Sunan model, the Wenzhou model, and the Dacuzhuan model (Wang 1998: 90-91).

The impact of these changes in social relations was not to be quite as restricted as their initial geographic distribution. This new model of relations appears to have subsequently spread to nearby rural areas. This thesis holds that, using an Eliasian perspective, it was the progressive weakening of traditional social relations such as these that contributed to growth in urban areas (migration) and even industrialization. The traditional social relations of the millennia-old dominant orientations of Chinese society had to weaken before these other events could occur to the extent that they did. There were a number of factors that caused these ties to weaken to this extent, all stemming if not completely, in large measure from the Centre's perceived need to change in order to survive.

⁵³ In the Confucian social order, those who pursued commerce held a position near the bottom of the social hierarchy.

State Intrusiveness during the Republican Period

At about this same time (1900-1910) there were concerns among the pro-democracy reformers that the reform councils then put in place at the more local level would only serve to consolidate the power of the already existing gentry (Spence 1990: 279). They were understandably uncomfortable with this possibility in that it might inhibit continuing reform.

This fear was borne out in the months after the Manchu abdication, as old scores were settled and powerful local incumbents took over a range of new posts designed to bring the authority of the central government much deeper into the countryside than the old Qing magistrates had ever been able to do (Spence 1990: 279-280).

Herein lay the difference. New leadership was seen to be a basic need of modernization and it was felt that the state should provide it. This new leadership would be far more directly linked to and held accountable by the centre. These links could most effectively be established with existing local power holders, be they gentry, representatives of the new rising class referred to as *yang-wu*, or someone else. As part of the state strengthening process, the “bureaucratic penetration of society” was seen as being vital and this was the means (Duara 1988: 60). Central control over local life was a major, if not the major, requirement for modernization as many of the reformers understood it. The aforementioned attack on the official gentry, the men who effectively supplied the stabilizing link between the centre and the locality in the traditional system, was the first step. The already mentioned void that was being created where leadership had been had

to be filled but, regardless of who the individuals filling the void were, it would be filled by people far more directly responsible to the state.

Zanasi refers to Fei Xiaotong in one of Fei's studies of Kaixiangong, who says that the old elite were simply replaced with officials from the state (Zanasi 2004: 140). The difference was, obviously, that in this new situation the direct link between the locality and the state was established with the state assuming ever greater control. The central state had simply reached another rung down the social ladder. In the past this over-extended reach of the government had always been consciously and intentionally avoided, this avoidance being an inherent part of the social order.

With the formation of the Republic the newly emerging political arrangement with its closer ties to the locality were gradually becoming cemented into the government structure. New "magistrate's examinations were introduced in 1913... these exams produced a younger breed of professionally trained administrators as opposed to the classically trained scholars of the Qing" (Duara 1988: 61). The traditional system certainly was not overthrown in one step. Many of the former officials remained in powerful positions and many of the functions, such as tax collection, were carried out "through the existing, informal structure of subcounty administration" (Duara 1988: 61). But the trend was set. The governmental structure of the locality was changing and the centre was becoming more of a factor in local social organization and relations. From an Eliasian perspective, the locality, and the people therein, were finally becoming more integrated into the larger state.

Nationalists

“By the spring of 1927 Chiang had almost completed his Northern Expedition, giving China the first semblance of unity since the fall of the Manchu [Qing] dynasty” (Schurmann 1967: 89-90). Even as the Nationalists assumed a fairly strong position of power, they retained a very similar understanding of what had to be done at the local level.

Both Nationalists and Communists aimed at breaking down the long-established network of socioeconomic power in the village. Because that network was seen as the stronghold of feudalism and a major obstacle to modernization, they agreed that its removal was crucial if China was to be saved from ‘backwardness’ and colonialism (Zanasi 2004: 138).

Further elaborating on this thought, Zanasi continues, “Displacing the local elites was as important for the Nationalist reformers as for the Communists” (Zanasi 2004: 139). Their primary focus was essentially the same as that of the Republicans before them, and the Communists who would follow.

When the Nationalists captured power in the North in 1928, they were determined to institutionalize local government at the level of the ward. Initially the wards were expected to be self-governing bodies with elected officials, but by 1933 they had become ‘purely administrative arms of the county government’ (Duara 1988: 62).

The Nationalists consolidated, and in fact increased, power over the locality after they took power. The wards were seen by the Nationalists as part of the nation-building process as opposed to just contributing to state-strengthening, requiring that they be integrated into the central apparatus. There continued to be many of the weaknesses of the old order, but the process of change was also continuing. Duara says of the ward's tasks that they "included not only population registration, land investigation, taxing, and policing but also supervising the construction of the infrastructure of a modern nation: education, participatory institutions, and an integrated economy" (Duara 1988: 62). These were functions that, if carried out at all, had for the most part been done at the local level previously, largely within the existing local social structures.

The Village

A second level formally recognized by the state was the village. In the early 1900s the county administration recognized the village headman and his assistant and, in some places, a leadership council. Village leaders were now responsible for managing the new schools, constructing roads, and undertaking various projects designed to bring the village within the ambit of the state-led nation-building process...

After 1928, the Nationalists sought to impose a more ambitious plan for bringing all of rural society within a distinctly formal relationship with the state (Duara 1988: 63).

While self-government was talked about a good deal, Duara makes it clear that little was actually allowed. The local level of government was performing many of the functions previously carried out by traditional social structures, but doing so under the

close supervision of the county and, therefore, under a chain of command leading directly to the centre.

The village was becoming progressively more important in the larger scheme of things. The place of the agents who had formerly collected taxes from the villages was being made superfluous as the village became more closely linked to the centre. One of the main means of doing this was the *tankuan*, a tax assessed against the whole village as opposed to individuals within the village. Under this new system it did not matter how much land individual peasants owned. With the *tankuan* the state-local society relationship changed.

The state would deal with a single village, which now had a formal, unmediated administrative link with the state. In its new transactions with the state, the village could borrow little of the strength of the cultural nexus that it had once used to resist the incursions of entrepreneurial brokers (Duara 1988: 65).

In other words, whereas in the past the culture had dictated that state–local society relations be conducted at a certain distance, this was no longer the case. The villages now had to provide the assessed amount of money directly to the state, with no mediators in between. This new tax system also forced changes in the village as it, in a sense, became more important. “Thus, state penetration forced the village not only to develop a fiscal system, thereby making it an important managerial center, but also to devise distinctive methods of assessment, making the particular village in which one lived a matter of some moment” (Duara 1988: 197).

Growth in Provincial Power

Through all of this the provinces were enabled to collect ever larger amounts of revenue from local society. In Hebei and Shandong Duara puts the annual increase at 42 and 56% respectively over the roughly twenty years from 1913 to 1934 (Duara 1988: 67).

The enormous expansion of provincial income suggests the increasing control of the province over the resources of society, and through increases in expenditures, the weightier role it was playing in society as well. This is a point of considerable importance. The bureaucratic power of the central state had become parcelized, but in the process the fiscal foundations of the provincial units had been strengthened, a fact that would enable them to play a more important role than they had heretofore (Duara 1988: 67).

As the state as a whole grew increasingly integrated in Eliasian fashion, from the village through the ward, county and province, each level gained in importance. Here we see the provinces gaining both in financial strength and in control of resources. In this sense, as the centre effectively gains more control over the various levels of society, it starts to look a good deal like Europe's civilizing process in motion in the Chinese context. The peasantry had to start looking to different sources to meet needs that had been met locally in the past. This translates directly into changing local social relations.

The progressive governmental intrusion into local affairs

in many cases exacerbated the peasants' plight by imposing new burdens. Because the Nationalists endeavored to extend their control down to the villages, the size of the bureaucracy at the hsien, or district, level grew. More administrators and tax-collectors were appointed, and the size of the police and militia expanded. These new local authorities provided few palpable services that benefited the peasants, but they had to be paid. (Eastman 1986: 154).

This was an expense that the villages could ill afford at that point as the economy was in a depression. It subsequently played an important role in the continuing agitation for change and would contribute to the eventual Communist victory.

Local Social Relations – An Eliasian Perspective

Regarding the centre's dealings with the countryside Fairbank draws the following conclusion. He describes the effort to restructure the rural situation as running head-on into difficulties deeply embedded in the culture. It seems that any attempt to aid local society, which involved altering local social relations in one fashion or another, usually in an Eliasian civilizing direction, required change at all levels. The social structure was so tightly integrated at the local level that any changes there were likely to impact society on a much broader level. Yet the need for change remained urgent as the problems festered and grew. "The local self-government program of the Nationalist regime was frustrated by this same syndrome. It was unable to penetrate the village level except superficially from the top down" (Fairbank 1992: 301).

Because they are quite difficult to define clearly, the achievements of the Nationalists are a subject of much debate. They attempted land reform but had little success (Beckmann 1962: 460). They implemented cooperatives and aided agricultural output significantly (Beckmann 1962: 459). Many of their programs can only be described as, at best, partly successful. One of the major problems was their indecisiveness which Beckmann exemplifies with the following: “In 1928 the Nanking government had abolished official Confucian rites on the ground that the principles of Confucius were despotic and superstitious, but by 1934 the old master had been recanonized” (Beckmann 1962: 462). Lloyd Eastman suggests that the Nationalists tiptoed around the issue of land reform and tenancy, and change in general, because of its centrality to those living in the countryside. There was great fear of the instability that might result, “the outcome of which they could neither control nor predict” (Eastman 1986: 152).

Lupher carries this point a step further in suggesting that the Nationalists left both the local and the regional powers alone for similar reasons. “In the Nanking decade, no genuine destruction of competing centers of political power occurred at the regional or local level” (Lupher 1996: 38). Nationalist leadership saw this as the most secure way to maintain power. This would contribute significantly to the undoing of the Nationalists in the end but for the time being it allowed for a moderate pace of change in the village communities. Even as this change was occurring, however, the traditional order remained strongly in place in the locality.

Drawing again on the related notion of Labor Allocation Patterns used by Wang in his study, both a resilient stability and yet significant change are evidenced. “In short, by the mid-twentieth century, Chinese labour allocation continued to be a largely family-

based traditional LAP. But new patterns emerged” (Wang 1998: 91). In other words, the dominant orientations of such long duration remained largely in place in most of China at least through the Nationalist period. This is certainly true in terms of influence over the distribution of resources where the family and/or the village remained in control despite the many changes coming from the centre.

Economically, the family has been the most important unit of organization in production, for not only has agriculture been almost exclusively a family undertaking but also in industry and commerce the family has been the most numerous organizational unit in investment and operation. There is hardly one major aspect of traditional social life that is not touched by the ties and influence of the family (Yang 1959: 5).

Most of what social change there was, could be found in and nearby the cities, and had not yet penetrated the countryside as significantly as the reformers might have hoped or thought.

Once again we see that where the traditional social structure is strong, those aspects of society with which this thesis is concerned are in a state not indicative of an Eliasian civilizing process. Integration and differentiation remain low, the chains of interdependence are short, and competition and mobility are limited. Whately might be useful in understanding this, with his Eliasian analysis of developmental processes in the scientific community. Basically the idea is that the closer the new idea is to the old,

the less resistance it will run into (Whitely 1977: 423).⁵⁴ If this thesis can take the liberty of applying this to the Chinese social context at this point the Confucian system was so well integrated and all-encompassing that almost any new ideas were at best marginal, making resistance to the new almost insurmountable. That was certainly the case with ideas advocating modernization.

Land, in the traditional sense, remained paramount at this time. In Republican China it was, as it always had been, the central determining factor of the quality of life.

It seems to us that this village represents a basic type of farming community in interior China. The life of the peasants is characterised by the use of traditional farming techniques on rather fertile land and under strong pressure of population. In these fundamental ways Lutz's represents, in miniature, traditional China (Fei Hsiao-tung 1945: 19).

In all of Fei's studies of the different villages this fact was clear. And this was the social fact around which the Chinese social system had always been built. The traditional self-sufficiency of the Chinese peasant holds true at this point as well.

It should be constantly borne in mind that a large part of the farmer's consumption is of products he supplies himself and that commercial transactions involving farm products are, in general, a minor part of the peasant's economic activities. Only those who are wage earners and

⁵⁴ This, of course, also relates to the Han adoption of Confucianism as the natural choice for ordering society.

those who have not enough rice depend on the market for their food supplies (Fei Hsiao-tung 1945: 106).

In one section describing the selling of land Fei leaves the reader with a feeling that it generally is not done. The land is part of the family, a part of its identity. One woman explained that “land is the foundation of a family, that it secures not only one’s own living but the living of future generations” (Fei Hsiao-tung 1945: 128). This same woman goes on to talk about how the villagers have experienced a lot and found that land is all that lasts. People will sometimes sell land at the death of the head of the family. This generally pertains to the planned for residue to be set aside after the land has been divided between his sons. If the sons can not finance the funeral they may sell this residue because “a decent ceremony for a dead ancestor is considered more important than the prosperity of the living descendents” (Fei Hsiao-tung 1945: 125). This is purely Confucian in its filial piety; about as traditional - in the Chinese sense of that term - as it gets.

In *Chinese Village Close-up* Fei draws a brief comparison of the individual in the Chinese society of the time as opposed to individuals of other, non-agrarian types of societies.

In a mobile community, nomadic or industrial, an individual has his own locus. He moves about by himself and acquires his social status on his own behalf. But for a settled peasant, it seems that all of his activities are bound to the group. The family is a self-sufficient and self-supporting group, in which he maintains his existence and perpetuates his kind. It is the center

from which his relations, kinship, local and professional, ramify (Hsiao-tung 1983: 126).

The individual was far more tightly bound into his figuration in this traditional rural Chinese society, as opposed to modern societies, reflecting the fact that while change may have occurred, the civilizing process had not yet progressed very far.

Differentiation remains one of the most accessible and effective measures of change in social structure across time. It is true that there was some limited trade with the outside world through temporary markets or the nearest market town but a majority of the needs of the people of any given village were met through the activities of the people in the village itself, and often those of any given household (Fei Hsiao-tung 1945: 47). It has also often been true in China that people's needs have not been met sufficiently, and famine has been the result, but this had been due largely to a lack of resources.

According to Tawney "The fundamental fact, it is urged, is of a terrible simplicity. It is that the population of China is too large to be supported by existing resources" (Tawney 1932: 103). That famine has been a recurring crisis in China is not the issue, however. The question is how the majority of the people attempted to meet whatever needs they may have had. Most of the felt needs that were met had been so almost exclusively within a very narrowly defined community.

