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HETERODOXIES, SECTARIANISM AND DYNAMICS OF CIVILIZATIONS

INTRODUCTION - THE PROBLEM

I

Heterodoxy, sects and sectarianism seemingly belong to the sphere of religions; they obviously refer to doctrinal organizational and behavioral aspects of dissension within the frameworks of religions. It would, however, be wrong to think that their importance is confined only within such frameworks—broad and important as they are. The importance of heterodoxy and sectarianism is indeed much wider. It is much wider not only because the term sect has been often used—as Roger Caillois has demonstrated in his brilliant essay on “L’Esprit des Sectes”¹—to refer to a much broader range of phenomena in the overall political and social order. The very possibility of using this term beyond its strictly religious connotation indicates that the developments of sectarianism, rooted as it is in the sphere of religion, are, potentially at least, of much broader implications.

¹ Roger Caillois, “L’Esprit des Sectes” in *Instincts et Société*, Paris, Editions Denoel Gonthier, 1969, pp. 61-114.

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This was, of course, most clearly seen and elaborated by Max Weber who, in his classical essays on the comparative sociology of religions,² was among the first to stress the place of dissent and heterodoxy, not only from the point of view of the doctrinal or organizational development of various religions, but from the broader point of view of the broader civilizational dynamics, of the innovative capacity of different civilizations.

His starting point, as well as the basic outlines of his answer, are of course well known. In his studies he has asked how did it happen that while in all the great civilizations—be they Chinese, Indian, or Ancient Judaism—there have developed many of the organizational aspects of capitalism, very often much beyond what can be found in Europe in the 16th and 17th century, yet it was only in Europe that a fully-fledged capitalist economic order or civilization—a fully-fledged process of rationalization of the world—had developed. As is well known, he attributed this development to Protestantism—originally of course heterodoxy within the Catholic Church.

In order to test, as it were, his argument, he studied the development of sects and heterodoxies in those other civilizations and analyzed the reasons why they did not generate the specific rationalizing tendencies which gave rise to the modern occidental civilization.³

His comparative starting point, and above all the way this starting point was often presented in the literature—especially in studies of modernization⁴—was often wrongly interpreted as implying that these non-Western civilizations were, as it were, relatively stagnant, thus minimizing the basic insights implicit in his extensive works—namely that such heterodoxies are of crucial importance in the shaping of specific features of the civilizational, institutional dynamics of these civilizations.

² See Max Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie*, Tübingen, J.C.B. Mohr, 1922 (1978) and the English translations—*Ancient Judaism*, New York, The Free Press, 1952; *The Religion of India*, New York, The Free Press, 1956; *The Religion of China*, New York, The Free Press, 1951, 1964.

³ On Weber's thematic and vision see: W. Schluchter, "The Paradox of Rationalization," in G. Roth and W. Schluchter, *Max Weber's Vision of History, Ethics and Methods*, Berkeley-Los Angeles-London, University of California Press, 1979, pp. 11-64.

⁴ See, for instance, the essays collected in S.N. Eisenstadt, *The Protestant Ethic and Modernization*, New York, Basic Books, 1968.

II

But our interest here is not in Weber but in the central problem itself—namely what is it in the nature of sects or heterodoxies, or at least of some of them, that makes them such important agents of change, not only in the sphere of religion, if one can indeed at all speak about such a distinct sphere in non-Western civilization (a point long ago stressed by Louis Dumont), but in the broad civilizational frameworks.

In order to be able to answer this problem we have first to inquire under what conditions heterodoxies and sectarian tendencies (as we shall yet see, the second is indeed the more general term which can be properly used for instance in the analysis of Hinduism and Buddhism to which the first would not be really applicable) may become agents of civilizational change, of change of the basic parameters and of the institutional structure of some at least of the major civilizations.

Here, of crucial importance is the fact that sects and heterodoxies are not universal. It would be very far-fetched to talk about sects or heterodoxies in Ancient Egypt or Ancient Assyria, or in most of the so-called “primitive” or tribal religions—although even within them one can find quite far-reaching differences in the interpretation of their belief systems and in ritual practice, as well as doubts about the validity of some of their premises, as Evans-Pritchard has shown in his classical work on the Azande.⁵

It is also very doubtful whether one could speak of sects—and especially of heterodoxy—in Japan. There developed of course in Japan, as is well known, a plethora of different so-called Buddhist sects, schools or monasteries, and yet one has an intuitive feeling—which we shall attempt to explicate later on—that they differed in some crucial ways, especially in their civilizational impact, from those that developed in the framework of monotheistic, as well as Confucian, Chinese, Hinduist and Buddhist civilizations.

⁵ E.E. Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*, Oxford, Clarendon Press (1937) 1965.

