

Stranger-Kings and Stranger-Kin: The Alterity of Power and Vice-Versa

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It is no exaggeration to say that anthropology, by virtue of its traditional concepts of societies and cultures as self-organized monads, has been implicated for centuries in a major theoretical scandal. It all began in the latter part of the eighteenth century with the German Counter-Enlightenment ideas of national cultures and national characters. The scandal is that while cultures were thus conceived as autonomous and *sui generis*, they have always been situated in greater historical fields of cultural others and largely formed in respect of one another. Even autonomy is a relation of heteronomy. But our major theories of cultural order, based one and all on insular epistemologies, presuppose that societies are all alone and that cultures as it were make themselves. (Or at least such have been the assumptions until very recently when these theories got knocked around by globalization and postmodernism.) As Frederik Barth put it some decades ago: “Practically all anthropological reasoning rests on the premise that cultural variation is discontinuous: that there are aggregates of people who essentially share a common culture and the interconnected differences that distinguish such culture from all others” (1969:9).

In the same work, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, Barth and colleagues tried to pivot the anthropological perspective around to the outside, arguing that ethnic identities cum cultural differences are generated through the interaction of peoples in “embracing social systems.” Just so had Levi-Strauss earlier, in his important UNESCO pamphlet *Race and History*, based his arguments on the incontestable premise that “human societies are never alone.” Moreover, the diversity of cultures, he wrote, “is less a function of the isolation of groups than of the relationships which unite them.” Here was an intimation of a structuralism to come that would move from a Saussurean-like systematics of a given culture, where *tout se tient*, to the open-ended, intercultural dialectics of transformations that mark the project of the *Mythologiques*. For a long time also, ethnographers here and there, especially in Melanesia and Amazonia, have been

registering anomalies to the entrenched theories of self-producing cultural systems—by now, one would think, enough anomalies to produce a Kuhnian paradigm-shift in the human sciences.

Just consider the paradigmatic perversity entailed in Malinowski's foundation of modern ethnography as a study of the internal engagements of different aspects of a Trobriand culture that was participating in a vast trade network involving, among other intersociety relations of order, complementary modes of production and a politics of external renown. On the basis of his analysis of the kula, Malinowski bravely prophesized the coming of a new era of anthropological understanding devoted to the "influence on one another of various aspects of an institution," together with "the study of the social and psychological mechanism on which the institution is based." Yet Malinowski's functionalism was hardly the only program of anthropology-in-one-country. Durkheimian sociology, British structural-functionalism, French structuralism, White's and Steward's evolutionisms, Marxism of base and superstructure, cultural ecology, cultural materialism, even post-structuralist epistemes, discourses, and subjectivities: all these problematics assumed that the cultural forms, relations or configurations they were explicating were *within* a more or less coherent order, and that the articulations and dynamics of that order were the theoretical matters at issue. The diffusionism of the early twentieth century American anthropology was an exception, but it was largely recuperated by the patterns of culture of Benedict et al. Otherwise the main anthropological theories fairly ignored that the cultures they took to be singular and distinct were involved in relations of alterity as a condition of their internal consistency, their status as some sort of entity, and their identity.

Clearly, nationalism has been the anthropological hang-up. Or as Karl Izikowitz already put it in the aforementioned *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, the concept of cultures as separate and *sui generis*, hence their analytic treatment as isolates, is at least in part due to "the influence of the old romantic movement that sought to give prominence to each people's national characteristics and particular system of values." The accusation obviously pointed to Hamann, Herder and their successors in the Germanic tradition of "culture," and more precisely of "national cultures," which under the influence of Franz Boas and colleagues became dominant in American anthropology

and thence broadly influential. Paradoxically, the concept of culture as an autonomous whole was predicated on its historical position as a heteronomous part, for it was produced in and as the very opposition of Germanic *Kultur* to French *civilisation*. The anthropological notion of *sui generis* cultures was itself generated in an eighteenth century historical relationship with cultural others. But where *sui generis* is an oppositional value, it is not *sui generis*.

“National Cultures, Where Are You?”

In fundamental respects the Germans of the late 18th century and the indigenous peoples around the world who were suffering an oncoming Western European imperialism, notably British and French imperialism, shared a common historical situation. This helps explain Herder’s defense of the “cultures” of the one and the others: all of them worthy of respect as autonomously fashioned, uniquely organized, and inherently valuable expressions of the human spirit. (How many times must it be repeated that the anthropological concept of “culture” had its source at least as much in resistance to colonialism as in its service?) The last thing we should do, said Herder, is to take European culture as a universal standard, an achievement devoutly to be desired for all peoples; only a real misanthrope could wish this fate on the rest of the mankind. Each nation, bearing within itself the standard of its own perfection, develops its own cultural character, independently of and without comparison to any other.