Feuerwerker, conservatively and with some discretion, says that in terms of gross domestic product it appears that there was not any significant positive or negative trend in the Chinese economy in the Republican period (Feuerwerker 1977). There were certainly some fits and starts due to wartime circumstances but generally the economy

remained flat. Output grew slowly, if at all, and per capita income was the same at the end of the period as at the beginning. The rural population made up about 75 percent of the Chinese population as a whole. Rural agriculture alone accounted for about 65 % of national output and if all other aspects (handicrafts, transportation) of the rural sector are counted the figure likely moves up over 75% (Feuerwerker 1977). Feuerwerker further shows that in 1933, 365 million out of 500 million people in China were devoted to agriculture in making a living. That represents 73% of the population. Compare this to the American situation where at the same time only 21.4% of the working population was engaged in agriculture. “To find figures even remotely close to those of China in 1933, one would need to look at America in 1820 or 1830 when 70% of the labor force worked in agriculture” (Feuerwerker 1977: 9). He goes on to say that the occupational distribution in China changed little from the Qing through the Republican period. A large majority of Chinese households continued to produce virtually all their own food and market the rest to meet other needs.

Duara points to changes in differentiation, while at the same time implying that there remained relatively little as a whole. “Although there had been a discernible increase in the number of families growing commercial crops and in the acreage devoted to commercial crops since the late Qing, notably of cotton, agriculture was still basically subsistence oriented” (Duara 1988: 18). With regard to cotton what was brought to market was only that which was left after subsistence needs had been met. It appears that these are changes in the direction of decreasing differentiation, if anything.

Of the numerous studies of the Chinese village, most involve differentiation in one fashion or another. Fei Xiaotong did four comprehensive and detailed studies of rural

villages between 1936 and 1940 (Fei 1983, Fei 1945). He suggests that there was differentiation (he points to some crafts and professional services, as well as some subsidiary occupations, and the raising of livestock and subsidiary crops) in these villages but, while this was true, in reality it is a case of the differentiation being so relatively low that the argument for limited differentiation is only bolstered. These villages, where the overall focus was still on agriculture, strongly resembled the medieval European villages of Elias's analysis. In general the Chinese villages, and the people in them, remained as always, whether out of desire, necessity, tradition, or some combination of the above, quite self-sufficient. The Chinese civilizing process had still, two thousand years after the state had formed (in Eliasian terms), not yet gotten past this point. The state was making increasingly strenuous efforts to break into and break down the local figurations, but to this point the actual impact was limited.

While there were discernible signs of change in the urban scene of China during the Republican period, and the state-local society relationship had begun to change, this change had not yet broadly effected how and with whom people interacted at the local level. Rural China was still very traditional in structure and worldview. As part of this traditional social situation the people were very tightly enmeshed in webs of relationships within a fairly confined area usually defined by their village boundaries and rarely interacted with those outside them. Their figurations rarely extended beyond those lines, and when they did, the market town provided the outer limit. In this situation the chains of interdependence between people remained traditionally short.

Also related to short chains of interdependence, C. K. Yang notes that the Nationalists tried to implement a collective responsibility system throughout China. He argues that

the difficulties in doing so were common to many parts of China, Fei apparently noting the same thing (Yang 1959: 107). The existing traditional social structure made it very difficult for a new social order to be implemented in which different, unnatural social relations were forced on the people involved. The people were being asked to interact with and depend upon, others with whom they had no normal relationship in the traditional system. This presented enormous difficulties, which were commonly noted where this collective responsibility system was attempted. Chains of interdependence were being artificially stretched, and this did not suit the people it affected.

Fei Xiaotong suggests that while China had no caste system as in India, there was virtually no mobility (Fei 1983: 144). The opportunities simply did not exist. They might acquire, or sometimes due to unfortunate circumstances lose, bits and pieces of land, moving them up or down the social ladder within the village but the same maxim whereby any wealth (land) accumulated would be lost through the attrition of inheritance in three generations held true during the Republican period as in the past. These limits on social mobility entailed a certain limiting effect on geographic mobility as well. The average person was tightly bound to his piece of land, for better or worse. Fei expands on the issue of mobility:

Moreover, there is no sign of people leaving their land in search of other occupations and meanwhile employing labourers to cultivate the land. This is due, first to the low degree of occupational differentiation... secondly to the special value attached to land... and lastly to the under-development of industry in the town (Fei 1962: 180).

As reasons for this lack of mobility he cites both cultural and social factors. Land was too important to one's identity to leave it behind. In addition, there was little else to do with oneself, part of the reason for this being the relative lack of industry in the towns.

With the following Fei makes a vital connection between mobility and differentiation pointing directly at cultural constraints.

Change of occupation in the village is more difficult than reform of an existing industry. No serious attempt has yet been made to find out the possibility of introducing new industries to the village besides sheep raising. Even the latter is only a supplement to the existing productive system and not a change of occupation. Villagers can change their occupation only by leaving the village. In other words, occupational mobility under the present situation means a mobility of population from the village to the town. In the village, those who go out to find new occupations are mostly young girls who have not yet entered into a fixed social place in the community. Even in this group, such mobility has already challenged the traditional kinship relation and the stability of the domestic group (Fei 1962: 261).

This amounts to a definitional constraint on differentiation, as well as mobility. In order to change occupation one had to leave, but in order to leave one had to violate existing social norms which, as we have seen, were quite powerful. The only ones who did were those who had not yet been drawn into the figurational web of the village. Unless prompted by dire need, few would make the move.

Henrietta Harrison refers to Ou Zhenhua, who was on the northern expedition of the Nationalist regime as they tried to root out the communists. In passing through numerous rural villages Ou noted that,

‘When I talk with them about the affairs of the party-nation, they do not know what kind of thing the nation is; when I talk with them about party affairs, they also do not recognize what kind of business party affairs are. The cause of their ignorance is really that few people leave the village and not many study’ (Harrison 2001: 192 citing Ou Zhenhua).

Not only was the mobility of the villagers restricted, but their knowledge of things beyond the village was quite limited as well. The revolutionaries could not arouse the interest of the villagers in their cause mainly because events outside the cellular membrane encasing the small communities in which the villagers lived were irrelevant to them. For the peasants, the village remained as it had been for over two thousand years, a self-contained world in which most of them were born, lived, and died. Only what happened within its borders aroused any real interest or was cause for any concern.

Writing early in the Communist period, Yang sums up the traditional nature of Republican China in the following words:

The dominant position of the kinship system in this as in other village communities stemmed especially from the immobility of the agrarian

population... The lack of occupational diversification in the agricultural economy and the insulating character of subsistence farming fostered a uniform mode of life, enhanced intimate economic and social cooperation, restricted population mobility, and furthered the internal cohesion of the lineage group, the kinship organization (Yang 1959: 80).

Yang points to the lack of differentiation and mobility as guarantors of the traditional system, and this was still largely true during the Republican period. He continues;

The lack of diversified opportunities of employment, characteristic of an agrarian economy, forced sons to follow in their father's footsteps, a process which had gone on for over thirty generations for both the Wong and Lee clans... In Nanching, kinship relations represented the paramount force tying the individual into a tightly-knit organization beyond which he contracted few direct and intimate social bonds (Yang 1959b: 80-81).

Lastly he points to this traditional social situation as being characteristic of all of China, and not just a local phenomenon. Even as there appears to have been a relative lack of mobility, however, from Yang's perspective there was also a trend of change specifically in the areas of economics, education and mobility. "All of these had profound effects on the attitudes of youth and acted to awaken the interest of the young in affairs of thinking which diminished the traditional strength of family ties" (Yang 1959: 169).

Guanxi

Though the word is not used much in the literature with regard to this period, *guanxi* existed during Republican China – at least in its traditional form. The traditional social structure prevalent in Republican China generally only allowed for *guanxi* relations with others within one's highly localized figuration. In this sense, these relations as described serve as evidence that the traditional social structure had not yet broken down, that Eliasian chains of interdependence had not yet extended to the degree they soon would.

Fei Xiaotong says that exchange is “necessary wherever there is specialization of production” (Fei 1962: 240). The specialization that he was talking about, of course, was quite limited; though obviously in his opinion there was enough to require exchange relationships.

The longer the time involved and the more roundabout the transfer of goods and services, the stronger are the social ties in the group. The exchange of goods or services is a concrete expression of social ties. Where obligations can be fulfilled only over a long period of time the individuals involved tend to feel more strongly their social relationship. This is in consequence one of the cohesive forces of the group. (Fei 1962: 241).

These are clearly reciprocal ties involving elements of affect and in this sense can appropriately be described as *guanxi* relations. The exchange involved is one of the binding elements for the group.

A similar type of exchange is found in larger social groups such as extended kinship groups and neighbourhood groups. Neighbours in the village are often allowed to take things from each other for consumption or other use in case of need. Within certain limits a man is glad to be useful to his neighbour (Fei 1962: 241-242).

The relations between these socially more distant people were developed and maintained through the reciprocal exchange of goods and services, through *guanxixue*-type activity, but the chains of interdependence were still quite short. As *guanxi* is practised within existing social ties and figurations, as it normally was in traditional China, it might be thought of as simply an inherent part of the existing social system.

Society was still very much ordered by traditional mores by the end of the Republican Period. Having said that, there were also discernable signs of change. It is held by this thesis that change was occurring at the local level, in that the social structure was changing with the centre assuming ever greater, albeit marginal, control over the locality. The question then, is whether or not these changes were in fact effecting the social relations, the figurations, of local society. The answer to this question seems at this point to be a guarded yes. The tenuousness of this change should not be understood as representing a problem for Eliasian theory in that social change for Elias is a gradual

process. The fact is that the state was successfully intruding into local affairs on a scale not tolerated since the Qin, and the local social structure was changing.

Chapter Eight - Intensification of the Assault on the Traditional Social Order under the Communists

The ascension to power of the Communist regime owes at least some of its success to the impact of previous regimes and events on the local order. “From an institutional perspective, the success of political mobilization in the countryside appears to have been facilitated by the decline of traditional arrangements” (Kau 1974: 262). Kau goes on to point out that the traditional order had been shaken, that by the third decade of the century “the authority of the village gentry and clan heads had so declined that they were powerless to prevent the distressed peasants from accepting the new and compelling concepts of moral legitimacy and political leadership introduced by the Communists” (Kau 1974: 263).

Yang affirms that change was in the air even at the local level (though he is referring primarily to the urban environment) by the first decade of Communist rule. He asserts that filial piety, probably the most basic tenet of the Confucian social system, had been under attack for some time by the middle of the twentieth century, with the clear implication that this assault had had some very real effects.

Thus, filial piety, once the most emphatically stressed value in the traditional social order for over two thousand years, was subjected to open challenge in the 1920's, gradually lost its sacred and binding character among the modern intellectuals by the 1930's, and, by the time the Communists became the ruling power, was publicly discredited

by them as feudalistic, designed for the exploitation of the young (Yang 1959a: 91).

The important question is how all of this had effected social relations on a day to day basis. Yang's understanding of this is inadvertently Eliasian.

With its structural system weakened and its functional importance reduced, the kinship organization no longer serves as the strategic core of the social order. Nor is the emerging social order able to function with a dominant kinship system, for the rapidly developing social pattern is no longer composed of a loose conglomeration of compartmentalised local societies in which a strong kinship system is a stabilizing asset, but is based on a national system of functional interdependence of the local units and centralized control, a system in which a strong and dominant kinship organization would have a disruptive influence. (Yang 1959: 20).

This, again, represents the situation as it existed within the first ten years of the Communist assumption of power. These trends, as has been elaborated, were destined to continue under the Communists. The functional importance of the old order had been 'reduced' by this time and would be further reduced in coming years. For the Communists, modernity could not be achieved with the old order in place. For this reason, further change in this order became a necessary part of the broader intended transformation. The kinship system was to be the sacrificial lamb. With the new assertion of control and authority

of the Communist regime a system of functional interdependence on a national level, as opposed to atomized local self-sufficiency, was the intended goal, and according to Yang, the emerging reality. In Elias's terms, the centre was taking increasing control over the social functions of the locality.

Furthermore "the Maoist strategy was based not only on an insight into the revolutionary potentialities of the peasantry but also on the realization that... state power was weakest in the vast swamplike countryside" (Schwartz 1966: 190). It was here that Mao focussed his efforts at getting new recruits and consolidating his power base. Communist rule subsequently carried this attack on the traditional order relentlessly forward as they rent local Chinese society with at times catastrophic upheaval for three decades. This came with two major policy drives, under the first of which there seemed to be a constantly shifting revolutionary struggle in itself.

In the 1950s it was plunged into revolutionary change, in which all of the former political institutions were overturned and the land tenure system was destroyed and replaced by collectives. Every village in China was dramatically affected by the two decades of at times radical Party programs that lasted until after Mao's death in 1976. As is well known, in an extraordinary turnabout a second transformation ensued under Deng (Unger 2002: 1).

Harrison sets the tone for describing Communist efforts at overhauling Chinese society. She touches on thoroughgoing reform in agriculture, taxes, business, and education, basically all of Chinese society.

Land reform destroyed both the corporate structures of rural society and the power of local elites. Communist activists, who mainly came from poor backgrounds, were placed in positions of power, but remained heavily dependent on the Communist Party and local officials. Thus traditional rural power structures were replaced by a structure that was effectively controlled by the central government. (Harrison 2001: 233).

Where the Republicans before them had used many of the existing local power holders, and attempted to draw them into the state apparatus, the Communist regime was replacing traditional authority with its own based on an entirely new dynamic – that of the Party. In so doing they were attempting to put the state firmly in control of the local social situation by integrating local society into the state. This effort had clear Eliasian implications as “government cadres and party activists formed a new power structure responsive to central government control... By these means the party was able to take control of local society to a much greater degree than any previous Chinese government” (Harrison 2001: 233).

The education system was forced to undergo a very similar process. The regime was focussed on eliminating the networks of the traditional power holders in the interest of destroying their power base. They sought nothing less than the complete overhaul of

traditional society in favour of its modern counterpart. The old was to be destroyed in order to usher in the new.

Destroying of the Foundations of the Traditional Order

Land Reform

In 1947 there was a violent reallocation of land in Communist held territories. The peasants were generally happy with this effort: “After this *‘fanshen’* (turnover) that touched almost every corner of China, millions of family-based farms were created and the ancient family-based LAP was restored on a massive scale” (Wang 1998: 94). This forced reapportioning of what had always been China’s most valuable resource was virtually universal, and while its effects might seem to be a reversion to more traditional ways, it must be remembered that this was a forced change made by the central state, and with this the state was effectively assuming command of the nation’s most basic resource, land. “Through this land-reform campaign, the power of the local elite was effectively broken in each village, and its place taken by a new leadership of poorer peasants loyal to the Party” (Unger 2002: 7-8). As the state effectively took over control of the land, the peasant’s most basic resource, local society was being integrated into the state. This was the beginning of a trend of the central government reaching ever deeper into village life that would continue for most of the next three decades.