THE ORIGINS OF SECTS AND HETERODOXY
IN AXIAL AGE CIVILIZATIONS

III

Thus it seems that it was only in some settings, in some civilizations that sectarianism and heterodoxy developed as, potentially at least, major agents of civilizational change. What are then these settings, these civilizations?

These are indeed those civilizations which crystallized out of the revolutions or transformations connected with what Karl Jaspers designated as the Axial Age, in the first millennium before the Christian era—namely Ancient Israel, later on Christianity in its great variety, Ancient Greece, partially Iran with the development of Zoroastrianism, China in the early Imperial period, Hinduism and Buddhism and, much later, beyond the Axial Age proper, Islam.⁶ Common to all the civilizations was the development and institutionalization of a basic tension between the transcendental and the mundane orders.

IV

What is then the nature of these Axial Age revolutions or transformations and what is it in the nature of the civilizations that crystallized out of them that generated the possibility of the development, within them, of sects and heterodoxies which could have far-reaching civilizational impacts?

We may start by quoting here from Benjamin Schwartz's introduction to the *Daedalus* volume "Wisdom, Revelation and Doubt" in which Jaspers' theme was taken up.⁷ "If there is nevertheless some common underlying impulse in all these 'axial' movements, it might be called the strain towards transcendence.

⁶ K. Jaspers, *Vom Ursprung und Ziel der Geschichte*, Zurich, 1949, pp. 15-106, and "Wisdom, Revelation and Doubt: Perspectives on the First Millennium B.C.", *Daedalus*, Spring 1975. E. Voegelin, *Order and History*, vols. 1-4, Baton Rouge, University of Louisiana Press, 1954-1974.

⁷ B.I. Schwartz. "The Age of Transcendence" in *Daedalus*, *op. cit.*, pp. 3-4.

... What I refer to here is something close to the etymological meaning of the word—a kind of standing back and looking beyond—a kind of critical reflexive questioning of the actual and a new vision of what lies beyond... In concentrating our attention on those transcendental breakthroughs we are of course stressing the significance of changes in man's conscious life. What is more, we are stressing the consciousness of small groups of prophets, philosophers and wise men who may have had a very small impact on their immediate environment."

These conceptions of a basic tension between the transcendental and the mundane orders differed greatly from the "homologous" perceptions of the relation between these two orders which were prevalent in so-called pagan religions in those very societies and civilizations from which these post-Axial Age civilizations emerged.

Certainly, the transmundane order has, in all human societies, been perceived as somewhat different, usually higher and stronger, than the mundane one. But in the pre-Axial Age "pagan" civilizations this higher world has been symbolically structured according to principles very similar to those of the mundane or lower one. Relatively similar symbolic terms were used for the definition of God(s) and man of the mundane and transmundane order—even if there was always a continuous stress on the difference between them. In most such societies the transmundane world was usually equated with a concrete setting, "the other world" which was the abode of the dead, the world of spirits, and not entirely unlike the mundane world in detail.⁸

These pagan societies, of course, always recognized the moral frailty of man; the failure of people to live up to the prevalent social and moral ideals. However, a conception of an autonomous, distinct moral order which is qualitatively different from both

⁸ For some, of the many analyses of these premises of pagan religions, see for instance: M. Fortes and G. Dietertlen (eds.), *African Systems of Thought*, London, Oxford Univ. Press, 1965, esp. pp. 7-49; the analysis in E. Voegelin, *Order and History*, vol. I, *Israel and Revelation*, *op. cit.*; the papers by Oppenheimer and Garelli in *Daedalus*, *op. cit.*; H. Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods*, Chicago, Univ. of Chicago Press, 1948; For a case of individual transcendental vision which was not institutionalized see G. Wiley, "Mesoamerica Civilization and the Idea of Transcendence", *Antiquity*, L, 1976, pp. 205-215.

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this world and “the other world” developed only to a minimal degree.

Such homologous conceptions of the transmundane and mundane worlds were very often closely connected with some mythical and cyclical conception of time in which the differences between the major time dimensions—past, present and future—are only mildly articulated.

By contrast, in the Axial Age civilizations, the perception of a sharp disjunction between the mundane and transmundane worlds developed. There was a concomitant stress on the existence of a higher transcendental moral or metaphysical order which is beyond any given this or other-worldly reality.

V

The institutionalization of such conceptions was not just an intellectual exercise—it connoted a far-reaching change in man's active orientation to the world, a change with basic institutional implications, and it was the combination of these new conceptions with their institutional implications that generated the symbolic, intellectual and institutional possibilities of the development of sects and heterodoxies as potential agents of civilizational change.