Indeed, absent a united national state, what else besides sharing a common culture could it mean to be German at this time? (Elias 1978:6) Relatively backward economically as well as politically, their boundaries vulnerable and their unity questionable, the Germans could only oppose in cultural terms the *civilisation* that the *lumières* posed as a measure for all humankind. Their culture was all the more precious insofar as the alternative conceits of civility and perfectibility gave the French and British ground to find others wanting on a scale that declined into the vilified degrees of “barbarism” and “savagery.” The German bourgeois intelligentsia in particular were under a double threat of French *civilisation*: not only from the power of France herself, but from their own ruling aristocracy, whose francophone and francophile tastes were all too evident proofs of that power. It is not for nothing that Herder saw the state as an

external imposition, foreign to the inherited cultural tradition conveyed in the authentic language of the *Volk*. Hence the common plight with the *Völker* everywhere:

“The princes speak French, and soon everybody will follow their example; and then, behold, perfect bliss: the golden age, when the world will speak one tongue, one universal language, is dawning again. National cultures, where are you?”
(Herder 1969:209)

Well, if anywhere, they were destined to be alive and well in the anthropology of the 20th century. The anthropological idea of “a culture” was largely distilled from this history of complementary opposition to a civilizing process that threatened to make good on its pretensions to universality. This intellectual genealogy from Herder to Boas has been traced by others, and I will not rehearse it here. Suffice it to say that the binary contrasts drawn by the Germans in ideological combat with Franco-British “civilization” became predicates of “a culture” as a scientific object. Perhaps most significantly, this included the idea that culture was generated from within, in contrast to the civilization the French and British were laying on people.

Culture was the essence of a people’s being, civilization a process of becoming. Civilization was a matter of degree, where culture was a difference in kind. With its own center of gravity, its own standards of value and its own direction of development, the culture of a people defined their individuality and identity, whereas civilization presented a cross-cultural measure of sophistication. Think of the *echt* Germans and the supercilious French, hence all those things that make culture something essential and civilization superficial: inner being, honesty, true nature, true appreciation, indeed truth as such, as opposed to outward show, dissemblance, mere *politesse*, fashion, and humbug.

To repeat the paradox: the idea of a culture as an anthropological object constituted by and for itself developed out of a relationship between European cultural orders – and more specifically, out of the interdependence of their differences.

Actually Existing Cultures

The prevailing tradition of separate and *sui generis* anthropology-cultures notwithstanding, the actually existing cultures at the time of European colonization were joined in mutual relations of determination with neighboring societies. These relations included assimilation as well as differentiation, and often both at once, as in the German case of an opposition (to France) founded on acculturation. Yet beyond relations to proximate others, specifiable cultures the world around were situated in wider dynamic fields of mutual influence: regional *ecumenes* of the kind once quaintly known (and now largely forgotten) as “culture areas.” Dynamism was inherent in the ordering of these regions by gradients of cultural authority, power, and value emanating from one or more strategically situated centers. Although our current human sciences are pleased to discover core-periphery configurations in the imperial ambitions of modern capitalist metropolises, most of the planet had already been mapped for ages in culture areas of that hierarchical form—involving also invidious distinctions of cultural sophistication.

In A. L. Kroeber’s classic treatise, the culture areas of native North America were largely constituted by influences radiating from certain centers of “cultural climax;” hence their boundaries, although intergrading, represented “something comparable to political spheres of influence” (1947:6). Kroeber could make that claim even for relatively egalitarian regions and “tribally-organized” centers such as the Hopi Pueblos in the American Southwest or the Haida and Tsimshian on the Northwest Coast. Similar observations have been made of locally dominant Melanesian peoples: among others, the Tolai, Orokaiva, Iatmul and Marind-Anim. Writing of the Sepik area dominated by Iatmul, Deborah Geertz (1983) demonstrated at length that the various local societies, as parts of a regional political-economic system, were actively engaged in shaping each others’ histories. And Simon Harrison confirms for Manambu people that they “seem to have imported throughout their history very many elements of Iatmul culture, particularly ritual, magic, totemism and myth. To the Manambu, the cultural forms of the Iatmul are surrounded by an aura of especially dangerous power, and therefore valuable to acquire” (*Ib.*, 20). Indeed a similar hierarchy obtains among Manambu villages, the most powerful of which, Avatip, having “a kind of metropolitan status among them” (p.17). Moreover, Harrison describes comparable regional networks – could we not say, tribal “galactic

polities” – in other Melanesian areas, such as the northeastern New Guinea, marked by the “perpetual striving by the hinterland peoples to emulate the perceived elegance and sophistication of the coastal cultures.” Certain notions of cultural development and underdevelopment were not born yesterday or exclusively in the modern World System.