Collectivization

Shortly thereafter, the party changed policy, but in the process further entrenched the already initiated trends with the same tradition-breaking, control-oriented direction in mind. “To make the new, relatively egalitarian peasant smallholdings economically viable, seasonal mutual-aid groups were soon established under the Party’s guidance;

and these gradually were shaped over the following years into agricultural producer cooperatives, each containing about two dozen families” (Unger 2002: 8). With this change toward collectivization the Communist Party was continuing to assert ever greater control over local society, hence further integrating it into the state. The Party had further change in the same direction in mind.

The CCP decided to adopt the Soviet-style agriculture collectivization. Mao very quickly and very impatiently began in 1954-5 to alter the restored family-based LAP and thus the overall Chinese organizational structure in the rural areas by launching ‘collectivization’ campaigns among the peasants... In literally a matter of months, five hundred million peasants were collectivized (Wang 1998: 94).

Remoulding local society in this fashion forced people into groupings that were alien to the people therein. The important points from an Eliasian perspective are that peasants were now interacting with different others in a different fashion, and the control of the distribution of resources was now in the hands of the collectives, or more appropriately, the state. The head of the family/clan/lineage was no longer making those decisions, this fact forcing people to interact with different others in different ways within their figurations.⁵⁵ “Collectivization not only entailed an entirely new system of property ownership. It also gave rise to new types of work relations... this dramatically reshaped social relationships in many thousands of villages” (Unger 2002: 7).

⁵⁵ That the structural change was to a large degree achieved, and without fomenting a revolution in the process, may serve as an indication that what actually happened might not have been as drastic a change as it on the surface appears, and/or that the society was more malleable in adapting to social change than it had been in the past. These issues will not be explored in this thesis.

It also brought the state boldly into individual households (Unger 2002: 7).

Collectivization therefore had a broad impact on local social relations at all levels. An important aspect of this was the competitive relations among the villagers. With the near elimination of private property, competition was reduced to nil.

In 1957, China's central leadership decided it was time to kick-start their society into communism. This new 'movement' was dubbed the 'Great Leap Forward.' The basic notions under-girding it were anathema (as were most of the reforms to this point) to cultural norms that had not yet disappeared to the degree apparently supposed by leadership. "A major theme in the movement was to consolidate the 'unified' or 'centralized' leadership of the CCP, through the state, over all aspects of the Chinese polity, economy, and social life, even people's minds" (Wang 1998: 103). This represented, in Eliasian terms, integration on a colossal scale; this coming from a regime in a society where the centre had historically stayed as aloof as possible from the local environment.

"In April of 1958 the first 'commune' was proclaimed" (Unger 2002: 8).

Property rights over land and other 'means of production,' even some consumer items, were defined on a commune (formerly *xian* or township) basis. Labor was also allocated in an authoritarian way by the commune instead of the village-based collectives... Mao envisioned the communes as the basic cells of the PRC: self-containing and self-sustaining complexes performing the roles of industry, agriculture,

commerce, education, military, and social life. The new units often had forty thousand to fifty thousand people each (Wang 1998: 95).

These were substantial social organizations and they were, in virtually every regard, under central control. In this case the state was assuming direct control over the distribution of resources even down, in many cases, to consumer items. This was completely unprecedented. The family and the village were losing control over all those aspects of life that had for millennia made them the core units of Chinese society. This change in traditional figurations brings Elias firmly into the equation. With the resultant changing dependencies, further changes in social relations could not be far behind.

It appears that Mao's vision had the communes taking over as the fundamental social unit of Chinese society. The most important Eliasian point here is that ultimately the individual was no longer dependent upon his family or village, but in a growing sense was forced to look to the state in meeting his daily needs. The tight chains of interdependence traditionally enmeshing him in his native village community were being torn apart. The primary figuration of the average individual was forcibly reorganized as he was being reintegrated into the larger state. Unger refers to one important aspect when he says that where the people had been oriented toward the market town in terms of selling grain, now things had changed: "after the Mao era collectives were established, produce was sold directly to the state, and only one or two people in each production team needed to be assigned to venture into the market town to deliver it" (Unger 2002: 21). Traditional relational priorities were being realigned to fit an unnatural model foisted upon existing cultural forms, and it was not a comfortable fit.

Retrenchment

The Great Leap Forward / Commune experiment had to be abandoned a few years later. The dislocations resulting from collectivization and the Great Leap were so severe that people had to be relocated in significant numbers to relieve the stress. “The disastrous consequences of Mao Tse-Tung’s Great Leap Forward movement (1957-61) forced massive numbers of starving peasants to flee to the cities” (Li 1993: 146). Most of the movement, however, was policy driven. “Chronic shortages and massive unemployment began to threaten the CCP regime... In the end, by mid-1963, more than 19.4 million state employees and 24 million urban hukou holders were relocated to the countryside” (Wang 1998: 103). Many of those relocated to the countryside at the state’s bidding had never previously set foot in a village.

In addition, “Mess halls were disbanded and small family plots of land were restored... In terms of value extraction and labor allocation, however, the communes and the brigades (a large village or a few small villages) still had tremendous authority until 1978-9” (Wang 1998: 95). Basically, local social units were ‘re-allowed’ to a limited degree as the artificially perverted social relations were de-emphasized, but control of resources and their distribution was not. Authority over those aspects of society was largely retained by the state, and local social units continued to be tightly integrated into the state. In this sense the trends Elias highlights continued uninterrupted.

At harvest time, after paying taxes, grain and other essentials were distributed on a per capita basis to meet everyone’s needs. The remainder was then distributed according to points accumulated... In many ways, the

system looked more like a traditional community-based LAP with only a certain communist political ‘flavor’... The CCP-state tried to have more direct control over the peasants through the cadres in the communes and below (Wang 1998: 96).

After all the difficulties created by land reform and the Great Leap Forward, the reorganization of the 60s has been described by Unger as a more realistic way of doing things (Unger 2002: 9). Mao largely facilitated this change by getting out of the way. “From 1961 Mao drew back into himself, quizzical in mood, bowing to political and economic reality” (Terrill 1980: 289). The most obvious example of the more pragmatic approach at this time was “when Deng and his colleagues were looking for ways to alleviate the disaster” and they came up with the household responsibility system (Starr 1997: 115). This overall trend lasted effectively until the early eighties and, while becoming more restrained in some areas, allowed the central government even greater control in many others. It seems “this new administrative structure enabled Beijing to penetrate the villages and rural households with new programs and new values” (Unger 2002: 9). The important point remains that the cadres represented the state as they carried out their duties, and they were still in control of rural life. The state had thus assumed, and continued to hold in increasing measure, control over local figurations in terms of the resources available on a day to day basis. The leadership allowed some limited freedoms but,

at the same time the national leaders were unwilling to give the team memberships enough leeway in figuring out what crops to grow or enough say on how their own teams and villages were run. The system

ultimately was top-down. The belief at the helm of the Party was that ...The villages needed to be controlled and prodded for their own good... The consequence was that... the production teams sat at the very bottom of an administrative hierarchy, and they were dominated by a top-down chain of Party rule that reached from Beijing into each and every village (Unger 2002: 11).

In the end, even decisions about what crops were grown where and when were made from the centre. In fact, “villages had options to shape their own policies only in those spheres that the central authorities did not decide to dominate” (Unger 2002: 11). The state had as much control as it chose to have, and, in this sense, was virtually unchecked. Unger further suggests that the Party centre became even more assertive with time. This level of infiltration by the state into local society was unprecedented and destined to have serious ramifications.

With each new assertive move from the centre, individuals became further integrated into the state apparatus and social relations took on an increasingly extended appearance. Peasants were dependent upon the state for decisions regarding food, living quarters, employment, movement, and even whether or not they qualified as a ‘good’ person. Where in the past (only 50 to 70 years earlier) the peasant had virtually no (or as little as possible) contact with a remote state, now their entire lives were dictated from above. Another step in this direction was the *hukou* system initiated in 1960 (Unger 2002: 22). As part of that; “Every PRC citizen was required to have identification papers to have access to land, jobs, social welfare benefits, housing, education, party

membership, good-character credentials, and numerous other opportunities”(Wang 1998: 98).

Control over land, education, and even ‘good character credentials’ are probably the most striking aspects of state control at this point. Land and education have already been mentioned, but they represented change in areas that were basic to what China traditionally was. The fact that the new government was even attempting to redefine what having ‘good character’ meant, and therefore who had it, is the most arresting of the points. Having ‘good character’ in a Confucian culture is vital for functioning effectively in society, within one’s figuration, and in China is measured and accredited primarily in terms of face. There had always been clearly defined and understood parameters for establishing and maintaining good character. In that it was so important in the Chinese world, it should come as no surprise that the Communist regime attempted to claim defining authority over it. The alarming thing is that they were in effect attempting to reach down as far as the level of individual identity. Taking aim at this characteristic, if the initiative were to be successful, would *inevitably* impact the way people interacted, and at a profound level. It almost seems as though the Communist regime was consciously trying to implement a civilizing process and, in a sense, that is true.

The *hukou* system was later legislated and created a rather high wall between rural and urban communities (Though policies such as these seem to indicate otherwise, Mao was actually in agreement with Marx that the road to socialism entailed “the abolition of the distinction between town and country in the socialist and communist future” (Meisner 1974: 207)). “The *hukou* system enabled the PRC government to control labor mobility

geographically and created very rigid and very contrasting urban-rural dual economic and social structures... All urban workers were effectively transformed to be state employees” (Wang 1998: 98). This is not to say that there was much mobility prior to these measures, but that afterwards it became virtually impossible to change location without authorization from the state. “This system effectively restricted migration to the cities and allowed the authorities to enforce the relocation of 16 million youths to rural areas” (Walder 1989: 410). When the social situation had deteriorated to such an extent that the state again felt insecure, it was forced to respond. This second coerced relocation would be carried on throughout the Cultural Revolution. It is impossible to say what amount of voluntary movement would have been evidenced had the Communist government not legislated against it, but it is not difficult to ascertain that actual mobility aside from that forced by the government was extremely low during Communist rule.

The reach of the state’s tentacles did not end there, as additional devices of control were devised which related mainly, though not exclusively, to the cities. New “micromechanisms such as *dangan* (personal dossiers) and *danwei* (unit) were devised, leading to the establishment of an authoritarian state LAP nation wide. A *dangan* was set up for every state employee, required for job-seeking, promotion and advancement” (Wang 1998: 98-99). The *dangan* was national in the mid 50s, applying to “urban workers and most rural cadres” (Wang 1998: 99). It followed one for life and effectively controlled their destiny. While Wang talks about the *dangan* primarily in terms of labour allocation, the more important point here is, once again, the heightened level of control enabled through its use.

Being placed in a given *danwei*, or work unit, was essentially a lifetime assignment as well (Wang 1998: 99). “To some extent, the bond between workers and their *danwei* rivaled those within the traditional Chinese family. Instead of having families as the cells of the domestic organizational structure, the PRC gradually established the *danweis* in that role.” (Wang 1998: 99). While Wang goes on to say that these *danweis* preserved the old ways by, in effect, replacing the family, from the perspective of this thesis this has to be considered an exaggeration, albeit a revealing one. The crucial difference that Wang is failing to note here is that while the structural units may have resembled the old familial structure, the units were now being determined and controlled by the state in a way previously unimaginable. State workers, urban and rural, were guaranteed lifetime work and benefits. “In exchange, the workers became dependent on their superiors and lost most of their personal mobility and freedom” (Wang 1998: 102). And these new fathers, or older brothers, represented the state, the new family.

“This nation-based traditional LAP restored the premodern Chinese domestic organizational structure with a comprehensive and penetrating political power that was unprecedented for the central government, which behaved like a traditional Chinese father” (Wang 1998: 103). While one might see the structures resulting from reform as traditional-like, one must at the same time acknowledge the intrusion of the central state into local affairs as opposed to the traditional distance normally assumed between state and locality, a distance in fact enabled largely by those very same traditional structures. This traditional distance, maintained by previously inviolable cultural norms, had finally broken down and the state was clearly moving in to take control of those social functions that it had not touched for well over two thousand years. Wang’s analogy to

the Chinese father is apt in that traditionally the father was the person to whom the greatest filial allegiance was owed and who controlled all of the family's resources. By assuming this position of control in the lives of the peasants, the state was effectively breaking the ties binding the people to their normal figurations and hence forcing a change in interdependencies. In so doing, as the Chinese state took the place of the 'traditional Chinese father,' further encroaching in local affairs, it was in effect kick-starting a long stalled Chinese civilizing process. These particular mechanisms would remain in force, to a greater or lesser degree, to at least the beginning of the 1980s.

Cultural Revolution

Initially it had been the 'Self-Strengthening Movement' followed by the reform of the late Qing, then reform under both the Republicans and the Nationlists. Now the same efforts to destroy the traditional Confucian social order continued under the Communists first in the form of land reform, then collectivization, followed by The Great Leap Forward, and now, finally the Cultural Revolution. From the 1890s through the 1970s it had all been a conscious effort aimed at replacing the old with a new social organization more amenable to modernization in the interests of enabling China to fend off the foreign threat and control her own fortunes. Mao's ideas on what this organization would look like certainly differed from those of the reformers before him, but its starting point was basically the same. All of the reform efforts aimed, in the final analysis, at breaking down traditional social relations as the first step toward modernization. To achieve this goal once and for all, it was felt that radical steps had to be taken. When Communist leadership held the initial manoeuvres to be stagnating, subsequent actions only became more radical.

Next in the line-up of assaults on the traditional order was the Cultural Revolution. “Mao’s last decade - from 1966 until his death in 1976 - saw a domestic political struggle that convulsed China, constantly amazed the outside world, and achieved appalling destruction... directly involving something like 100 million people” (Fairbank 1992: 383)⁵⁶. Mao’s intent through this latest initiative was more or less a continuation of the same drive towards modernization initially spurred on by defeat at the hands of the West and Japan. Mao seemed to see (among other more personal things) that his new Communist bureaucracy was basically just “taking the place of the local elite of imperial times. He feared a revival of the ruling class domination of the villagers” (Fairbank 1992: 384). It seems that, “Even Mao Tse Tung... apparently failed to prevent the crystalization of a new establishment within their society” (Wouters 1977: 448). Were this to take hold the old social order would simply remain in place, obstructing any transition to modernity. In an important sense this amounted to a deep unease with the belief that the preconditions for the process of modernization had not yet been met but had, in fact, stopped developing. As Grasso et al put it,

the Chairman and many of his supporters believed that revolutionary development of all aspects of Chinese society had stagnated. For them, China was still mired in enervating traditional cultural conventions – customs and habits that were millennia old... What was needed, according to Mao, was nothing less than a thorough revamping of Chinese culture. By culture Mao was referring not only to how people were educated, what they read, how they created their art and music...