On the symbolic or ideological level the development of these conceptions created a problem in the rational, abstract articulation of the given of human and social existence and of the cosmic order. The root of the problem lies in the fact that the development of such conceptions necessarily poses the question of the ways in which the chasm between the transcendental and the mundane orders can be bridged. This gives rise to the problem of salvation—to use Weber's terminology. The roots of the quest for salvation are given in the consciousness of death and the arbitrariness of human actions and social arrangements. The search for some type of immortality and a way to overcome such arbitrariness are universal to all human societies. In the societies in which the mundane and transmundane worlds are defined in relatively homologous terms this search for immortality is on the whole envisaged in terms of some physical continuity. It is usually seen as conditional to the fulfilment of

one's concrete obligation to one's group.

This no longer holds true in the civilizations in which there is an emphasis on the chasm between the transcendental and the mundane order and a conception of a higher moral or metaphysical order. While the concept of immortality in these civilizations may or may not still be tied to bodily images and to ideas of physical resurrection, the very possibility of some continuity beyond this world is usually seen in terms of the reconstruction of human behavior and personality. This reconstruction would be based on the precepts of the higher moral or metaphysical order through which the chasm between the transcendental and mundane orders is bridged, and, as Grananath Obeyesekere has put it, rebirth eschatology becomes ethnicized.⁹ But the very attempt at such reconstruction was always torn by many internal tensions. It is these tensions—which we shall explicate in greater detail later on—and their institutional repercussions that ushered in a new type of social and civilizational dynamics in the history of mankind.

VI

On the institutional level the development and institutionalization of such a conception of a basic tension, chasm, between the transcendental and the mundane order, gave rise, in all these civilizations, to attempts to reconstruct the mundane world—human personality and the socio-political and economic order according to the appropriate transcendental vision, to the principles of the higher metaphysical or ethical order.¹⁰

The given, mundane, order was perceived in these civilizations as incomplete, inferior, often as bad as in need of being—at least in some of its parts—reconstructed according to the conception of bridging over the chasm between the transcen-

⁹ G. Obeyesekere, "The Rebirth Eschatology and Its Transformations: A Contribution to the Sociology of Early Buddhism" in W. Doniger O'Flaherty (ed.), *Karma and Rebirth in Classical Indian Traditions*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, Univ. of California Press, 1980, pp. 137-165.

¹⁰ See the material in Max Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie*, *op. cit.*, and G. Roth and W. Schluchter, *Max Weber's Vision of History*, *op. cit.*

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dental and the mundane orders of salvation, i.e., according to the precepts of the higher ethical or metaphysical order.

Thus in these societies or civilizations personal identity has usually been taken beyond the definition of man in terms of the primordial facts of human existence, and beyond the various technical needs of daily activities, and constructed around the central mode or modes of human action through which the tensions between the transcendental and the mundane order are resolved. Purely personal virtues such as courage, or interpersonal ones such as solidarity, mutual help or the like have been taken out of their primordial framework and are combined, in different dialectical modes, with the attributes of resolution of the tension between the transcendental and the mundane orders, thus generating a new level of internal tensions in the structuring of the personality.¹¹

Similarly there developed far-reaching concrete institutional implications of those tensions. The most general and common has been the high degree of symbolic orientation and ideologization of the major aspects of the institutional structure. This applies in particular to the structure of collectivities, social centers, social hierarchies and processes of political struggle.

Let's dwell here only on two such institutional aspects or consequences which are of special interest from the point of view of our analysis—namely the tendency to the construction of distinct civilizational frameworks and of the development of the conceptions of accountability of rulers.

Some collectivities and institutional spheres were singled out as the most appropriate carriers of the attributes of the required resolution. As a result, new types of collectivities were created or seemingly natural and “primordial” groups were endowed with special meaning couched in terms of the perception of this tension and its resolution. The most important innovation in this context was the development of “cultural” or “religious” collectivities as distinct from ethnic or political ones. Some embryonic elements of this development existed in some of those societies in which no conception of tension between the tran-

¹¹ See, for instance, E.H. Erikson (ed.), *Adulthood*, New York, W.W. Norton & Co., 1978.

scendental and the mundane order was institutionalized. However, it was only with the development and institutionalization of this conception that those elements became transformed into new, potentially full-fledged collectivities with autonomous criteria of membership and loci of authority. The membership in these collectivities and frameworks tended to become imbued with a strong ideological dimension and to become a focus of ideological struggle.

An aspect of this ideological struggle was the insistence on the exclusiveness and closure of such collectivities and on the distinction between inner and outer social and cultural space defined by them. This aspect became connected with attempts to structure the different cultural, political and ethnic collectivities in some hierarchical order, and the very construction of such an order usually became a focus of ideological and political conflict.