These intercultural relations of order and change were amplified, however, when they were politically organized by royal centers holding greater or lesser sway over other ethnic groups in their hinterlands. Many areas of Asia, Africa, and the Americas were so configured at the time of European expansion, as was much of the European continent in times before. The world knew many kingships of universal pretensions that generated the kind of “galactic polities” described by Stanley Tambiah (1969) for Southeast Asia. Here were graded systems of power and cultural authority focused on dominant apical states from which the others derived much of their own political form, if in reduced versions in proportion to distance from the center, and often enough their own ruling dynasties of stranger-kings—while retaining a certain ethnic distinctiveness. Common the world around were political genealogies tracing the descent of outlying ruling groups to ancestral names to conjure with, some of them purely legendary: Teotihuacan, Toltec, Sina (China), Kahiki (Polynesia), Kachaw (Micronesia), Rum (Rome, Turkey or Persia), Aeneus, Ashoka, Alexander, Ile Ife, Luo, Lunda, Tikal, Troy, Mycenae, Zande, Majapahit, Bunyoro, Kalinga (India), Kitara, Jukun etc., etc. – although as Janet Hoskins remarked of the similar claims of certain eastern Indonesian aristocrats, “it could hardly be that all the peoples of the outer islands were descended from exiled Javanese princes” (1993:35).

My object here is to “get real” about anthropology-cultures by studying them in the greater fields of cultural value and historical change by which they are actually generated. In particular, I note some of these processes of order in the overlapping realms of East Asia, Southeast Asia, and Oceania. But first, some high-flying talk about the cultural politics of alterity.

The Cultural Politics of Alterity: Depending on the Kingness of Strangers

I take Eduardo Viveiros de Castro’s golden point that, “If humans were immortal, perhaps society would be confounded with the cosmos. Since death exists, it is necessary

for society to be linked with something that is outside itself – and that it be linked *socially* to this exterior” (1995:190). Ranging from beasts, spirits and gods to ineffable forces, by the way of the generic dead or the ancestors and of other peoples with their remarkable gifts, the extraordinary agents that control the human fate live outside the space of human control. More precisely, the lack of control translates as being-in-other-space. I am speaking of the so-called and unfortunately named “supernatural.” Misleadingly named. I believe, because the term supposes ethnocentric concepts of “nature” and “natural” – an autonomous world of soulless material things, of Cartesian *res extensa* – that are not pertinent to peoples who are engaged in a cosmic society of interacting subjects, including a variety of non-human beings with consciousness, soul, intentionality and other qualities of human persons.

Admittedly my notions of the so-called “supernatural” rest on old-fashioned premises. I take the rather banal, positivist, and Malinowskian view that people must in reality depend for their existence on external conditions not of their own making – hence and whence the spirits. (Recall Malinowski’s observations on the integration of “magic” in Trobriand activities of gardening, voyaging or fishing when the outcome depends on conditions beyond human control [1948: 10ff].) The going anthropological alternatives argue that divinity is some misrecognition of humanity. For Durkheim, god is the misplaced apprehension of the power of society, a power people surely experience but know not wherefrom it comes. For a certain Marxist anthropology, god is an alienated projection of people’s own powers of production and reproduction, an unhappy consciousness that has transferred human self-fashioning to the deity (e.g., Sangren 1991; 1993). Such theories may address the morphology of divinity, whether as projection or mystification, but they do not tell us why society is set in a cosmos of beings invested with powers of vitality and mortality beyond any that humans themselves know or control, produce or reproduce. Neither sense of false consciousness takes sufficient account of the generic predicament of the human condition: this dependence on *sui generis* forces of life and death, forces not created by human science or governed by human intentionality. If people really were in control of their own existence, they would not die. Or fall ill. Nor do they control the biology of sexual or agricultural generation. Or the weather on which their prosperity depends. Or, notably, the other peoples of their

ken: peoples whose cultural existence may be enviable or scandalous to them; but in either case, by the very difference from themselves, strangers who thus offer proof of a transcendent capacity for life. It is as if nothing foreign were merely human to them. Endowed with transcendent powers of life and death, the foreign becomes an ambiguous object of desire and danger. Hence the ubiquity – and ambiguity – of the aforementioned stranger-king formations.

If I called the following notes on the distribution and character of stranger-kingship around the world an “ideal-typical description,” would I be allowed some Weberian immunity from the charge of essentializing? In any case I generalize – surely at the risk of oversimplifying. The rulers of a remarkable number of pre-modern kingdoms and chiefdoms in many parts of the planet have been strangers to the places and peoples they rule. By their dynastic origins and their inherited nature, as rehearsed in ongoing traditions and enacted in royal rituals, they are foreigners – who on that ground must concede certain powers and privileges to the native people. The effect is a certain system of dual sovereignty.