⁵⁶ Valuable insight might be gained by exploring the Cultural Revolution period from a decivilizing perspective. This will not be done in this thesis.

but also to how people interrelated, what they thought, and even how they amused themselves (Grasso 1991: 204).

“The Cultural Revolution lasted nominally three years, from early 1966 to April 1969, but many point out that its type of activities really continued for a whole decade to 1976” (Fairbank 1992: 385). The entire period was one of violence and confusion in which authority was attacked in all its forms – except that of Mao, who has been appropriately described as ‘an updated emperor’ and in that sense was virtually untouchable (Fairbank 1992: 385). In fact, this was the one aspect of traditional culture that remained inviolable throughout. “The Chinese conviction that all power should reside in the central authority – a fact that is acknowledged by the entire population – has been one of the most powerful factors in shaping Chinese history” (Pye 1985: 184). But all other aspects of the social order were fair game. “For four years Communist China had no Communist Party, except that which existed within the military. Proud youngsters with ‘Red Guard’ bands on their arms and pistols in their belts entered any office they wished” (Ladany 1988: 290). In August of 1966 in a party plenum “Mao got nominal legality for stirring up a mass movement against revisionism in the party establishment. This soon took the form of the Red Guard movement” (Fairbank 1992: 392). These loyal youth were urged to rebel even against their own families. “The official voice in Peking said that the revolutionary youths should rise up against their ‘bourgeois’ parents” (Ladany 1988: 290). In the past, to curse one’s father was punishable by death. Now it was to be rewarded. Nor was the sibling relationship spared, with “brothers and sisters finding themselves in fiercely opposed camps” (Ladany 1988: 290). Mao’s revolution was intentionally turning all of the old ideas on proper social relations on their head.

The whole Cultural Revolution movement was aimed primarily at urban areas and “did not greatly affect the peasantry except in communes near cities” (Fairbank 1992: 392). In Unger’s study he points out that “more than one-third of the villages of interviewees... rode out the Cultural Revolution without any serious eruptions from below” (Unger 2002: 51). The countryside was not left untouched, however. From Unger’s own reckoning, two thirds of those rural interviewees were affected, some seriously. A lot of the animosity resulting in violence in the countryside during the Cultural Revolution had been manufactured by the Party through class labels (and other means) which, of course (and very importantly), crossed family lines. Loyalties were continually being realigned toward the centre and away from the family. Then there was also the issue of some 18 million youths who were sent down to the countryside in the late 60s and 70s, a policy which was only reversed in 1978 (Unger 2002: 44). They had to be housed and fed on very limited resources in an environment in which most of them did not belong, further disrupting local social relations. The Cultural Revolution under Mao would be the final dart aimed at the traditional order but it was a devastating one.

The primary overriding goal of the Communist regime during the Mao period, and especially the Cultural Revolution, was to destroy the social foundations of traditional Chinese society. This effort was centred on the assumption of control of local life, a big part of which was the control of the distribution of resources. This, of course, dovetails well with Eliasian thought. During the 1950s the Communist regime had, according to Rozman, replaced the old Confucian order in rural areas with networks of devoted people, an ideology persuading those newly appointed party members of the importance of their leadership responsibilities, and aspirations for a career similar to that through

the examinations (Rozman 1981: 359). The central government continued this intrusive process through the 1960s. “In the 1950s and 1960s the CCP seized control of the levers of society, that is, the distribution of such factors as land, labor, income, and education” (Rozman 1981: 359). After this the series of campaigns waged against the old order merely “tightened the leadership’s grasp over societal resources” (Rozman 1981: 359).

Unger describes an aspect of this social context in a way that may help clarify the extent of this penetration. By the 1970s local bureaucrats were no longer taking any initiatives. Generally they simply jumped on the then current bandwagon.

They were vying nervously to avoid seeming laggard compared to officials in the regions next door... What is striking... is the similarity of such bureaucratic responses over vast distances. Even when the Party Central Committee did not issue specific national directives, far flung villages were forced to shift in the same direction at the same time... Nationwide, the same coercive pressures were at work everywhere (Unger 2002: 21).

The local Party leadership was dancing to the centre’s tune, often before it had even been played, and further orchestrating the lives of the villagers at their command. Later in the same publication, Unger mentions how the end of collectivization had been a similar unplanned, undirected phenomenon (Unger 2002: 104). This ‘method’ frequently led to disastrous consequences in which entire regions, and even the entire nation, were involved, through decisions made at the centre that went directly against the better judgement of the individuals on the periphery. In terms of penetrating local

society, it seems that the government's efforts were decisive. They had gotten into the heads of the entire nation.

Conservative Impact of Communist Policy

This does not tell the whole story, though. The Communist government, through their policies on rural versus urban residence, actually reinforced some aspects of traditional culture in that social and physical mobility were, if anything, even more highly restricted than in the past. While their stated intent was to smash the old ways through their unremitting campaigns and policies, they may in fact have done just the opposite in some areas. In terms of mobility the *hukou* system is a classic example as it tied family members to the land, tightly restricting their ability to move anywhere beyond the village of their birth. In other words, the Gordian knot of cultural norms in place for millennia, but possibly loosening as a result of the previous 50 years of revolution, was very effectively re-tightened.

In fact, it is not difficult to argue that during the Maoist period the traditional village structure as a whole was reinforced in some ways. "Thus, the deep structure of the old lineages was perpetuated. It could even be argued that the solidarity of the traditional lineage village was actually reinforced during the Maoist collectivist period" (Potter 1990: 262). Not only through the *hukou* system but also with collectivization, many of the regime's policies if not strengthened at least did not break down traditional structures as thoroughly as intended.

So the basic structural idea that property should be owned by groups of co-resident, patrilineally related men, has persisted unchallenged, and

has been the basis for all the collectives implemented in China since Liberation. Whatever the form of the collective - whether team, brigade, or higher-level cooperative, commune, or, now, lineage village - at its core was a group of patrilineally related men owning and managing property (Potter 1990: 262).

This understanding, while no doubt containing some truth, misses a very important element that this thesis has focussed on. In the newly developing social situation of Communist China, the 'groups' the Potters refer to were making decisions about the distribution of resources at the behest of, and in direct connection with, the central government. The control of resources was no longer in the peasants' hands, and, from an Eliasian perspective, this is a crucial point. Those in need of access to and use of those resources had now to look to the state in a way never before necessary.

Local Social Relations - An Eliasian Perspective

That there was change seems clear, but it is also true that there remained a good deal of continuity with the traditional past. It is important to point out again that when Yang talks about the change that had occurred by the first decade of the Communist period he is primarily referring to urban China. There is a 'disconnect' regarding the trends discussed, between the rural and urban environments in China at this point, and from this time forward this disconnect grew. Modernizing trends were definitely making their impact on the urban social environment by the beginning of the Communist period, but the rural situation at the same time, according to Yang, appears rather different. Here "the requirements of an agrarian life, with successful agricultural production as a

constant guiding objective, exerted a shaping influence on the village's socio-economic structure" (Yang 1959a: 23).

Since the peasantry constituted over 80% of the nation's population, it is fully understandable that agrarian well-being was of major consideration in the social and political principles of the Confucian orthodoxy which still dominated the thinking of those in this village who were over forty years of age. Thus the agrarian economy had bred the characteristics that marked the life of Nanching as well as the Chinese national culture of which this village was a part. Of decisive importance to the agrarian economy were the land itself and the ways of its exploitation which bore the closest relationship to the existence of the community (Yang 1959: 23-24).

Social change is implied here, for it was primarily those over forty to whom the traditional Confucian orthodoxy applied. Yet the fact is that Confucian orthodoxy remained dominant. This was four decades after the 1911 revolution and in this village, as well as in Yang's estimation most others, the inhabitants were still quite traditional in many of their orientations. While there had been many more or less spontaneous changes to the basic social structure since the revolution, at this point rural people still relied heavily on the land for their support. This agrarian life impacted most other areas of the life of the peasants, who made up 'over 80% of the nation's population.'

This is true with regard to filial piety, the most basic of Confucian virtues, and hence in the Chinese case, the family/kinship structure, self-sufficiency, differentiation and

integration, and finally mobility and *guanxi* at the village level, as well as on a national basis. All of these areas of course have a direct bearing on our Eliasian analysis.

Through the first decade of the Communist period, traditional social mores, under attack for the past half century, were still operational in rural communities, indicating that the modernizing trend obvious in the cities had not yet impacted the countryside to the same degree. As long as the traditional social structure remained dominant, the civilizing process that Elias described was stymied, as it had been for two millennia. Immense pressure had been exerted on those social relations central to this process, but to that point they had not broken, and the traditional order was still in place.

There is ample evidence to indicate that through the 1970s considerable continuity with the past remained. Where else has modern growth proceeded so far with so little urbanization, or with so little movement of individuals away from their longstanding genealogical roots, or with so great a state-enforced hold over the individual allotted to the still powerful family unit? Persistent traditional factors of this sort give a distinctive cast to China's course of modernization and enhance the significance of the past (Rozman 1981: 353).

It appears that much of the traditional ways were still in force at the end of the decade despite the often dramatic incursions by the state since the early 1950s. The revolution may indeed have reached the countryside, but it had not yet managed to transform it as these voices from the past had not yet been silenced. "Traditional China has not passed. It is present, although in many respects it has been covered by modifications and by novelties... The essential pattern of social structure is functioning as ever" (Fei 1983:

146). The comparison is to the same village in the 1930s, from the perspective of the 1980s. Clearly in Fei's opinion the Confucian social structure had not been eradicated and/or replaced. It was still what ordered society, whether on, or underneath, the surface.

While there is plenty of evidence that the traditional nature of Chinese society continued, and even that it had been reinforced, it is also clear that significant changes were affected by the Communist regime, as well as those regimes immediately preceding them. These changes had especially impacted the city. In the countryside, the old, traditional ways were still, to an uncertain degree, intact, however, even if as Fei says, they were submerged. Of vital importance for an Eliasian analysis, however, is the fact that the majority of the peasants had been living and working within new and different figurational patterns for much of the communist period. Their relational world had been altered, albeit forcibly.

One thing that the Communists clearly affected was the peasants' relationship to the land, at least in the sense of the peasants not being in control of the land which they inhabited or the ground they tilled⁵⁷. In that the peasant's relation to the land was so central to traditional Chinese society, this change was significant. The land was now 'collectively' owned by the state and very little, if any, of the produce from it actually belonged to the tiller of the soil. In this sense the state was intruding into local society in the profoundest of ways. As a result, the changes made by the Communists impacted the local web of relations, the primary figurations, starting with the family. The family head was no longer responsible for those vital resource decisions on which everyone had

⁵⁷ That they still largely relied on the land goes without saying, but their relationship to it was definitely altered.

depended for millennia. In this most fundamental way people had to look elsewhere for direction and sustenance. While the detail is different, the course of events in general terms fits the Eliasian understanding of a civilizing process. Control over the distribution of resources, including the land itself, had been assumed by the centre, and local figurations were being affected.

Integration

Stockman, drawing on Habermas with regard to integration, says that as society becomes more complex “systemic modes of societal integration... become ‘uncoupled’ from the lifeworld, the world of interpersonal interaction governed by shared language and shared morality in which individual identities are formed” (Stockman 2000: 208 citing Habermas). This had not happened in China to that point - at least not to anywhere near the same degree as occurred elsewhere. “Utilizing this approach, it is possible to suggest that in Chinese society systems became only partially uncoupled from the lifeworld” (Stockman 2000: 208). They never became further uncoupled because the social system that was so successful for so long simply did not allow them to. China’s social structure only allowed for change within given boundaries. In fact, with the system operating effectively, as it did for most of Chinese imperial history, it worked very much against the uncoupling of the lifeworld and systemic modes of integration, and to the promotion of the opposite. Integration on a broader statewide level was not likely until this traditional social system was broken down.

As has been noted, the Communist regime made strenuous efforts in this direction, with significant success. The main thrust of most of Communist policy was geared toward the integration of local society into the state. In their view this was central to the whole

modernizing effort. As a result, peasants were forced to look to the state far more than in the past in ensuring their own subsistence, in that the state had effectively assumed control over the distribution of resources. The state had successfully intruded in the local life of the peasants and in so doing, integrated the peasants into the overarching state apparatus on a scale likely surpassing that of even the Qin. This was so even though traditional structures were still in place in many areas.

Differentiation, Chains of Interdependence

It has already been noted that differentiation had not progressed very far through the Republican period despite the efforts to change rural social organization. According to Fei, “the traditional forces operating in this institution are strong enough to resist any significant changes” (Fei 1962: 118). In Fei Xiaotong’s study of Luts’un in 1945 he points out the relatively high self-sufficiency and low differentiation of the community (Fei 1945). His other studies suggest the same relative lack of differentiation, though he does suggest that there was some.

Given the drive to destroy China’s traditional ways and become a modern state, more differentiation might have been expected under the Communists than was evidenced. “Mao’s emphasis on the need to build socialism on the ethical principles of selflessness, self-reliance, persistence, honesty, and faith... is evidence of a social theory which, consonant with Confucian traditions, prefers to operate at the level of the lifeworld rather than that of systems” (Stockman 2000: 215). Ironically, the very traditional social structure that the Communists were trying to break down and relegate to history, they in fact reinforced in ways that worked against further differentiation. “In some respects revolutionary de-differentiation reinforced pre-revolutionary tendencies to a

homogenous social structure, while post-revolutionary developments have begun to result in increased social complexity” (Stockman 2000: 226). This was done largely through the Communist regime’s tight restriction on mobility by virtue of the *hukou* system, and the equally tight restriction of competition through the collectives and the virtual elimination of private property. The contrast with the ‘post revolutionary’ environment could not be clearer. An additional contributing effect of the *hukou*, was the strict separation of rural from urban areas. Qian says that even before the advent of the *hukou* system, and certainly after, “the current of rural-urban migration in China... was almost totally stopped” (Qian 1996: 53). What differentiation did occur did so mainly in the cities where traditional social relations were hardest hit and industrial development was focussed. These changes were very significant but did not generally translate directly to the countryside where the overwhelming majority of the people were and where the traditional order largely continued to hold sway. This entailed relatively low levels of differentiation. The people continued to be, for the most part, tied to the land, albeit at this point through state control.