VII

Closely related to this mode of structuring of special civilizational frameworks, there took place, in all these civilizations, a far-reaching restructuring of the relation between the political and the higher, transcendental order.

The political order as the central locus of the mundane order has usually been conceived as lower than the transcendental one and accordingly had to be restructured according to the precepts of the latter and above all according to the perception of the proper mode of overcoming the tension between the transcendental and the mundane order, of "salvation." It was the rulers who were usually held to be responsible for organizing the political order.

At the same time the nature of the rulers became greatly transformed. The King-God, the embodiment of the cosmic and earthly order alike, disappeared, and a secular ruler, in principle accountable to some higher order, appeared. Thus there emerged the conception of the accountability of the rulers and of the community to a higher authority, God, Divine Law and the like. Accordingly, the possibility of calling a ruler to judgement

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emerged. The first most dramatic appearance of this conception took place in Ancient Israel, in the priestly and prophetic pronouncements. A different conception of such accountability, an accountability of the community and its laws, appeared on the northern shores of the Eastern Mediterranean, in Ancient Greece. In different forms this conception appeared in all these civilizations.¹²

Concomitant to the emergence of conceptions of accountability there began to develop autonomous spheres of law and conceptions of rights. These tended to be somewhat distinct from ascriptively bound custom and from purely customary law. The scope of these spheres of law and rights varied greatly from society to society but they were all established according to some distinct and autonomous criteria.

THE MULTIPLICITY OF VISIONS AND THE GROWTH OF REFLEXIVITY AND DEVELOPMENT OF SECTS AND HETERODOXIES

VIII

These new modes of continuous reconstruction of the social and civilizational orders and of social and cultural change cannot be understood except in connection with the tension, to which we have already alluded above, inherent in the very premises of these civilizations.

The root of such tensions lies in the very institutionalization of the perception of the tension between the transcendental and the mundane order and of the quest to overcome it. This generates an awareness of a great range of possibilities or visions of the very definition of such tensions, of the proper mode of their resolution, as well as an awareness of the incompleteness of any given institutionalization of such vision.

Historically the growth of this awareness was never a simple peaceful process. It has usually been connected with a continuous

¹² See S.N. Eisenstadt, "Cultural Traditions and Political Dynamics: The Origins and Modes of Ideological Politics," *The British Journal of Sociology*, XXXII, No. 2, June 1981, pp. 155-181.

struggle and competition between many groups and between their respective visions.

Once the conception of a basic tension between the transcendental and the mundane order was fully recognized and institutionalized in a society, or at least within its center, any definition and resolution of this tension became in itself very problematic. It usually contained strong heterogeneous and even contradictory elements, and its elaboration in fully articulated terms generated the possibility of different emphases, directions and interpretations, all of which have been reinforced by the historical existence of multiple visions carried by different groups. Because of this multiplicity of visions, no single one could be taken as given or complete.

It is this very multiplicity of alternative visions that gave rise in all these civilizations to an awareness of the uncertainty of different roads to salvation, of alternative conceptions of social and cultural order, and of the seeming arbitrariness of any single solution. Such awareness has become a constituent element of the consciousness of these civilizations, especially among the carriers of their great traditions. This was closely related to the development of a high degree of “second order” thinking which is a reflexivity turning on the basic premises of the social and cultural order.¹³

Out of the combination between the conception of possible alternative ways of salvation, alternative cultural and social orders, and the structuring of the time dimensions, there emerged another element which is common to all these civilizations—namely that of the Utopian vision or visions—the visions of an alternative cultural and social order beyond any given place or time. Such visions contain many of the millenarian and revivalist elements which can be found also in pagan religions, but they go beyond them by combining these elements with a vision based on the stress on necessity to construct the mundane order according to the precepts of the higher one, with the search for an alternative “better” order beyond any given time and place.¹⁴

¹³ See on this the various discussions in *Daedalus*, *op. cit.*

¹⁴ The literature on Utopia is, of course, immense. For a good survey see

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THE EMERGENCE OF INTELLECTUALS, THE
TRANSFORMATION OF ELITES AND THE DEVELOPMENT
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IX

In order, however, to understand these dynamics we have to analyze the social factors which were most active in the structuring of these civilizations—namely the carriers of those orientations—the major societal elites that developed within them.

The development and institutionalization of the perception of basic tension between the transcendental and the mundane order was closely connected with the emergence of a new social element, of a new type of elites in general and of carriers of models of cultural and social order, of autonomous intellectuals—such as the Jewish prophets and priests, the Greek philosophers and sophists, the Chinese Literati, the Hindu Brahmins, the Buddhist Sangha and the Islamic Ulema.