Southeast Asia and the Pacific. Immigrant dynasties of ruling strangers have been widespread since early times in Southeast Asia and the Pacific Islands, including the Cambodian kingdoms of Brahmin ancestry, the Siamese Ayudhyan dynasty founded by a Chinese merchant-prince, the dominant Balinese dynasty of Klungkung that originated in a Javanese warrior-prince, the Hawaiian ruling chiefs whose ancestors arrived from legendary Kahiki, the Malay sultans descended from Arabian *sayyids* or Alexander the Great, and the Sinhalese realm founded by an errant prince descended from a lion in India. The like is to be found on the lowland peripheries of the major eastern Asian empires and kingdoms, as among the Shan, Yi or Malay principalities; and then again, on their own peripheries, among the upland tribal peoples whose leaders have been known to adopt the cultural trappings of dominant lowland societies. Take note for further reference that native rulers can become stranger-kings, just as stranger-kings may become native rulers.

The Indo-European Ancients. Alexander the Great of Macedonia was a stranger-king in his own right, as we shall see, as were many other ancient Indo-European rulers from Ireland to India (Sahlins 1985, 2008). From Celts to Aryans one encounters similar

narrative charters of immigrant rulers constituting a dualistic polity with their underlying indigenous or autochthonous subjects. Dynastic founders of Peloponnesus kingdoms from the eponymous Pelops and Lacedaemon to Agamemnon and the Heraclid rulers of Sparta were all Zeus-descended strangers who gained their realms through marriage with the daughters of their native predecessors. Pelops had notoriously conspired with the King of Pisa's daughter to cause her father's death, upon which he married her and succeeded him, a tale of violence and cunning intelligence not unlike the assumption of rule over the native Latins by Aeneas the Trojan or the subjection of the Sabines by the fratricidal Romulus. Marseille (Masilia) was founded by a Greek immigrant from Phocaea who likewise married the daughter of the native Celtic king. Commenting on many of these same traditions, J-G Preaux has written: "Every foundation of a city, every conquest of royal power becomes effective the moment the stranger, charged with sacredness by the gods or the fates, endowed moreover with the force of the warrior, symbolically gains possession of a new land either by receiving peacefully, or by conquering valorously or by ruse, the daughter of the king of the land" (Préaux 1962: 117).

In the manner of their great god Lugus, an archetypal stranger-king as Krista Ovist (2004) has demonstrated, the Celtic societies of the Continent and the Islands were dominated by kingly clans of foreign derivation, military orientation, and aristocratic pretension. Ovist speaks of "the self-understanding of Gaulish societies as groups constituted by autochthonous and foreign elements, the former regarded as feminine and the latter as masculine." (p.382). Indeed, a set of traditions traces the origin of the Gauls to Hercules, who in the course of one of his exploits fathered the heroic ancestor of the people by the daughter of a native Aquitanian king; or in another version he established the several Gaulish groups by unions with a number of indigenous noble women. Just so in Ireland, the kings of old were ritually married to their realms, which is to say the goddess or princess thereof, a practice that continued in modified form until the nineteenth century. The epic Irish *Book of Invasions* tells of a series of conquests from abroad culminating in the advent of the dominant Goidel stock, the Sons of Mil, who purportedly came from Scythia via Egypt and Spain (Various c. 1150 A.D.). These Milesians had already learned to unite with the daughters of local kings during their

legendary peregrinations, including a marriage with the eponymous Scotia, the Pharaoh's daughter. (I will have more to say about such traditions of the marvelous in due course.) By the Middle Ages the Gaels were able to incorporate other aristocratic clans of foreign origins such as such as the Eoganachta of Munster who had similarly dominated the original native peoples (Eriann and Cruithin).

To continue this rapid tour du monde:

Africa. Africa has also been the site of numerous dualistic polities consisting of indigenous or autochthonous "owners" of the land and stranger-rulers of different ethnic origins, broad cosmic powers, and notably wild dispositions. Referring generally to West and Central Africa, Luc de Heusch writes: "Everything happens as if the very structure of a lineage-based society is not capable of engendering dialectical development on the political plane without the intervention of a new political structure. The sovereignty, the magical source of power, always comes from elsewhere, from a claimed original place, exterior to society" (1982a:26). The observation is easily extendable to the several East African kingdoms dominated by immigrant Nilotic groups. Well-known examples of stranger dynasties from around the continent include Alur, Benin, Shilluk, Nupe, Azande, Mossi, Kongo, Luba, Lunda, Zande, Nyakyusa, Rwanda, etc., not to mention the many lesser kingdoms and chiefdoms that are effectively satellites in galactic orders centered on the greater ones. Worthy of mention, however, are the so-called acephalous Tallensi, whose Namoo chiefs claimed origin in the Mamprussi kingdom and were still installed in modern times by a Mamprussi official.

Americas. The major American empires of the Aztecs and Inca were ruled by kings of foreign derivation. The classic period Maya dynasties of Tikal and Copan were initiated by "the arrival of strangers," as the local inscriptions relate, and similar kingly origins were known in post-classic cities of the Quiche as well as in Mayapan and Chichen Itza, among others (e.g., Sabloff 2003; Sharer and Traxler 2006).