There seem to have been two countervailing trends; one directed intentionally towards greater differentiation and one unintentionally away from differentiation and towards more traditional social characteristics. Much of what was happening would seem to represent, from an Eliasian perspective, stumbling blocks to the civilizing process but with the state assuming such direct control over the distribution of resources, as well as most of the rest of local life, local social relations were coming under great stress. As a whole, there was an increase in the level of differentiation in the villages. The primary activity of the Chinese people remained overwhelmingly agriculture and they remained remarkably self-sufficient by modern standards. The conclusion must therefore be that,

yes, an increase in differentiation had occurred, but that it had remained at a relatively low level up to 1978.

With the dramatic shifts in social relations, whether forced or not, the chains of interdependence between the peasants can be said to have extended. This is true in a technical sense due both to the integration of local society into the state, hence forcing new dependencies, and the increase in differentiation, even if only marginal. Peasants had to look farther down an extended chain to see all the people upon whom they depended for a living. This was necessarily true in that the state had assumed control of the distribution of resources at the local level. Peasants were dealing with state representatives, cadres, in a chain of command running all the way to the centre, as opposed to ending with their family head or at the village boundary. This runs very much parallel to the extending chains of interdependence in the European context that Elias describes. The peasants had to interact with different sets of people in different ways than in the past. This was especially true during the collective era and later during the Cultural Revolution when the youth were sent down to the countryside (Mosher 1983: 146).

The following quote from Lin provides another indication that, starting shortly after the revolution and continuing with the reforms, there was both a growth in differentiation and extending chains of interdependence in China, and that it was in some ways similar to the German situation described by Elias.

The massive absorption of rural laborers into the urban workforce in the 1950s further increased the social networks between rural and urban

areas. A survey conducted by the policy research office of the CCP's Secretariate in 1972 revealed that 70% of those who joined the urban workforce before 1957 were recruited from the countryside... The local personal contacts that they have accumulated over time also provide a major stepping stone for their relatives in the countryside to explore access to the loci of state authority in urban areas (Lin 2002: 70-71).

In the above, the connection between differentiation, mobility (in this case forced), lengthening chains of interdependence, and *guanxi* relations is evident. Social relations were changing due mainly to policy dictated from the centre, however. These changes were, therefore, neither spontaneous nor natural. For this reason, it has to be judged that the actual lasting effects on social relations at the local level remain uncertain up to 1978. An examination of the Post-Opening period will show that these social relations were indeed impacted significantly, and that this impact was what allowed for much of the change that has occurred since the opening.

Mobility

There is an important distinction in the way that migration must be viewed in China under Communism. "In Western societies human migration is usually treated as a matter of individual choice. People are free to move elsewhere in search of better socioeconomic opportunities... Regional redistribution under Mao involved a type of forced migration" (Li 1993: 148). Under the Communists it was never a matter of choice but of compulsion. Mobilization of the masses was a key component of Mao's social engineering project. According to Mao, "traditional Chinese religious and family doctrines had seriously handicapped his country's industrial development" (Li 1993:

150). If Mao was to lead his country into a new era, these traditional ways would have to be broken. “The way to do this was to effect a massive redistribution of the population” (Li 1993: 150). Outside of this program, voluntary movement was proscribed to an exceptional degree. Through the tight restriction of mobility the Communist Party kept the peasant masses on the land, where they had been for centuries. Essentially, what mobility there was, through the forced mass shifting of population was thoroughly controlled by the state. Aside from that, the almost complete lack of voluntary mobility was also enforced by the state. Where culture had been the determining factor in the past (and this factor had likely not been eliminated), once again, the state had inserted itself as a decisive force.

Guanxi

Guanxi relations had been restricted to traditional figurations in the past. This was part of the nature of the traditional reciprocal social ties that grew out of the Confucian order. If the Communist efforts to destroy the old social order had had any effect on social relations, one might expect these reciprocal ties to change as well. If these social ties had been broken, or at least loosened, one might expect a corresponding lengthening of these reciprocal dependencies.

Andrew Walder talks about instrumental-personal ties: “it refers to an exchange relationship that mingles instrumental intentions with personal feeling” (Walder 1986: 178). From the interviews he conducted it becomes clear that these types of relationships existed in the fifties and sixties after the communists came to power, as they had in the Republican period before, but became considerably more prominent with the advent of the Cultural Revolution initiated in 1966, and as the 1970s

progressed. Mei Hui Yang says that *guanxi* is indeed linked to the Cultural Revolution, but is clear in reaffirming the point made earlier that the Chinese gift economy comes from the more ancient gift and etiquette practises founded in the Confucian social order (Yang 1994, 208-9).

Walder quotes one informant:

Workers could use all kinds of methods to get around regulations. After the Cultural Revolution there was a back door for everything, and it became very serious... Before the Cultural Revolution things were generally run according to strict procedures... [Q: Why did the situation change after the Cultural Revolution?] Conditions were like this: wages were low, material things were scarce. So people used whatever advantage they had, given their position in society... [People] were willing to exchange favors with others and cultivate *guanxi* to live easier, and for mutual advantage. [Q: Didn't this kind of thing occur before the Cultural Revolution, too?] Of course... you can't say that it didn't occur at all. It's just that before the Cultural Revolution it was on a smaller scale, and less open... But after the Cultural Revolution it became much more widespread, much more open, and used commonly in everyday situations. People say that after the Cultural Revolution, *ganqing* replaced policies [yi ganqing daiti zhengce]" (Walder 1986: 211 parentheses his).

As a result of Cultural Revolution policies it became more difficult to acquire scarce resources and, in general, to get things done. In order to fulfil needs Gold says “one’s network ideally should contain everyone from store clerks who control scarce commodities, to cadres who have final say over such things as housing allotments, residence permits, job assignments and political evaluations needed for Youth League or Party membership” (Gold 1985: 661). In other words, anyone who controlled any kind of needed or desired resource was a logical target for cultivating *guanxi* relations with. This situation made officials even more powerful and important than they otherwise would have been. *Guanxixue* was rapidly being recognized as a valuable skill in manipulating those balances of power (social relations) involving increasingly scarce resources and the people in the controlling position were now almost exclusively government officials. “Officials in these communities therefore not only had a formidable political apparatus at their disposal, but they also had wide discretion in the distribution of housing, consumer items, wage raises, and promotion” (Walder 1989: 411). As the government had taken over these functions from the family and the locality, the need arose for cultivating relationships with formerly irrelevant others in the interest of acquiring needed resources. This represented a significant extension of chains of interdependence at the local level. This same process of extending chains of interdependence directly involved *guanxi* activity, making *guanxi* a good barometer for the civilizing process. *Guanxi* activity grew into a broad based phenomenon that cannot be called new, but that was ironically encouraged by the Communist system. Walder continues:

Moreover, the dependence upon administrative distribution at the workplace, along with official discretion in allocating goods and

material scarcity of the period, gave rise to an active subculture of personal ties, upon which people relied for the attainment of scarce goods, services, and opportunities (Walder 1989: 411).

From 1949 to 1978, resort to a gift economy of sorts became more common, largely due to material deficiencies caused by the Communist system and its policies. It might be suggested that this same phenomenon had probably occurred at other times in the past, when resources were scarce, and while this may be true in some sense, it must be remembered that the government had never before been in this position in the local community. The Party was in control, at the local level, of whatever resources there were. If one wanted access to those resources, the path lay through Communist Party officials who were often, though not always, different from those with whom locals would normally deal. After 1978, this same 'gift' economy transformed into something much more broad-based and far-reaching. At this time, as will be seen, there was a coarser, more instrumental form, first in the cities, according to Yang, and then in the rural areas as well (Yang 1994). And since the time of Yang's seminal work on the subject, it has expanded considerably further.

Chapter Nine - Withdrawal of the State from Local Society: Post-Opening Period

Introduction

It has already effectively been shown in this thesis that during the course of the past century there has been an intensifying struggle within Chinese culture and society to overthrow the traditional social order. This attack was focussed on social relations at the local, primarily village level, and on the traditional family. It was carried out ostensibly in the interest of modernization, but for all practical purposes survival was its root motivation. The traditional order proved highly resilient and resistant to change, however, and, as has also been established, in 1978 it was still widespread across most of rural China.

The question being addressed is whether this century-long assault on the old order actually had any lasting impact on social relations at the local level. It must be determined whether the figurations of the peasant masses had been impacted in a fashion exemplifying a civilizing process. In previous chapters we saw that some change in these areas did seem apparent, but this assessment has to be judged inconclusive. This change was largely top down and in that sense superficial. For example, resulting from the 'Four modernizations', "marriage and the family have shown significant changes. It is necessary to point out here, however, that some of these changes are new, but some are merely the resurgence of 'traditional' patterns that had been forced to hide until now" (Tsai 1989: 235). There had been changes in mate selection techniques and divorce had increased significantly, but with a nod to

traditionalism, family size had also increased. In other words, both a re-emergence of the traditional, and shifts in a civilizing direction are evidenced.

In approaching this question, the thesis returns to some of Elias's central concepts applied to the period after 1978 when state control was reduced. Examining an analogous development in the black American ghetto, Waquant comes to the conclusion that the problems there were directly related to the withdrawal of the state. This is his explanation for what he refers to as a decivilizing process in that environment. He suggests that Elias would have expected the dedifferentiation and "shortening of networks of interdependency" that have occurred in the ghetto (Wacquant 2004: 104). In the Chinese context, on the other hand, where with the same logic Elias might have expected to see the reversal of civilizing processes originally tentatively brought on by the intrusion of the state one sees instead their expansion.

This might be seen as problematic for an Eliasian analysis in this situation as the state extricated itself in many areas, but in the end, this is not the case. Elias dealt with simultaneous countervailing, sometimes overlapping and/or lagging trends within civilizing processes. Wouters points out that "in accordance with one of Elias' theoretical models... long-term processes in one specific direction, which one can observe, go almost invariably hand in hand with counterprocesses in the opposite direction" (Wouters 1977: 448). This is what has been happening in the Chinese context with a similar withdrawal of the state, as well as some reversion to the traditional order. More important and dominant has been the continuation of civilizing trends including, as will be evidenced shortly, increasing competition, differentiation and extending chains of interdependence.

Mobility and *guanxi* represent the two concepts through which the existence of a Chinese civilizing process can best be established. Historically, as has been shown, mobility in Chinese society has been relatively low, or restricted, although there has been some movement. But for the most part this movement has been forced, due either to privation or policy. Absent these compulsions, the culture has been strong enough to hold the people on the land within their primary figurations. If evidence is found of there being a significant increase in voluntary mobilization, this will be held up as strong supporting evidence for the breaking down of the traditional social order at the local figurational level and of extending chains of interdependence. If people are choosing to move outside their traditional figurations in large numbers, it follows that the culture is no longer strong enough to hold them on the land as it had done for millennia previously.

Guanxi and mobility are related as they are manifested in the Chinese context. After the Opening, when movement had become more a matter of choice than compulsion, making the decision to move was based on having *guanxi* connections (facilitating employment and residence) at the destination. But *guanxi* relations are much more than just this. Reciprocal relations have always been a part of traditional Chinese culture, but it is also true that under normal circumstances they have been restricted to within a person's normal figuration, their family and/or village, and have not really been *guanxi* relations in the strict sense. With interpersonal relations so tightly constrained to within one's figuration, it makes logical sense that any relationship based phenomenon would be constrained in like fashion. If one only very rarely had relations outside their localized figuration, one obviously could only equally rarely have had *guanxi* relations

outside those same barriers (While *guanxi* relations can probably be accurately described as existing between the literati elite of imperial China, those relations were already discussed both as the exception and as part of the traditional order). The *guanxi* relations of Post-Opening China, as an extension of the traditional reciprocal relations beyond traditional boundaries, serve as strong evidence that the nature of social relations was in fact changing, and doing so in a fashion indicating an extension of the chains of interdependence.

It has also been established that part of the nature of *guanxi* is that there be a significant amount of affect binding *guanxi* relations. This affective aspect is both sought and cultivated through *guanxi* activity, or *guanxixue*. It is possible that *renqing* and/or *ganqing* feelings associated with *guanxi* relations were changing as the relations themselves extended to others beyond traditional barriers and with whom one might have no other reason to interact than the purely instrumental. This would indicate a depersonalizing, or distancing, of *guanxi* relations. It is posited that if this is the case, it too represents chains of interdependence that are extending well beyond traditional boundaries.

Historical Survey

1978 marks the beginning of the Post-Opening period. After the death of Mao, numerous changes in the economic and social structure opened opportunities for rural people on a significant scale. “The Chinese domestic organizational structure prior to the 1980s was basically the unchanged premodern institutional arrangement” (Wang 1998: 106). After the reforms, things were to change in ways heretofore unseen in China.

The ten years from 1966 had been a very difficult time throughout China and some positive change was overdue. Deng Xiaoping had actually begun to take “the bull by the horns” in the spring of 1975 (Garside 1981). Generally he was following the principles outlined in Zhou Enlai’s Four Modernizations. “According to Deng’s vision, mainland China must adopt a two fold policy of opening up to the outside world and revitalizing its domestic economy” (Tsai 1989: 232). This basically meant that he was encouraging change in virtually every area of society. “He made it quite clear that he thought that the country was in a mess, and that it was suffering from too much empty politics” (Garside 1981: 64). ‘On the General Program’, one of the three controversial documents produced by Deng in 1975, “called for rectification in every area of life in China, spelling out each field of activity by name lest there be any misunderstanding” (Garside 1981: 78). Deng was gradually assuming power over, and responsibility for, many important areas of government. “From the summer of 1977 to the end of 1978, Deng was directly responsible for education, science and technology, military affairs and foreign affairs” (Evans 1993: 225). These were areas central to the changes he was planning and he was very active in all of them, from raising the standards of education, while stripping it of ideology, to dealing with the moral and professionalism problems in the military, and even normalizing relations with the United States (Evans 1993: 225-226). Deng’s efforts were directed at “getting the party to repudiate the ideology” that had been responsible for the Cultural Revolution as well as other disasters (Evans 1993: 228). All of this change of course had an impact on Chinese society, as the artificial, top-down pressure was relaxed.

“In 1976, a campaign to set things to rights was launched throughout the country. The Third Plenary Session of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party held in 1978 made a decision on reforming the rural economic structure” (Fei 1989: 233). Salisbury describes the meeting as a situation where “Deng cut loose” (Salisbury 1992: 389). In doing so he was separating himself, and China, from Mao. It was the decisions at this session that allowed for “a) moving toward decentralization; b) rewarding hard work and discouraging egalitarianism, or ‘everyone eating from the same pot’; c) instituting flexibility in management; and d) placing authority in laws and institutions rather than in individuals” (Etheridge 1988: 8). This represented essentially a casting off of much of what Mao and his cohorts had put in place.