It was the initial small nuclei of such groups of intellectuals that developed these new “transcendental” conceptions. In all these Axial Age civilizations these conceptions ultimately became institutionalized. That is, they became the predominant orientations of both the ruling as well as of many secondary elites, fully embodied in their respective centers or subcenters.

Once such a conception of a tension between the transcendental and the mundane order became institutionalized, it was also associated with the transformation of political elites, and turned the new scholar class into relatively autonomous partners in the major ruling coalitions and protest movements. The new type of elite which resulted from this process of institutionalization was entirely different in nature from the elites which had been ritual, magical and sacral in the pre-Axial Age civilizations. The new elites, intellectuals and clerics, were recruited and legitimized according to distinct, autonomous criteria, and were organized in autonomous settings, distinct from those

G. Kaleb, “Utopians and Utopianism,” *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, New York, Macmillan & Free Press, 1968, vol. 16, pp. 267-270; and for a fascinating collection of essays, *Vom Sinn der Utopie—Eranos Jahrbuch*, 1963, Zurich, Rhein Verlag, 1964.

of the basic ascriptive units. They acquired a potential country-wide status-consciousness of their own. They also tended to become potentially independent of other categories of elites and social groups. But at the same time they competed strongly with them, especially over the production and control of symbols and media of communication.

Such competition now became very intensive because, with the institutionalization of such transcendental conceptions, a parallel transformation had taken place in the structure of other elites. All these elites tended to develop claims for an autonomous place in the construction of the cultural and social order. They saw themselves not only as performing specific technical, functional activities, but also as potentially autonomous carriers of a distinct cultural and social order related to the transcendental vision prevalent in their respective societies.

The non-political cultural elites and the political elites each saw themselves as the autonomous articulators of the new order, with the other type potentially inferior and accountable to themselves.

Moreover, each of these groups of elites were not, in these societies, homogeneous. There developed a multiplicity of secondary cultural, political or educational elites, each very often carrying a different conception of the cultural and social order. It is these elites that were the most active in the restructuring of the world and the institutional creativity that developed in these societies.

But—and this is crucial for our analysis—these different elites in general and the intellectuals in particular¹⁵ constituted also the most active element in the movements of protest and processes of change that developed in these societies, and above all in the construction of that new type of such movements which are the focus of our analysis—namely of different sects and heterodoxies which upheld the different conceptions of the resolution of the tension between the transcendental and the mundane order, of the proper way of the institutionalization of

¹⁵ See S.N. Eisenstadt, "Intellectuals and Tradition" in S.N. Eisenstadt and S.R. Graubard (eds.), *Intellectuals and Tradition*, New York, Humanities Press, 1973, pp. 1-21; and E. Shils, *Intellectuals, Traditions and the Tradition of Intellectuals*, pp. 21-35.

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such concepts, of various alternative conceptions of the social and cultural order.

Thus these conceptions were not confined to the purely intellectual realm—they had also far-reaching institutional implications rooted in two closely interconnected facts. First these institutional implications were rooted in the fact that these conceptions had usually—as we have seen above—very strong orientations to the construction of the mundane world. Second, they were rooted in the fact that these conceptions became closely connected with the struggle between different elites, indeed often because the very foci of such struggle.

Because of this there emerged in these civilizations the possibility of structural and ideological linkages between different movements of protest and foci of political conflict, and above all between rebellions, central political struggle and religious or intellectual heterodoxies. These linkages were effected by different coalitions of different secondary elites—above all by coalitions between “secondary” political elites and different religious and intellectual sects and heterodoxies. Accordingly there developed also the possibility of the greater impingement of all such movements in general and of sects and heterodoxies at the center or centers of the society.

It is thus that there developed here a new type of civilizational dynamics. This new dynamics of civilization transformed group conflicts into potential class and ideological conflicts, cult conflicts into struggles between the orthodox and the heterodox. Conflicts between tribes and societies became missionary crusades for the transformation of civilizations. The zeal for reorganization informed by each society’s concept of salvation made the whole world at least potentially subject to cultural-political reconstruction, and in all these new developments the different sectarian movements and movements of heterodoxy played, because of the reasons outlined above, a central role.

The transformation of such alternative conceptions into heterodoxies was effected, of course, by their confrontation with some institutionalized orthodoxy. And it was since then that the continuous confrontation between orthodoxy on the one hand and schism and heterodoxy on the other, and with it also the development of strong and potentially widespread antinomian

tendencies, has become a crucial component in the history of mankind.

SECTS AND HETERODOXIES; DYNAMICS OF CIVILIZATIONS
AND MODERNITY; PRELIMINARY COMPARATIVE INDICATIONS

X

Thus we see that the tendency to the development of sects and heterodoxies with the potential to become agents of civilizational change is indeed rooted in the very basic premises of the Axial Age civilizations.