Variations. In a common permutation of stranger-kingship – known in Japan, Korea, Polynesia, Micronesia, Natchez, etc. – the founding prince descends from the heavens, always a good address for outsiders of royal pretensions. Then again, as was just noted regarding Ireland and is also commonly observed in Indonesian and African

societies, the coming of strangers is a recursive formation, one foreign kingship succeeding another without entirely erasing the tradition of the previous dynasty, so the polity is in effect a multi-ethnic palimpsest of temporally and politically stratified groups.

Still another variation involves the return of the ancestor-cum-stranger: an immigrant hero claiming derivation from original chiefs or autochthonous gods who some time ago had left the land, whether voluntarily or by reason of banishment or usurpation. Indeed, this topos of the ancestral stranger has often been adapted to the construal of colonizing Whitemen. Before they were cruelly disabused of the idea, many indigenous peoples took Europeans to be long lost sons of their own progenitors, if not lovers of their main goddess or forms of their original god—like Captain Cook, for example.

Summarizing – and still risking: in these stranger-kingships, two forms of authority and legitimacy coexist in a state of mutual dependence and reciprocal incorporation. The native people and the foreign rulers claim precedence on different grounds. For the underlying people it is the founder-principle: the right of first occupancy; in the maximal and common case, the claim of autochthony. Former rulers of the land and still its “owners”—so are they known in many Austronesian as well as African societies—the aboriginal people belong to the soil as much as it belongs to them. Hence within the dualistic polity, they are not only the main subsistence producers, they detain a privileged spiritual relation to the land and its products. People of the Central African Luapula Valley put the relation of the original people and their rulers this way: every land has two “owners,” they say, “the original settler, who is owner through the fact of being first, and therefore has ritual authority, and the political ‘owner’ there by right of might or cunning or duplicity; and each respects the other for the particular attributes for which he is owner” (Cunnison 1951:15). Or as Igor Kopytoff generalized these relations for many parts of Africa: “In principle, authority was legitimated by being a ‘first-comer’. The principle had to be adapted to the reality that the polity was in fact dominated by the immigrant late-coming group.” (1987:17).

The stranger-kings trump the native peoples’ claims of priority, characteristically by aggressive and transgressive demonstrations of superior might, allowing them to gain the sovereignty. Peaceful versions of the takeover may be recited for politically interested

purposes, but so long as the royal violence of the stranger-hero often has an ongoing function, it also has an enduring narrative and ritual presence. Commonly in African, Indo-European, and Southeast Asian traditions, the immigrant hero is the son of a powerful king who fails to obtain the succession in his native land, perhaps for some fault that results in his exile. Moreover, the advent of the stranger on the local scene is often marked by feats of incest, murder or other crimes against kinship and morality. This “exploit,” as Luc de Heusch calls it, by its transcendence of the local native society, is a sign of the foreigner’s power to organize it. The founder of the old Kongo kingdom established his reign by murder and conquest, “in their nature the most anti-social and destructive of all acts,” observed Georges Balandier; yet the same acts “implied promising changes—progress. The conquest led to law and order and a higher form of life.”

These beneficent effects are achieved when the stranger-rulers are domesticated by the indigenous people, thus sublimating their terrible powers in the general interest. The ritual means of this transformation are typically rehearsed at the installations of kings of the foreign-derived dynasty. They range from the privilege of leaders of the native people to install the new king, to the infliction of humiliation on his person, and sham battles that symbolically enact the death of the prince as an outsider and his rebirth as ruler of the people. The stranger is indigenized. Indeed the foreign dynasty is often linguistically and culturally assimilated by the native people, without however erasing its external origins and powers. In the event, the royal violence of the immigrant ruler is redefined as the gift of victory, to be turned outward toward expansion of the realm; while internally, the king initiates a kind of *mission civilisatrice*, bestowing benefits on the native people that lift them from a more rudimentary state. There is thus a reciprocal incorporation of the people by the king and the king by the people. Accordingly, the alien character of rule is not simply a function of the estrangement of power, the projection of its anti-social nature to an external source – “society against the state,” to reprise Pierre Clastres’ well-known formula—since the foreign derivation of the kingship, transmitting the powers of alterity, has in itself a positive domestic value. This is no sovereign exceptionalism. Like the elders of Israel who pleaded with Samuel to “give us a king to judge us like all the nations,” indigenous peoples have been known to solicit a prince from powerful

neighbors—for their own protection and internal good order. Some Sudanic peoples claim to have kidnapped their Nilotic Alur rulers.

Nor are order and victory the only royal gifts. Sacralized or divinized, the stranger-king is a rain-maker, both in the Frazerian sense that he fertilizes the bearing earth of the aboriginal people and in the current colloquial sense that, by contrast to their identification with the land, he is the source of the society's exchangeable, and spiritual riches, its mobile and transmissible wealth, including the life-enhancing foreign valuables distributed in kingly largesse or consecrated as royal regalia. It is not for nothing that a number of Southeast Asian kingdoms were founded by merchant princes. As it is said in the *Annals* of the Melakan sultanate, "Where there is sovereignty there is gold" (C.C.E. Brown 1952:187). Providing foreign wealth and fertilizing the land are parallel sovereign functions, insofar as both convey the potency of alterity and comprise a necessary complement of active means for realizing the fixed earthly powers of the indigenous people. The material counterpart on the part of the underlying people is the tribute owed the stranger-king: typically produce of the earth, given in return for the cultural riches and transcendent reproductive powers he conveys to them.