One of the rallying cries “of Teng’s [Deng’s] development strategy [was] ‘let a minority get rich first’” (Li 1993:145). This was primarily directed at the cities where, “Dramatic measures have been taken to ‘open up’ (*k'ai-fang*) the eastern coastal cities to international investment, in the hope that the benefits of such development will gradually filter through to the interior” (Li 1993:145). In succeeding years and in response to the above changes, foreign investment would become an important factor in economic growth. “From a level of \$57 million in 1980, FDI [Foreign Direct Investment] drifted upward, reaching \$4 billion in 1991, and then accelerated at a 21% annual rate, reaching \$70 billion in 2006” (Greenspan 2007: 12-13).

Reform was not directed solely at the urban areas. When encouraging a liberating of the forces of production, Deng and his allies were talking about all of China. “The household-responsibility system was resurrected in 1978, once again as an experiment in one or two locations” (Starr 1997: 115). By end of 1983 it had been adopted by about

95% of the people across China (Ling 1991: 13). The idea in the countryside was to give the peasants control over their own land and a share in any profits it generated. Everything produced over and above what the state required was to be theirs to dispose of as they saw fit.

The government was not taking its hand completely out of the rural pie, but was releasing its stranglehold of the previous thirty years. State involvement in the farm economy was dramatically reduced. This represented a step toward putting the control of the distribution of resources back in the hands of the peasants. Theoretically, assuming the traditional cultural system was still intact, even if submerged, these changes might allow for a snapping back into place of the old social relations and institutions. This did occur to some degree, but so too did significant change in the opposite direction as the old relations had been forever altered.

Also effecting initially the urban but eventually including the rural environment was China's new stance toward foreign relations.

By the spring of 1978 Deng Xiaoping had achieved a position where he could set in train a series of foreign-policy initiatives that would make the next twelve months the most creative, sophisticated, and confident period of diplomacy China had ever known, and within those twelve months the Chinese people would see how the new activism could enliven and enrich their lives (Garside 1981: 339).

After the momentous decisions of 1978, things started to happen very quickly. One often heard phrase of the time reveals a lot:

“As early as 1979 a verse began to sweep China:

Yao chi liang

Zhao Ziyang.

Yao chi mi

Zhao Wan Li

(“If you want wheat, go to Zhao Ziyang; if you want rice, go to Wan Li” (Salisbury 1992: 383)).

Zhao Ziyang and Wan Li were two of the gifted early reformers of the Deng era. In Anhui Wan Li quickly took control and acted decisively. “He gave each family its own plot of land and instituted what he called a household contract responsibility system... It gave each family a share in the profits... the peasant had a motive to cultivate his plot well” (Salisbury 1992: 385). Zhao Ziyang did much the same thing in Sichuan. “He got fast results with a spectacular rise in food production” (Salisbury 1992: 388). This new movement was taken up in varying degrees and methods but as a whole it became universal within Chinese borders. The people were starting to eat better, and make money in the process.

At this point the stage was set for significant and rapid change. The traditional order had been under intense attack for eight decades. The old social relations had been torn asunder and rebuilt; forcibly destroyed while at the same time constrained in perverted form. Now with the artificial constraint of the state receding, and the traditional social

order altered to some unknown degree, the potential for change was possibly as great as it ever had been.

Local Social Relations - An Eliasian Perspective

Differentiation

Significant increases in both competition and differentiation have accompanied increasing economic activity. Within the traditional agrarian based economy, there was little chance for a significant amount of either in the countryside. This remained the case through the Qing dynasty, and in relative terms, to the opening in 1978. Generally, there had been neither the opportunity nor the desire to branch out. The off-farm work that was engaged in (both Fei and Potter have shown that it was not insignificant in some areas of the country) was generally pursued out of necessity; the land could not produce enough to support the family through agriculture alone. But even this activity remained within individual families or villages and did not foster or represent significant differentiation. During the Communist period and previous to the opening, rural areas had usually not been allowed to have factories that competed with the state enterprises. The new policies that started in the 80s changed that. They effectively opened the floodgates for the rural industrialization that became the fastest growing segment of the fastest growing economy in the world. (Unger 2002: 147-148).

As markets began to expand, the peasant farmers were encouraged to make the best use of their resources. This required significant adjustment, “strongly promoted by the government through a strategy of developing a diversified economy instead of one-sidedly steering grain production” (Ling 1991: 16). Grain output, which had increased 3% between 1952 and 1978, increased 9% from 1978 to 1984. In 1987 over 80 million

farm workers were employed outside normal farm jobs, most of them in the new local community-owned enterprises. Even more striking was the changing distribution of output value. By 1986 with less than 20% of labour in town or village enterprises they had surpassed agriculture in output value (Ling 1991: 17-18). Between 1978 and 1985 non-farm income grew by 855% as compared to an increase in farm income of 131% (Ling 1991: 79). Another study has the agricultural population decreasing from 85% of the total in the fifties to less than 70% in 1993. During the same period, Industrial output increased from 43% to 83% of the total, while agricultural output decreased from 57% to 17% of total output (Changmin 2000: 190). Industrial enterprises were taking over an increasing share of economic activity in rural areas. This is evidenced by the employment figures for rural areas. “Non-agricultural employment increased by nearly 30 million, resulting in a nearly 13 million net increase in total rural employment... agricultural employment dropped from nearly 90 percent of total rural employment in 1978 to about 72 percent in 1995” (Xuejin 2000: 138). In rural areas by far the strongest employment growth has been in the non-farm sector. From 1985 to 1990, “non-agricultural sectors accounted for 40 percent of the total absorption of 50 million rural labourers; the figure increased to 133 percent of the 30 million absorption between 1992 and 1995” with much of this increase having been offset by losses in agricultural employment (Xuejin 2000: 138). The peasant population was becoming less dependent on agriculture for subsistence as increasing differentiation provided them with ever increasing opportunities.

A survey done in 1999 indicates the obvious in saying that there were simply a lot more and different jobs to be had (Xinxin 2001). Obvious or not, however, this is another clear indication of the growth in differentiation. Another study by Qian describes

several population centres and geographical areas where industrial production has grown dramatically since 1978 absorbing most of what had been the agricultural labour force (Qian 1996). There had apparently also been a newly emerging group in China since 1978, made up of businessmen and the self-employed, and their numbers were significant. Wu points out that “more than 100 million former peasants are now in the process of becoming workers” (Wu Zhongmin 2000: 85). This represents a dramatic shift in social organization. Increasing differentiation has been a fact effectively since the opening.

Xiqiao Township in Guangdong province was a place that “was almost entirely agrarian until the mid-1980s and that has experienced a surge of entrepreneurship in the years since. Today it boasts well over 2000 factories, including more than 1600 textile firms” (Unger 2002: 132). “In some of the township’s villages, close to half of all the families owned factories” (Unger 2002: 133). Most of these factories have specialized in synthetic fabrics. Regardless of the average size of these industrial establishments, this represents both increasing competition (which was often extensive and fierce, and was growing ever more so) as well as rapid and dramatic differentiation. Also interesting here is the fact that as technique and know-how improved, vital information “easily circulated within the bounds of the local township, but did not so readily spread beyond the township’s localized social networks” (Unger 2002: 134). With key civilizing trends intensifying, old attitudes toward social relations still remained in place. Channels of communication were still dictated to some degree by the old social norms and relations.

“Xiqiao is not unique in the degree to which it specializes successfully. Xiqiao lies in Nanhai county, and each of the rural townships in the county has similarly developed a

special niche in which it has become pre-eminent” (Unger 2002: 134). A number of other locations are mentioned in Unger’s study as manifesting similar economic and social situations. “Such local concentrations of mutually competitive enterprises are not unique to this corner of China.” (Unger 2002: 135). This was a growing trend on a nationwide basis. Differentiation was burgeoning more or less rapidly all over the country.

Most of these small businesses started as partnerships mainly for financing purposes, and when successful enough splintered into family businesses. According to Unger the most successful ones were those which were “able to break the mould of a familistic approach to business” and remain as partnerships, even to the point of intentionally avoiding employing their own progeny (Unger 2002: 135). The familistic approach was a more comfortable fit for Chinese cultural proclivities, while the partnership model was considerably less so. Despite this, many businesses were opting to stick with the partnership structure. With the competitive drive for greater success and riches, and all that went with it, there was a corresponding pressure to move away from more traditional social ties, and an increasing willingness to do so.

Mobility

What was also manifested during this post-opening period was “unprecedented social mobility” which encompassed “the mobility between urban and rural areas, between different industries, between economic sectors of different ownerships, and between different statuses, groups, and generations” (Wanli 2002: 53). This represented geographic, social, and economic mobility and differentiation to a degree that would have been impossible, if not unthinkable, at any earlier time in Chinese history.

That rural mobility has increased can be seen by the rise in urban population. Referring to the Communist period up through the 1980s “the annual rate of increase of the urban population is twice that of total population (4.2 percent vs 1.8 percent). So, China’s level of urbanization still is low, but the progress of urbanization has been rapid” (Fenggan 2000: 167). Xuejin concurs with this assessment (Xuejin 2000: 143). Urban population increased from 10.6% of the total in 1949 to 46.6% of the total in 1987, with by far the most rapid increase occurring after 1978 when it went from 17.9% to 46.6% of the total population (Kaichen 1991: 56). “The rural population peaked in 1995 at nearly 860 million. Eleven years later it was down to 737 million.” (Greenspan 2007: 304). Starr, in 1997, had the rural population at “900 million people, more than three and a half times the total population of the United States” (Starr 1997: 114). Rural population growth had started going negative in the eighties and nineties, eventually changing at a rate of -10.1% (Kaichen 1991: 57). Given the absolute size of the population, the numbers are staggering. The rural Chinese were on the move to a greater degree than ever before.

Post-Opening Urbanization is largely a result of this internal migration. Most of these migrants seem to be coming from rural areas. In Johnson’s study of in-migrants to the Pearl River Delta, 92% “had an agricultural registration. Ninety-four percent were from rural areas” (Johnson 2007: 38). In Dongguan in 1990 there were “655,000 temporary residents, a population more than half the size of the registered population of 1.2 million... By 1995, the number of temporary residents was almost equivalent to that of locals... by the end of 2000, 1.67 times that of the registered local population.” (Johnson 2007: 40). In 1991 non-local population in Panyu in Guangdong Province was

'nil.' "In 1997, the non-local population was estimated at 347,063, registering the proportion at 0.39" (Yow 2007: 51).

Wu suggests that it is the changes made to the *hukou* system that have contributed to the increase in rural-urban mobility. "The resumption of the national college entrance examination has also contributed to an ever-increasing number of rural residents becoming urban residents with a change in their *hukou* status" (Wu Zhongmin 2000: 84). Starr seems to agree with this: "they are taking advantage of the relaxed restrictions on geographical mobility in record numbers, and some 100 million underemployed workers have left their rural homes in search of temporary work in China's largest cities" (Starr 1997: 116). These changes no doubt contributed to allowing the increased movement of the peasants in that restrictions had been relaxed, but there is little doubt either that migration would have been considerably lower had not the traditional social relations of the countryside been broken down to some significant degree. Rural people were no longer tied to the land by the singularly successful, though rigid social and cultural system in place for most of the previous two millennia.

Another point of interest to this thesis is the rise of a new social group referred to in English as the 'floating population'. These are people who are on the move for employment purposes. This is something quite new in China, and its scale is significant. Estimates say that this population was around 50 million in 1989 and well over 100 million by the year 2000 (Changmin 2000: 180), making their numbers alone larger than most countries. The trend was also for an increasing percentage of the floating population to stay away from home for longer periods, in the case of the study over one

year. (Changmin 2000: 182). To be on the move in such a fashion goes against the very core of what it had meant to be Chinese in the traditional sense. In the past to be in this situation, without a home or land, would have labelled one as something other than Chinese, a fate worse than death and to be avoided at all costs, except in times of dire need or out of desperation.

Overseas migration has seen dramatic growth as well. The overseas Chinese who have been so important in facilitating the economic expansion through transnational contacts and *guanxi* connections generally have, or have relatives who have, emigrated at some point during the course of the past 150 years. “Migration creates multiple homes and transregional and... transnational relations. Chinese migrants [have always] maintained relations with their homeland, hoping to return one day... their links with the Chinese homeland had tremendous impacts on the economic and social life of *qiaoxiang*” (Tan 2007a: 1). The literal meaning of *qiaoxiang* is ‘sojourners homeland’ and in China generally refers to “certain villages and towns that have a history of migration to Hong Kong, Macao, and other parts of the world.” (Yow 2007: 49). The implication clearly is of a place that one will ideally return to one day. Tan Chee-Beng says it is a “convenient term to use, because people know what it refers to even though the areas covered may not be precise” (Tan 2007b: 75). The importance of a *qiaoxiang* lies as much in the sentimental attachment as in the geographical location. These people generally maintain a fondness for their homeland, their place of origin, and for this reason, connections (*guanxi*) between the groups, even if they have never met and otherwise have little if any common ground, are easily cultivated and nourished. Tan further points out that as China’s economy grows stronger, these overseas Chinese are in an ideal position to take advantage “since linguistic and some cultural affinities allow them easier access to the

guanxi networks in China, at the same time, they perform a bridge-building function between China and their respective countries” (Tan 2007a: 16). As they build those bridges, the chains of interdependence are extending in radical fashion.

Mobility, Extending Chains of Interdependence and the Connection with *Guanxi*

When rural residents migrated to urban areas of whatever size, they moved into entirely new social situations.⁵⁸ They were mobilizing in three ways; location, occupation, and strata. More basically, there were two fundamental changes; “One in lifestyle and in social connection network (from one characterized by consanguine and geographical relations to one characterized mainly by occupational relations); the other is the enhancement of social status symbolized by opportunity resources” (Peilin 2003: 141). These last points highlight the connection between movement and *guanxi*. Upon movement into the city, or any other relatively distant location, one was moving into a different web of social relations; effectively a different figuration. Wellman, Chen and Dong point out that the typical smaller, group-based relations of the average Chinese person were (and are) being extended into networks in similar fashion to those seen in the more developed, industrialized world (Wellman 2002: 226). In this sense the traditional figuration was giving way to a more modern one. Chains of interdependence were being extended and new relationships were being formed. Much as in Elias’s Europe, people were interacting with different others, often from different social classes, in ways they never had before. In a fashion also similar to Elias’s Europe, the classes themselves were being redefined.