Here the comparison with Japan is very instructive. The reason why the multiple Buddhist sects or Confucian schools which developed in Japan did not have a broader civilizational impact, why they did not on the whole attempt to reconstruct Japanese society, was rooted not only in the fact that there was in Japan no established Church which defined and upheld the boundaries of doctrinal or ritual orthodoxy, but above all because the doctrinal and ritual premises of Japanese religion were not based on that type of transcendental breakthrough that took place in the Axial Age civilizations, and accordingly there did not develop in Japan the ideological orientations to the reconstruction of the world.¹⁶

Thus one of the most interesting aspects of Japanese history—an aspect brilliantly analyzed by Hajime Nakamura¹⁷—was that however great and elaborate were the intellectual and artistic creations of the different Japanese sects, these sects accepted the basic “non-ideological” premises of the Japanese religion and hence did not wage that type of battle which was characteristic of sects and heterodoxies in the Axial Age civilizations.

¹⁶ On Japanese religions and society see for instance: R.N. Bellah, *Togukawa Religion, The Values of Pre-Industrial Japan*, Glencoe, Ill., The Free Press, 1957 and “Values and Social Change in Modern Japan,” *Asian Cultural Studies* 3, Tokyo, October 1952; Ch. Nakane, *Japanese Society*, London, Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1970; R. Huntsberry, *Myths and Values in Japanese Society*, mime., Ohio, Wesley Univ. Press, 1975.

¹⁷ H. Nakamura, “The Ways of Thinking”, *Ways of Thinking of Eastern People*, Honolulu, East-West Center, 1964, pp. 407-351.

XI

But beyond all these characteristics common to all the Axial Age civilizations, there developed between them far-reaching differences in the structuring of sects and heterodoxies and in their overall civilizational impact. The roots of such differences lay in the nature of the respective “orthodoxies” and of their confrontation with the different sects and heterodoxies. The most crucial difference is, of course, between those civilizations to which it is legitimate to apply the term heterodoxy and those in which it is more appropriate to talk “only” about sects and sectarianism.

The term heterodoxy is, of course, applicable only to cases when one can talk about orthodoxy and this term is in its turn a certain type of both organizational and cognitive doctrinal structure.

Organizationally, the crucial aspect is, of course, the existence of some type of organized Church which attempts to monopolize at least the religious sphere and usually also the relations of this sphere to the political powers. But of no lesser importance is the doctrinal aspect—the organization of doctrine, i.e., the very stress on the structuring of clear cognitive and symbolic boundaries of doctrine.

With respect to both the organizational and the doctrinal aspects, the major difference among the Axial Age civilizations is that between, on the one hand, the monotheistic civilizations in general and Christianity in particular, and, on the other hand, Hinduism and Buddhism with Confucian China constituting a sort of in-between type.

It is within Christianity that these organizational and doctrinal aspects of orthodoxy developed in the fullest way. Thus it was in Christianity that there developed fully-fledged Churches which constituted potentially active and autonomous partners of the ruling coalitions. In Judaism and Islam these developments were weaker—there developed rather powerful, but not always as fully organized and autonomous organizations of clerics.

But of no lesser importance is the fact that in Christianity and to a smaller, but yet not insignificant, degree also in Judaism and Islam, there developed strong tendencies to the structuring

of relatively clear cognitive doctrinal boundaries.

This tendency was rooted first of all in the prevalence, within the monotheistic civilizations in general and within Christianity with its stronger connections with the Greek philosophical heritage in particular, of strong orientations first of all to the cognitive elaboration of the relations between God, man and the world. Second, this tendency was rooted in the fact that, in all these monotheistic religions, with their strong other-worldly orientation, the mundane world was seen—even if in differing degrees—as at least one focus of other-worldly salvation, and hence the proper designation of such activity became a focus of central concern and of contention between the ruling orthodoxies and the numerous heterodoxies that developed within them.¹⁸

The importance, for the struggle between orthodoxies and heterodoxies, of the structuring of such cognitive boundaries, of the elaboration of visions, of the reconstruction of the mundane world according to transcendental other-worldly vision, is best seen—in a negative way—in the case of Hinduism and Buddhism.¹⁹

In both these cases we find, despite a very strong transcendental and other-worldly orientation, that the structuring of cognitive doctrines—as distinct from ritual—and above all of

¹⁸ See for instance J. Le Goff (ed.), *Hérésies et sociétés dans l'Europe pré-Industrielle*, Paris, La Haye, 1968.