This mutually beneficent conjunction is almost invariably sealed by the union of the immigrant prince with a daughter of the indigenous ruler, thus making the formation of the polity a mix of contract and conflict. Characteristically, then, there is some continuing tension between the foreign-derived royals and the native people. Invidious disagreements about legitimacy and superiority may surface in partisan renderings of the founding narratives. As historic elders and affines, representing a certain *gravitas* to the royal *celeritas*, indigenous leaders may detain the authority to moderate the kingly power. More than political, however, the conjunction here is cosmological, which is what helps it endure. The foreign rulers are to native people in some such encompassing relation as the Celestial is to the Terrestrial, the Sea to the Land, the Wild to the Settled; or in abstract terms, as the Universal is to the Particular, a ratio that also holds for their respective gods. We see, then, why the narratives of the advent of the stranger-hero function as all-round cultural constitutions. The union with the other, which is also an elemental combination of an external masculinity and an internal femininity, gives rise to

the society as a self-producing totality – and the permanent contradiction that this autonomy is dependent on alterity.

Finally, speaking generally, the structure I have been describing is intrinsically temporal or diachronic, whether or not it is actually historical. Where local rulers take on foreign identities, it can be a structure without an event, an actual foreign incursion. But “structure” here is not merely a set of oppositions or proportions; rather, as in the later Levi-Strauss, it a series of transformations of its fundamental terms.

Elementary Forms of the Political Life

Still, the stranger-king is hardly the only form of the cultural politics of otherness. The same configuring of power, the same project of prospering the local society by incorporating potent foreign agencies, with the analogous effect of enhancing the social value of those who accomplish the feat, describes a variety of border-transcending exploits ranging from head-hunting, cannibalism, and other modes of predation, through trading and raiding for foreign valuables, to vision quests, shamanism and other such means of domesticating the life-giving virtues of external subjects.

Consider the head-hunting of Southeast Asian hinterland peoples – the Ifugao, Nagas, Iban, Kayan, Marinds and their like – who by ritually domesticating the trophies of their raids in sacrifices and head-feasts are able to harness the life-powers of their enemies to the service of their own existence. Sometimes placed in temples, fed, kept warm, and otherwise attended, the heads might thus be as ceremonially honored as they were initially reviled. By such means, Kayan people say, “those who were once our enemies thereby become our guardians, our friends, our benefactors” – the benefits including bountiful harvests and immunity to illness. At the end of the Ifugao head-feast, the quondam enemy is enjoined to combat sickness, sorcery, famine, evil gods, and the Ifugao’s own enemies – “For you,” they say, “have become one of us.” (Of course, South Americanists will recognize the same sort of beneficial effects of warfare and cannibalism in Amazonia.) All of which makes the more telling de Josselin de Jong’s notice of the structural resemblances between the headhunting rites and traditions of the Toradja of Sulawesi and the foundation legend of the Negri Sembilan kingdom of Malaya by a border-crossing, enemy-overcoming Minangkabau prince from Sumatra. In the

Toradja tradition of the origin of the head-feast, the hero indeed undertakes and arduous trip to the Upperworld to exact revenge on the killer of his parents, and then descends to the Underworld to take the heads of his victims' ghosts (Downs, *op.cit.*). Corollary Toradja narratives tell that the village of the headhunter had been dead during his absence but revives upon his triumphal return, and that the hero also brings home the magical daughter of his victim and marries her after the head-feast – thus transforming enemies into affines and marking their equivalence as reproductive agents. In sum, the Toradja warrior returns from a cosmic exploit with a foreign subject (the head) and enhanced reproductive virtue (the wife) in order to give life to (revive) the whole society. Allowance made for the inversion of stranger-king formations – the local hero who captures foreign power as opposed to the foreign prince whose power is captured locally – here is another modality of the same relationships.

By an analogous principle, the Iban warriors of Sarawak could not marry until they had taken a head, although nineteenth century accounts already indicate that amassing heirloom wealth in the form of large Chinese jars acquired in journeys abroad – the well-known Iban *bejalai* – was an acceptable alternative. For like heads, these valuables had the agentic capacities of potent foreign subjects (as Marcel Mauss might have taught). “Many of the goods acquired through *bejalai*,” explains the historian John Walker, “were themselves sources of potency. Antique jars, for example, were credited with supernatural powers and healing virtues and would thereby contribute to the potency of the community to which they were taken. Moreover, the successful accumulation of prestige goods and other wealth would indicate, in itself, an increase in spiritual powers, status and strength.” (Parenthetically, given the life-giving virtues of the foreign things, it follows that scarcity is a function of value rather than, as Economists teach, the other way around.) Considering these practices of acquiring the potency of alterity in the form of heads, valuables, and their own persons (through *bejalai* experience), it is not surprising that the Iban knew how to welcome stranger-kings, fiercely egalitarian as they were themselves: not only immigrant Malay aristocrats but notably also James Brooke, the famous “White Rajah of Sarawak.”