⁵⁸ The following discussion is equally true (though the details differ) for external migration, but in that it is not as important to this thesis it will not be explored in any further detail here.

This is not to say that connections with the old figuration were left behind and forgotten, for it was more often than not the case that connections through old figurations facilitated movement to the cities both in terms of employment and housing.⁵⁹ “For migrants themselves to go out and find work... was not very common” (Qian 1996: 128). Peilin shows that the migration process in the post-opening period was highly dependent upon *guanxi* connections (Peilin 2003: 145).

Chinese rural society takes special stock in consanguine and geographical relations based on family ties. Scholars of older generations invariably took ‘family’ as the basic unit of traditional Chinese social networks. Special attachments of blood and locality strongly influenced the way of life and social interactions, which ossified into ‘custom’ and displayed tremendous inertia ... This ‘custom’ does not change with change in living place from the villages to the cities or with a change in occupation from farm hand to worker, for example, in the ‘Zhejiang Village’ on the south outskirts of Beijing; nor does it change when they have some productive capital in industry and commerce and become business owners, or even when they go abroad: Chinatowns exist in international metropolises like Paris, London and San (sic), where the Chinese live in compact community. Our survey of *mingong* in Jinan shows that their whole process of migration, living and mingling is permeated with the influence of consanguine networks (Peilin 2003: 142).

⁵⁹ This had been true for a while. It was *guanxi* connections that often enabled economically motivated migration to the cities in the late Qing (Murphy 2002: 31).

The *mingong* naturally take this reliance upon ‘blood and locality’ attachments with them when they migrate. But there is more to it than just this.

Peilin points out that the *mingong* often did not fit in very well once in the cities. They tended to use networks to secure employment in the cities; “in their migration far from both home and farmland, the peasants rely more heavily on a network of social relations based on blood and geographical ties in information gathering, hunting for jobs, modes of employment and associations in the cities” (Peilin 2003: 145). This new figuration confronting them in their new place of residence was different in that it was just that, new. It may have overlapped with the old (more often than not, it did, and thus represented expanding figurations and chains of interdependence), but in carrying out daily activity one was relying on, or dependent upon, a different, expanded figuration, usually in addition to their more traditional figuration. These new social relations were also, as often as not, occupational as opposed to personal. The affective component of the ‘connection’, while not eliminated, was necessarily changing. One simply did not interact with non-kin occupational contacts in the same way that one did with close personal ties. The community that confronted the *mingong* when they got to the city was often not very welcoming, so the old networks were vital, at least initially, but accommodation to the new had to be made.

According to Tang Can, “The pattern of group relations with status in the city or countryside as a boundary is slowly breaking down” (Tang 2001: 43). In other words the *mingong*’s rigid association with the countryside among the urban populace was becoming less of a barrier over time. The *mingong* were clearly developing new networks, new interpersonal relations within the urban environments. Wolf draws on

Elias's understanding of social relations in saying that "They sometimes proliferate like the runners of the strawberry plant or the shoots of the bamboo; they can metastacize like cancer cells; or they can leap over intervening populations" (Wolf 1977, 33).

Wouters is referring to the effects of the civilizing process in Europe when he says that, "people's identifications with each other have been expanding and may be expected to continue to do so as long as intranational and international interdependencies continue to expand, as long as processes of social differentiation and integration continue" (Wouters 1986: 12). This point can easily be made to apply to China. Both Wolf's and Wouter's comments combine to make a very good description of what was happening in China at this time. The migrants' figurations were changing and, by definition, expanding.

Shen, in his review of recent studies of *mingong* migration, makes some observations about their relationships as they made the move to the urban environment. He refers to them as consisting of two parts: the "local native relationship in place even before their exodus", and "the new relationship they go into after exodus" (Shen 2003: 86). The *mingong* were indeed entering new relationships upon their entry into the new environment. "A survey from the Horizon Company... finds that the limited resources available within a homogeneous community determines that some of these people tend to dissociate themselves from the original community when possible" (Shen 2003: 86). Without over-interpreting these findings, they do suggest that these people are in some cases leaving old relations behind and searching out new ones. They are attempting to form or become part of new figurations and in so doing relating to new social others with whom they never would have had the chance or desire to relate in the past. Shen confirms this when he talks about 'strong and weak ties', a la Granovetter's study. He

says that unlike those in the West, “Chinese communities mostly rely upon strong ties... contacts among *mingong* in the cities and the social support they rely on are formed basically by what we called strong ties, which, starting from consanguinity, gradually extends to fellow villagership” (Shen 2003: 86). This, of course, is not surprising. “At the same time, the *mingong* in the cities go through a process of learning and resocializing, and some of them extend their weak ties” (Shen 2003: 86). The point is that while the strong ties from their home village environment often helped them get into the city, and they often, in a sense, found their village in the city, many of the *mingong* quickly and consciously extended their network beyond their more restricted village figuration. In doing so they were extending their chains of interdependence, in Eliasian terms.

Research done on Zhejiang village in 2003, a community on the southern end of Beijing, indicates that the idea of community has changed in the Chinese context. Previously it had had distinct boundaries and internal integrity.

What has been found in Zhejiang village, however, is integration, conflict and openness, all combined... Zhejiang village has become an ‘unbounded community’ because it keeps closely tied to other sectors of society while at the same time staying outside the integral social order. Another feature is that it oversteps not only geographical, but also a series of other profound, hidden boundaries, e.g., those relating to the organizational, administrative and personal identity systems (Shen 2003: 88).

Residents of Zhejiang village have become interdependent with those beyond their own village boundaries. The old ties have not given up their hold, but they have weakened to the extent that villagers have begun to look beyond them in meeting their needs, or even in attempting to find a better life.

“As trading activities became more concentrated, and organizations and individuals providing information and trading services appeared, dependence on personal relationships was to some extent reduced” (Wang Hansheng 1998: 30). In Eliasian terms, with greater differentiation came the extension of the chains of interdependence. The whole nature of social relations was changing. Instead of relying strictly on the ‘personal’ relationships of blood and village these people were branching out beyond what was formerly acceptable in relational terms. They were no longer restricting themselves to close personal ties with those whom they knew they could trust, but were allowing themselves to interact with those with whom they may have had no previous relationship, but with whom it might prove beneficial to have a relationship at that point. In fact, it seems that they were seeking out these ties with which to do business. This is *guanxi* building, or *guanxixue*, and, it is argued, is tantamount to fostering the extending chains of interdependence that Elias’s describes.

This change goes to the very root of Chinese culture. The change continued to progress with the second generation as they “have begun to try to identify with the society on the ground... their attachment to their home village is weakening, and in contrast with the first generation, implies mainly an attachment to loved ones back at home” (Shen 2003: 93). This new generation was apparently becoming quite restive in Chinese terms, not only reaching out to the new, larger society around them, but also leaving a significant

part of the old - the land - behind. In traditional Chinese terms this was a radical change in perspective, representing a departure from cultural imperatives thousands of years old. They may not have been ready to leave their family totally behind, but they left the land. Indeed,

this generation of rural migrants is a distinct demographic group, marked by lower age, higher levels of education and no experience of farming. They identify weakly with their traditional status and imbue the status of farmers with more social implications. The new generation differs from the earlier one in that some of its members are beginning to identify with the local society into which they have migrated. Their identification with their hometown has meanwhile weakened... Lack of identity with the rural traditions on the part of the new generation, Wang Chunming holds, will further give rise to or stimulate the 'fluidity' of the new generation of rural youth. (Qiang 2002: 83).

This passage indicates that these younger people, representing the new generation of *mingong*, are living within a very different relational world. To a large degree they are reaching out and finding their own significant relationships, as opposed to being born into them, and it is a process that has built on itself. As they found themselves in a new relational community, both their alienation from the old and their need for a new community was increased. The old social relations had broken down to a very significant degree.

The use of contacts to facilitate migration is important. It was an obviously natural response to a changing environment. This was an outgrowth of the traditional Chinese habitus based largely on the Confucian worldview where the ideal was for people to live a harmonious life within tightly ordered interpersonal relationships starting with their family and reaching outward to extended family and kin, and ultimately society on a broader level. This dependence on predominantly familial relations within the Confucian context had been extended beyond the family, first through necessity during the Communist era, in an effort to meet daily needs as the Communist control of resources became so draconian, and later through desire to take advantage of opportunity arising as China opened economically. This had been enabled through the impact of the assault on traditional social relations of the previous eighty years. These relations were still a central concern for the average Chinese peasant, but they were no longer so completely binding. Nor were the relations themselves so precisely defined. People could reach beyond their traditional figurations without fear of being socially ostracized, a fate apparently no longer so intimidating. A trend was in motion. The natural reliance on and interdependence with close relations extended to people beyond traditional horizons until eventually the cultivation of these extended relations became fundamental to success, even to the point of having been described as an art form (*guanxixue*). There are unmistakable parallels here to Elias's European 'bourgeois' context in which people were newly on the move, interacting with new and different other people. The advent of *guanxixue* was integrally related to what Elias would call a lengthening of the chains of interdependence in a society in a period of transition. Social relations were changing; it was an old game, adjusting to a new environment, requiring different rules.

Conclusion

This thesis has attempted to establish the Eliasian understanding of civilizing processes as an effective tool for the analysis of the Chinese social context. Part One discussed those aspects of the civilizing process deemed important for Part Two, on Chinese social development. This was a fairly broad based approach to Elias's ideas. Its aim was to show how competition was the driving force behind the civilizing process. It was competition that was responsible for the breaking down of the traditional social order, leading to greater differentiation and extending chains of interdependence, ultimately resulting in the internalization of constraint.

At first glance Chinese social development, viewed as a whole, might seem incompatible with the processes described by Elias, for, despite the early emergence of the state, China remained highly stable and traditional for over two millennia, not seeming to develop in a civilizing direction. Close examination reveals a traditional social organization which relied upon a symbiotic relationship between the state and local society, whereby the centre remained distant, leaving control of the distribution of resources in local hands. It was the strength and resilience of this social order that was the defining difference between the civilizing process of China and that of Elias's West. This should not be construed, however, to imply that this difference was so large as to rule out obvious points of comparison between the two.

The traditional means of ordering Chinese society was largely as it remained up to the revolution in 1911. Continuing with the earlier mentioned thought regarding state and local society, for either of them to violate the bounds of the unwritten Confucian

‘agreement’ between centre and locality would be to fail to fulfil their prescribed role, and to violate precepts deeply embedded in the Chinese habitus. This, more specifically, was the stumbling block that for so long stalled the civilizing process in China. With the state and the locality so aloof, the distribution of resources remained in the hands of the locality. As the system was so highly successful in traditional terms, it would take a powerful social force to effect change in this area, to move it in a civilizing direction.

Crucial to understanding the Chinese civilizing process then is the fact that, while the monopoly mechanism certainly played out in law-like Eliasian fashion, whatever other social forces internal to the Chinese context there may have been, they were not strong enough or law-like enough to overcome, or even significantly alter, the existing Confucian social order mandating this state–local society relationship. As Weber pointed out, a change in emperor meant only “a different tax receiver, not an altered social order” (Weber 1951: 27). Once the state had formed through Elias’s monopoly mechanism, the rest of the Chinese civilizing process was not to proceed in quite so inexorable a fashion as seemed the case in the European context.

The social force that did eventually result in this civilizing change was quite different in Eliasian terms and, in fact, initially entirely external to the Chinese world. This, of course, was the incursion by Western powers into the China, mandating a re-evaluation of their own place in the larger world order. This, in turn, was followed in the post-revolutionary environment by the centre aggressively seeking to change the traditional social order through controlling and integrating local society, in the process assuming control over the distribution of resources. It has been argued that this development effectively kick-started the civilizing process, which only truly manifested itself after

1978. It is certainly possible that the process in China would eventually have started up again in any case, but there is no reason or way to be sure of that, and given the longevity and consistency of the then existing Confucian order, plenty of reason to doubt it.

Given the extended time frames involved, it would seem that China underwent a civilizing process significantly different from that of the West, but in many ways it was also strikingly similar. At this point the primary difference can be said to lie in the resilience of the Confucian social organization. Eliasian theory need not be adjusted all that much in order to account for the differences, however, in that once the grip of the old order was broken, admittedly by forces other than Elias would have expected, the Eliasian process continued.⁶⁰

The process of state formation began well before unification under the Qin, with the monopoly mechanism gradually centralizing power in fewer and fewer hands until finally only one ruler remained. This is much as Elias would have it. The Qin brought into force monopolies of the means of violence and taxation and instituted an extremely rigid Legalist system of governance, all of which, due to the strength of the longstanding Confucian social order, as well as Confucianism's part in the Chinese habitus, the people quickly found too onerous to bear. After a short period of rule the Qin were overthrown and replaced by the Han who carried forward the Qin monopolies but eventually adopted the already existing Confucian social system (as opposed to Qin Legalism) as the ruling order of the land. If a specific, historical point of reference is

⁶⁰ One might even posit a civilizing process on a grander, worldwide scale, whereby China was finally being engulfed in the same civilizing process initiated in the West at an earlier time, that the monopoly mechanism has been moving the entire world in a civilizing direction, but that lies well beyond the scope of this project.

sought for the differences between the civilizing processes, this would be the best place to look. Confucianism had already arguably supplied the guiding social principles to Chinese society for centuries and, once codified as the law of the land, promised to do so for millennia to come. It was this Confucian system that would make up the dominant orientations facilitating the stability of Chinese civilization, those dominant orientations that would prove virtually impervious to internal forces for social change in an Eliasian civilizing direction.

Part Two of this thesis was concerned primarily with the process of breaking down the traditional Confucian social order. With the arrival of the West in the 1850s during the Qing dynasty, China was forced to acknowledge that it had fallen behind, and that it was now the revered the social order itself which needed to be changed. This realization was the powerful social force required to effect change and spawned the effort targeted specifically at those social relations that had for so long held Chinese society together. With the fall of the Qing in 1911, the Republicans, followed by the Nationalists and then the Communists, focussed increasingly intense pressure on the traditional social order, impacting it in ways difficult to determine comprehensively. Central to this effort, the state assumed increasing control over the distribution of resources and intruded into local and family life on a scale previously unseen in China.

Though the circumstances and details were certainly different from those in Europe, this was the vital step, missing for millennia, which allowed China to continue its civilizing process. One vital difference that needs to be noted, however, is that in the Chinese case, the changing of the traditional social order was very much a conscious effort, and not the by-product of blind social forces. It was most definitely and quite openly the

traditional order that was the intentional target for change, eventually leading to the resumption of the civilizing process. At first glance this would seem to mark a significant point of departure from Elias's European civilizing process, and indeed it does, but it should also be borne in mind that the eventual consequences of the intentional action (discussed in some detail in the body of this thesis) cannot be said to have been anticipated; that they were, in fact, unintentional, again forging a close tie to Eliasian theory.