¹⁹ On Hinduism from this point of view see: M. Biarreau, *Clefs pour la pensée hindoue*, Paris, Seghers, 1972; L. Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus: Essai sur le système des castes*, Paris, Gallimard, 1966, 1970; L. Dumont, *Religion, Politics and History in India, Collected Papers in Indian Sociology*, Paris, La Haye, Mouton, 1971; D. Mandelbaum, *Society in India*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, Un. of California Press, 1970; J.C. Heesterman, "Brahmanism, Ritual and Renouncer," *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Südasiens*, vol. 1, 1964, and "India and the Inner Conflict of Traditions" in S.N. Eisenstadt (ed.), *Post-Traditional Societies*, New York 1972, pp. 97-115. On Buddhist societies from the point of view of this discussion, see P.A. Pardue, *Buddhism: An Historic Introduction*, New York, 1958; W.T. de Bary (ed.), *The Buddhist Tradition in India, China and Japan*, New York, 1972; P. Levy, *Buddhism: A "Mystery Religion"?*, New York, 1968, H. Bechert, *Buddhismus, Staat und Gesellschaft in den Ländern des Theravada-Buddhismus*, 4 vols., Frankfurt-am-Main, 1966-1968; S.J. Tambiah, *World Conqueror and World Renouncer*, Cambridge, 1976; E.M. Mendelson, *Sangha and State in Burma: A Study of Monastic Sectarianism*, J.P. Ferguson (ed.), Ithaca, New York, 1975; R.F. Gombrich, *Precept and Practice: Traditional Buddhism in the Rural Highlands of Ceylon*, Oxford, 1971; and E.B. Harper (ed.), *Religion in South Asia*, Seattle, 1964.

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their applicability to mundane matters, did not constitute a central aspect or premise of these religions or civilizations. Hence even when, as in Buddhism, it is not impossible to talk about something akin to Church—albeit a much more loosely organized one—it is very difficult to talk about heterodoxy. At the same time sectarianism abounds—Buddhism itself being in a sense a sect developing out of Hinduism.

These differences between sects and heterodoxies are not just matters of scholarly classification. They are closely related to the impact of these sects or orthodoxies on the dynamics of their respective civilizations. It would not be correct to state—a statement which seemingly, but only seemingly, can be attributed to Weber—that it was only in the realm of Christianity—or perhaps stretching it to include all the monotheistic civilizations—that sects and heterodoxies had far-reaching consequences on the structure of mundane fields.

The various Hinduist sects, Buddhism itself, did indeed have far-reaching impact on the structuring of the mundane spheres of their respective civilizations. First of all they extended the scope of the different national and political communities and imbued them with new symbolic dimensions.²⁰ They could also, second, change some of the bases and criteria of participation in the civilizational communities—as was the case in Jainism, in the Bhakti movement and, of course, above all, in Buddhism when an entirely new civilizational framework was constructed.

Buddhism also introduced new elements into the political scene—above all that special way in which the Sangha, usually politically a very compliant group, could in some cases, as Paul Mus²¹ has shown, become a sort of moral conscience of the community, calling the rulers to some accountability.

But this impact was of a different nature from that of the struggles between the reigning orthodoxies and the numerous heterodoxies that developed within the monotheistic civilizations. Of crucial importance has been the fact that in these latter cases a central aspect of such struggles were the attempts to reconstruct

²⁰ See especially S.J. Tambiah, *World Conqueror*, *op. cit.*

²¹ P. Mus, "Traditions anciennes et bouddhisme moderne," *Eranos Jahrbuch* 32, 1968, pp. 161-275, and "La sociologie de George Gurvitch et l'Asie," *Cahiers Internationaux de Sociologie* 43, Dec. 1967, pp. 1-21.

the very political and cultural centers of their respective societies and that, because of this, these struggles became a central part of the histories of these civilizations, shaping the major contours of their development.²²

From all these points of view, Confucian China constitutes a rather mixed case, paradoxically somewhat nearer to the monotheistic than to the Axian civilizations.²³

There did not develop in China an elaborate official religious doctrine, as distinct from the “secular” precepts of Confucianism. These precepts—in which there was almost no reference to God or to other-worldly concerns—did however entail very strong transcendental—albeit this-worldly—orientations with very explicit cognitive elaboration of the precepts according to which the mundane world had to be constructed.

Similarly while there did not exist in China any official Church, the stratum of *literari* and the bureaucracy, in coalition with the Emperor, did exercise not only strong political control, but also control over the communication of the major symbolic reference orientations, over official rituals and over the major channels of education.