For the Iban and other indigenous peoples of Sarawak, James Brooke was endowed with an extraordinary soul-power – *semangat* was the Malay term – which

made him capable of mana-like effects on their fertility and mortality. Brooke found it “highly gratifying” when the leaders of Dayak communities came to Kuching to obtain some of his body fluids, like the Bidayuh headman who “brought me a young cocoa-nut for me to spit into, as usual: and after receiving a little gold dust and white cloth returned home to cultivate his fields” (in Walker 2002:116). On the occasion of a visit to a Bidayuh longhouse by Brooke and the Anglican Bishop McDougall, the people begged the Englishmen to spit on some cooked rice, whereupon the Bidayuh ate the rice, “thinking they would be the better for it” (McDougall 1854:57). Brooke noted that as a matter of course when he visited them, Dayak people would wash his hands and feet, and afterward sprinkle the bathwater on their houses and gardens. Likewise for the gold and white cloth he presented – gifts they particularly desired of him – these too they planted in their gardens (Mundy 1848, v.2:43). Among other classic features of stranger-kingship, note again that “where there is sovereignty, there is gold.” Rajah Brooke and his European colleagues were solicited for the mobile wealth that potentiates the reproductive capacities of the native people—such as the gold dust that could be showered like rain on the swidden fields of the indigenous owners. (Not that the exchange-value of gold in the marketplace, of which the Borneo people were probably well aware, works in ways any less mysterious.) In a related cosmic register, that of the founding union of the stranger-king with the daughter of his native predecessor, rumors circulated about the liaisons of Rajah Brooke with important Malay and Dayak women. According to one (unconfirmed) report, Brooke married the niece (brother’s daughter) of the Malay noble who originally ceded Sarawak to him (D. E. Brown 1972). The Iban had even less-verifiable and more marvelous stories of Brooke’s relations to their own cosmogonic deities. Some comprehended him by the topos of the returning ancestral-stranger, saying he was the son of their primordial mother and father, Kumang and Keling. Others said Brooke was not Kumang’s son but her lover, and that he was in the habit of climbing Mt. Santugong to make love to her—a magnified feat of union with the goddess of the land. (Just like Irish kings.)

Finally, then, is not marriage itself the ordinary and extraordinary representation of the vital powers of alterity, the gains and losses of reproductive powers that are functions of the incest taboo in the form of spouse-taking and spouse-giving? Inasmuch

as the incest taboo renders the self-organized *socius* incomplete of necessity, marriage becomes the experiential social archetype of life-from-without. As a relation of insiders to outsiders, roughly speaking consanguines to affines, producing offspring who unite these endogenous and exogenous complements, marriage is a manifest quotidian form of the same generation of vitality by the integration of external subjects that we have been discussing in political modalities. Opposing the potencies and gifts of spouse-givers or spouse-takers to the constituted authority of elders or ancestors, involving the negotiated appropriation of the beneficial virtues of potentially dangerous others, the relations of affines to consanguines amount to something like stranger-kingship *in nuce*. The marital alliance of insiders with outsiders is similarly a synthesis of being and becoming or first-comers and late-comers, while the accompanying transactions in gifts and regards likewise confer value and identity on the issue of the union (the *mission civilisatrice*). Also like the life-and-death potency of kingship are the powers of blessing and cursing that may be detained by key affinal relatives. Recall Edmund Leach's famous distinction between the we-group of consanguines, defined as relations of common substance, and relations of alliance that "are viewed as metaphysical influence" (1961:21).

Galactic Dynamics of Culture in East Asia

In his well-known *Political Systems of Highland Burma* (1954), Leach documented the aspirations of certain Kachin chiefs to "become Shan," so it is not surprising that their houses are spoken of in the same terms as Shan palaces. But how did the establishments of these hinterland chiefs come to be styled "the cave of the alligator," referring to a fabulous monster-ancestor whose symbolic associations bear "striking resemblance" to the kingly Chinese dragon, and how did they come to function like the Temple of Heaven in the Chinese imperial cult? (pp.112-13) Leach makes a considerable case for the ritual and architectural parallels. The site of important ceremonies undertaken by the Celestial Emperor for the welfare of the state and the fertility of the crops, the Temple of Heaven consisted of two parts: a domed building dedicated to Heaven and an open circular platform dedicated to Earth. Just so, in *gumsa* Kachin, the chief makes offerings to the principal sky spirit (Madai), a being who ensures the general welfare, at a shrine in his own roofed house. And he makes offerings to the earth spirit,

who controls the fertility of the soil and of people, at a circular open space at the entrance to the village. Normally bounded by stones, this site of the earth spirit in a few prosperous villages “becomes a stone platform decorated in Chinese style.” Hence Leach’s conclusion that the Kachin chief’s ritual role “has a definitely Chinese flavor,” and his house, more than a dwelling or a palace, is a kind of temple dedicated to the great celestial deity.