Chinese manifestation of the civilizing process

This thesis has argued that it is only with the Opening of China in 1978, after the passing of Mao, that evidence emerges of a civilizing process strongly in force. This evidence takes the form of increasing mobility and the rise of *guanxi*. Brandtstädter argues that "... 'socialist' values and loyalties never managed to replace kinship and community solidarities" (Brandtstadter 2000: 20). While this is almost definitely the case, when she also argues that it was these kinship groups and alliances that facilitated the necessary connections for the rapidly expanding economy, she is only telling part of the story. One's relational ties may have been restricted more or less to kinship at an earlier time as one interacted on a more geographically limited basis, essentially within the village, or even for a short while after migrating into a city, but after 1949 and more especially as the expansion truly got under way after 1978, one needed to be able to move fluidly and ultimately substantially beyond kinship in their *guanxiwang*, or, more appropriately, their new, expanded figurations.

When the iron fist of state control had finally been lifted, people began moving about China, primarily (though by no means only) from rural areas into the cities. Whether

moving locally or to the more distant cities, they relied on connections of a more traditional sort through family and kin to find shelter and employment. Upon settling into their new environment new webs of interpersonal relations became a social reality. The old was not normally shunned, but the new took on increasing importance. Now that the traditional ties were no longer so binding, but more a safety net, relations beyond blood and locality became a legitimate means both of meeting needs and even of seeking out a better life. This made perfect and obvious sense for a people group that had been cast suddenly and forcefully out of a traditional world and into a modernizing one, and for whom interpersonal relationships had always been such a fundamental concern. Where in the past *ganqing* and *renqing* were defining elements of traditional reciprocal social relations, enabling harmonious interaction, the new social relations, extending significantly beyond any previous figurational boundaries, required something new and different. Combining elements of both *ganqing* and *renqing* and adapting them to the new social reality, considerably more instrumental in nature, *guanxi*, and *guanxixue*, were the result.

***Guanxi* as Extending Chains of Interdependence**

The classical Confucian tradition, which is where the analysis of the Chinese context in this thesis began, was a social system emphasizing human relationships and the notion of *li* – proper behaviour within relations, or ritual. The thesis has also noted that reciprocity within social relations is central to Confucian society. Out of these characteristics emerged *renqing*, or gift relations. “This point of departure leads logically to the emphasis on exchange behaviour to concretize and nurture social relationships, and thus the notions of reciprocity and empathy also become important” (Yang 1994: 70 citing Jin). These conceptions, Yang argues, can be found among

Chinese communities everywhere and at all times as having emerged out of the Confucian tradition (Yang 1994: 6 citing Jin). She further states that “*guanxi* discourse has grown out of an older *renqing* discourse, so that although it retains many of the principles of *renqing* ethics, it also has developed new political and economic dimensions that were only latent and rudimentary before” (Yang 1994: 71). The word *guanxixue*, or the study or art of *guanxi*, was apparently rarely used or heard “outside the new socialist society on the mainland” indicating a changing perception of social relations in that environment (Yang 1994: 8). After 1949, as control of the distribution of resources was taken over by the government, and those same resources became very scarce and difficult to obtain, *guanxi* became one of the means by which to ‘get in the back door.’ It increasingly became the way to avoid an often impossibly obstructive bureaucracy in securing one’s daily needs. And because social relations and the control of the distribution of resources had been altered to such an extent, the people with whom one had to deal in the process were quite different than they would have been in more traditional times. As such, *guanxi* was another example of old cultural predispositions adapting to a new environment, and doing so in a fashion that Elias would have recognized. The old had not passed away. It simply resurfaced in modified form under different circumstances. Nor is *guanxi* to be thought of as a strictly urban phenomenon:

there is ample evidence that the art of *guanxi* exists in the countryside as well as in urban society... Indeed, some urban Chinese I interviewed believe that *guanxixue* is even more pervasive in rural areas than in cities because its very ‘source’ or ‘origin’ (*faiyuandi*) is rural culture

where kinship ties and a tradition of labor exchange and mutual aid and obligation have always been dominant (Yang 1994: 76).

As they see the rural areas as the source of Chinese tradition, which is the source of *guanxi*, it makes sense that rural China must also be the source of *guanxi*.

“In the 1980s, with the dramatic rural economic reforms, there seemed to be even more opportunities and situations that called for engaging in the art of *guanxi*” (Yang 1994: 77). This new situation represented something different again, analogous to the choice involved with mobility in the post-opening era as opposed to the coercion prior to 1978. These were opportunities, as opposed to requirements for survival, as under the Communist regime. *Guanxi* was being used by choice to achieve higher goals, not simply to stay alive. The people who were using *guanxi* were moving beyond the old cultural barriers more often than not out of choice, in an effort to improve their own situation.

Huang Xiyi, drawing on Samuel Whyte, says that “the new external orientation of family economic activities in the post-reform [Post-Opening] era may foster alliances and cooperation with outsiders and, as a result, undermine patrilineal solidarity” (Huang 1998: 178 citing Whyte). Whether or not the patrilineal structure will be undermined completely remains an open question, but that outsiders have been included in the network, or *guanxiwang*, is without doubt. The alliances and cooperation being fostered by the new external orientation are enabled by *guanxixue*. Kinship relations, especially as they grow more distant, are a part, but only a part, of the larger *guanxiwang*, or figuration, that helps one succeed in the new economy. Family and kinship connections

in Chinese society have always had both primacy and a considerable flexibility to them. This flexibility is one enabler of *guanxiwang* expansion. Even by traditional Chinese standards, outsiders might be allowed entrance into the family group, or figuration, under certain circumstances. It is a theoretically small (but culturally rather large) step from here to an expanding *guanxiwang* or figuration, which can accurately be described as a structure entailing extending chains of interdependence, and which was appearing with changing local social relations after reform.

The key to this process was the weakening of traditional social ties. The connection with the civilizing process as described by Elias is clear. The post-opening period is characterized by the crossing of social boundaries and extending chains of interdependence in the form of the shifting focus of *guanxi* relations. The localized nature of individual social ties in the past was giving way to networks that now stretched across the country and even across the globe. Where what might be called the precursors to *guanxi* relations were restricted to within one's primary figuration, their family or village, after 1978 and with the expansion of the traditional figurations these old restrictions were being left by the wayside.

From the eighties into the nineties, there was a great deal of movement between classes and the lines between them grew faint as "large numbers of poor people with a relatively low economic status, or from marginal social groups, made lots of money and became members of the rich stratum" (Qiang 2005: 128). This does not mean that these newly wealthy people automatically associated with and became part of the primarily urban, upper class stratum to the exclusion of all their other social and familial relations. That would be exaggerating the case. What it does indicate, however, is that these

people were beginning to cross social boundaries that had previously been virtually impenetrable. The boundaries were on the move, in a manner different from, yet reminiscent of, the Europe dealt with by Elias. The Communists had to a large degree broken down the class walls or, at the every least, lowered them considerably. From the 1980s through the mid 1990s according to Qiang, these class lines were being redrawn for large numbers of people. With the new status came also new social relations extending outward based on considerations other than simply blood and locality.

As a clear example Qiang observes that, “Social intercourse among the rich has given rise to such new forms of social organization as clubs and guild halls with very high membership fees to keep lower income people outside” (Qiang 2005: 130). Another good example would be the expensive higher education programs, which serve essentially the same purpose, marking off networks from wider society. “The process of studying together naturally helps interactions among these members of top enterprise administrators as well as forming internal social networks within the rich strata.” (Qiang 2005:130). A major incentive for entering such programs is the connections one will make. In fact, educational ties are as good a starting point for *guanxi* relations now as they had been for the literati in the past, with the difference in this case being that the lines of entry are drawn starting at one’s wallet.

By the 1990s class relations were becoming ossified again. According to Qiang, “by the late 1990s and the turn of the century, demarcation between the strata were becoming ever more clear-cut” (Qiang 2005: 128). It seemed that “life styles and cultural modes specific to different strata gradually took shape” (Qiang 2005: 128). This development seemed to represent a regression to earlier social tendencies. In a sense that may have

been true, but an important consideration remains. New relational lines had been drawn. Social relations determined by family and village boundaries were still available but were no longer the only social resources at the disposal of a large and growing number of people. Nor were they necessarily the most important. New social hierarchies were increasingly determined by achievement, and achievement required being adept in the art of *guanxi* – essentially (in the modern sense) the skill of extending one's chains of interdependence.

These new social relations represented something almost entirely new within Chinese society. As they were a new form of interacting, a new social lubricant was required. This role was filled by *guanxixue* which, virtually by definition, represented a means of securing and coping with interpersonal relations that extended beyond traditionally acceptable chains of interdependence. The advent and growth of *guanxi* relations is the result of a civilizing process in motion in the mainland Chinese social world.

Put in more Eliasian terms, with the old order having been weakened, new figurational boundaries were emerging. While by no means destroyed, the historically restrictive traditional ties binding individuals to land and family were loosened considerably and the rigid hierarchy that went with them was no longer so defining or impenetrable. Competition became a realistic option. The phenomenal expansion of *guanxixue*, when viewed from an Eliasian perspective, represents an increase in competition for power chances, for control of balances of power. Much as in the European situation described by Elias, whereby the weakening of the traditional order resulted in changing figurations enabling one to effectively enter these competitions for power chances, in the Chinese case, the active, and even aggressive, reaching out to the unknown in the

form of *guanxixue* and *guanxi* relationships represents a breaking down of the traditional order, an extension of the chains of interdependence, and the continuation of a long-interrupted civilizing process.

Viewed through Eliasian lenses, Chinese social development can clearly be explained in terms quite similar to that of Elias's West. Using one theoretical framework in discussing social development for both the West and China has the potential to open whole new avenues of investigation. It is hoped that this fact might facilitate important new research and understanding of social development both in China and on a much broader scale.

Future Research

Having concluded its main task, this thesis turns for its final, it is hoped valuable, discussion, to a listing of areas for future research. By the nature of this thesis, many questions were raised (and usually noted in footnotes) that were beyond its scope. Many of these questions, however, are deemed worthy of brief mention again in this final section. It is felt that research in these areas would contribute significantly to understanding the Chinese civilizing process.

At the top of the list should probably be the Chinese understanding of the relationship between the state and the people in comparison with that of the West. For example, a detailed comparison of the Confucian understanding of the state with that of not only Elias but also Hobbes would help in clarifying the Chinese civilizing process and why it occurred as it did.

Also with regard to the activity of the state, or lack thereof, further research into unintended consequences in the Chinese context would be helpful. The intrusion of the Chinese state into local society beginning just before the revolution and continuing thereafter was both conscious and intentional, with modernization being the goal. Mao, and the Communist Party more generally, almost certainly weren't looking forward to a successful capitalist transition, however, possibly making recent events in China a good candidate for such an investigation.

In terms of the pacification of Chinese society there obviously occurred a very different process than that in Europe. Where the monopoly of violence was pressed to the local level in Europe, it was not in China. At the centre of this question is the means of pacification. The source and model providers for Chinese pacification are to be found primarily in Confucianism and the bureaucracy, both the Confucian scholars and the literati more generally. A study of this process would highlight the fact of pacification while also making apparent the different nature it can take in different societies and in different civilizing processes. In connection with that it would be interesting to gain a better understanding of the place of the Chinese court in China's social development. The court(s) clearly played a very different role in the Chinese situation, but it would be interesting to determine if there are points of comparison with the Europe of Elias's analysis. Also related to the position of the courts, it has been noted that social interaction in the European courts bears close similarity to that in the typical traditional Chinese village. More detailed research in this area would be enlightening. How and why was social interaction between the people of two so distant and mutually isolated social groupings so similar?

Shame and honour are obviously central to Elias's study of the European civilizing process. Face is correspondingly equally important to any study of the Chinese civilizing process. A far more detailed analysis of these concepts in comparison with each other is needed. This is fundamental to understanding the current social development of the Chinese context relative to that of Europe. Pursuant to that, some method of analyzing and tracking any possible changes in the understanding/approach to face in China would be valuable in observing China's civilizing process (potential internalization of constraint) as it occurs. Along similar lines, a study of the ongoing trends in both functional democratization and rationality in Post-Opening China would also shed light on whether China is continuing along a similar civilizing path to that of Europe.

With regard to counter trends in civilizing processes one might easily point to the Cultural Revolution for examples. Decivilizing trends were obvious throughout this period as children betrayed their parents and authority was questioned and rejected, often violently, at all levels. A better understanding in Eliasian terms of what was actually happening during the Cultural Revolution would be useful in understanding counter-trends in civilizing processes.

A study of manners in the Chinese context would also be interesting and useful. For example, it has been noted that the act of spitting is currently approached in many parts of China in a fashion very similar to medieval Europe. Elias, himself, also noted the significant differences (not necessarily in form, but in extent) between the two societies with regard to the use of the knife in eating – essentially how it was moved much earlier and more radically behind the scenes in China. A more detailed study of developmental

trends in Chinese manners, past and present, in comparison with those of the West of Elias's research, to see if there is any correspondence in terms of what gets moved behind the scenes of social life, and when, would help with this important aspect of Elias's approach to civilizing processes.

There are undoubtedly many other questions that can fruitfully be researched along Eliasian lines in the Chinese social context. These are but a few, more obvious recommendations.

Appendix

China's Dynasties

Early Empire

Shang (first historical Dynasty)	1554 – 1045
Zhou (Warring States – 453 – 221)	1122 – 221
Qin	221 – 206
Former Han	206 BC – 8 AD
Later Han	25 – 220
Three Kingdoms	221 – 264
Western Chin	265 – 311
Northern and Southern Dynasties (Toba 386 – 533)	311 – 580

Middle Empire

Sui	589 – 617
Tang	618 – 906
Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms	907 – 959

Later Empire

Northern Sung	960 – 1126
Chin/Mongol rule in north,	1127 - 1225
Southern Sung in south	
Mongols (Yuan)	1276 – 1367
Ming	1368 – 1644
Manchus (Qing)	1645 – 191

Revolutionary China

Republican China	1911 - 1949
Nationalist China	1927 - 1937
Communist China	1949 -
Land Reform	1947
Collectivization	1954 - 1955
Great Leap Forward	1957 - 1961
Cultural Revolution	1966 - 1969 (1976)
Death of Mao	1976
Post Opening Period	1978 -

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