As in all other Axial Age civilizations there did develop in China numerous and secondary sects of “religions”—like Buddhism and Taoism—with strong other-worldly orientations, as well as numerous schools from within the central Confucian fold. As the official Confucian “orthodoxy” was not greatly concerned with their other-worldly orientations or pure speculation, these sects never developed into heterodoxy in the doctrinal sense, and so long as they did not impinge on the basic institutional implications of the Imperial order with the political-cultural predominance of the *literati* and bureaucracy, they were more or less left alone. But once some of these sects did attempt

²² S.N. Eisenstadt, *Revolutions and the Transformation of Societies*, New York, The Free Press, 1978.

²³ On China see E.O. Reischauer and J.K. Fairbank, *A History of East Asian Civilization*, vol. 1. *East Asia: The Great Tradition*, Boston 1960; M. Weber, *The Religion of China: Confucianism and Taoism*, transl. by H. Gerth, New York 1964; C.K. Yang, “The Functional Relationship between Confucian Thought and Chinese Religion,” in J.K. Fairbank (ed.), *Chinese Thought and Institutions*, Chicago, 1957, pp. 269-91; *Persuasion*, Stanford, 1960; D.S. Nivison and A.F. Wright (eds.), *Confucianism in Action*, Stanford 1959; and A.F. Wright (ed.), *Studies in Chinese Thought*, Chicago, 1953.

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—as was the case with the Buddhists under the Tang—to impinge on these premises of the Confucian order to construct the world according to their own premises, the Confucian *literati* and bureaucracy behaved just as any other “monotheistic” orthodoxy—engaging in fierce political struggle and far-reaching persecutions.²⁴

XII

The differences in the impact of sects and heterodoxies on dynamics of the respective civilizations in which they developed could be discerned throughout their histories, but they can be most fully seen in the transition to modernity. In the realm of Christian civilization (and later on in China) they became most fully manifest in the outbreak of the great revolutions, the English, the American and the French—which were the harbingers of the modern political civilization—and later on in the Russian and Chinese ones.²⁵

These revolutions were not just political events—changes of regime or even of ruling classes. Their very dramatic nature, which in many ways changed the course of world history, was rooted in the combination of such political changes with great civilizational visions. These visions were rooted in their religious traditions, above all in the strong orientations to the reconstruction of the world according to a transcendental and usually (with the exception of China) other-worldly vision; they came to fullest function in various sects and heterodoxies—be they the Puritans in England and America, the more secular (but also rooted in the religious tradition) intellectual groups in France; and later on those in Russia and China.

Organizationally these revolutions were based on a certain interweaving between rebellions, central political struggle and religious or intellectual heterodox groups. It was the combination of these organizational characteristics with the transcendental

²⁴ E. Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China*, Leiden, Brill 1959; A. Wright, *Buddhism in Universe History*, Stanford, Stanford Univ. Press, 1959.

²⁵ This analysis follows S.N. Eisenstadt, *Revolutions and the Transformation of Societies*, *op. cit.*, 1978, esp. chs. 6, 7 & 8.

vision that generated the specific civilizational dynamics of these societies and the breakthrough to modernity.

The situation was different in the realm of Hinduism and Buddhism, in the realm of sects but not of heterodoxies. Here no such strong organizational linkages, oriented to political centers, but only weak attempts at the reconstruction of their centers, according to such transcendental visions, developed and the dynamics of response to modernity moved in different ways, much more akin to the historical civilizational patterns of these civilizations.

Here the comparison with Japan is again most instructive from the point of view of our analysis.²⁶ In the Meiji restoration one cannot find the attempts at the ideological transformations which were past and present in the great revolutions. Not only was this momentous political change defined as a restoration and not as a revolution, but even this restoration—unlike the attempts at restoration that developed in Europe in the 19th century—was not combined with a stress of a missionary-universalistic transcendental vision.

The lack or weakness of such a vision was rooted in the very basic characteristics of Japanese religion which were briefly alluded to above, and they were evident in the fact that in the Meiji restoration no religious sects or intellectuals constituted an important element. Hence the Meiji restoration gave rise to a different, very specific pattern of modernization.

The Meiji restoration brought, as is well known, very far-reaching structural changes in all the major fields of economy and society—changes which were perhaps more far-reaching even than those that took place in the post-revolutionary societies. But Japanese modernization was relatively weak in those ideological elements and battles which characterize the revolutionary and post-revolutionary societies of Western civilizations and of China.

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²⁶ On Japanese modernity see, for instance: R.P. Dore (ed.), *Aspects of Social Change in Modern Japan*, Princeton, Princeton Univ. Press, 1967; R. Word (ed.), *Political Development in Modern Japan*, Princeton, Princeton Univ. Press, 1969; H. Patrick & H. Rosovsky (eds.), *Asia's New Giant*, Washington, D.C., The Brookings Institution, 1976.