Perhaps Kachin have had direct contact with Chinese along the old trade route to Assam, but something should also be said for the mediated relations of the Kachin Hills to Chinese dynasts at least since the 8th century A.D. The Kachin were more or less subject to neighboring states – occasionally much less: they were militarily dominant – that were themselves tributary to China, beginning with the Nan-chao Kingdom of Yunnan during the T’ang dynasty and continuing into recent times with the Tai-speaking Shans and the Burmese kingdom. The tributary relations and cultural assimilations of ruling groups that marked the Chinese, Burmese, and Indian impact on major lowland states of Southeast Asia were replicated again in the interactions of the latter with hinterland peoples such as Kachin. As noted earlier, we have to do with extensive galactic systems involving potent cultural influences radiating out from their “civilizing” centers, with reciprocal, attractive effects on the peoples and products of the “barbarian” peripheries—whence developed a certain dialectics of assimilation and differentiation (Tambiah 1976; 1985; 1987).

The apical states of the galaxies were universal kingdoms whose rulers conflated their *polis* with the cosmos and their hegemony with world order – cosmocrats, if you will. Such were the Buddhist Chakkavatti King of Kings, the Devaraja Hindu monarchs as well as the Chinese ruler of All Under Heaven. Although their dynastic founders may have been foreign in origin, these were not stranger-kingships of the kind I discussed earlier, marked by the complementary sovereign claims of immigrant rulers and indigenous owners. Rather, the cosmocrats synthesized the ontological and political dualisms of stranger-king polities. They detained the powers of heaven and earth both. One is reminded of the famous text of the Han dynasty official, Dong Zhongshu, “The Way the King Penetrates Three”

Those who invented writing in ancient times drew three horizontal lines and connected them vertically through the middle, calling the character “king.” The three horizontal lines are Heaven, Earth and Man, and that which passes through the middle joins the principles of all three. If he is not king, who can do this? (Granet 1968:264).

Although it is commonly described as a centralization of power, which it was, the transformation initiated by the Qin founder of the Empire (third century BCE) was also a cultural synthesis of this sort, overcoming the dualism of heaven and earth structurally by undermining the regional lineage authorities, and ritually by undertaking the sacrifices to local spirits.

Thenceforth, according to imperial theory and practice, world order is created as the effect of the Celestial Emperor’s personal virtue (*te*). By a double impulse, centrifugal and centripetal, the imperial virtue extends outward to pacify the barbarian peoples and attracts them inward on missions of fealty and tribute. Both movements thus entail a politics of presencing. On the one hand, the civilizing virtue of the emperor is distributed outward in the persons, objects, and acts of the imperial bureaucracy. Or else if need be, it is spread by imperial armies and garrisons – especially since the Yuan (Mongol) dynasty, whose Chinese ministers were able to deduce that “there was no real contradiction between *te* and force so long as force was applied by a ruler possessing *te*” (Wang 1968:49). On the other hand, the Emperor draws the world into his own existence. He represents and absorbs the totality of beings and things in his palaces, gardens, and hunting parks, his regalia, his diet and, not least, in the collections of wonders and monsters that come to him as tributes from the untamed borderlands of the Middle Kingdom.

In official parlance, the tributary missions represent the barbarians’ desire to “come and be transformed;” that is, transformed to culture by ritual participation in the emperor’s presence and the splendors that manifest it. The barbarian rulers who sponsor these embassies, however, may have an eye singular to their material or political advantages. They may be interested in lucrative trading rights. Or else, in coming away with Chinese titles, seals, surnames, and regalia of office, the hinterland rulers are invested by imperial authority with sovereignty in their own realms as well as a

subordinate rank in the Chinese world order. This was especially desirable for the barbarian chief when he was granted a realm contested by others. Of course, the Chinese also worked the tributary system for pragmatic benefits. As is well known, since the Han dynasty if not before, the policy of installing barbarian leaders as Chinese bureaucratic or military officials had the value of providing a defensive shield of “tame” or “cooked” barbarians against the “wild” or “raw” barbarians of the regions beyond. However, my argument is that the utilities of the tributary system are embedded in a larger exchange of mutually empowering values whose asymmetries generate lasting relations of hierarchy and the conditions of the possibility of material and political advantage.

Recall the earlier discussion of the cultural politics of alterity, involving the harnessing of external life-giving powers to the well-being of the local society. Just so, the parties to exchange in galactic systems are engaged in transactions of vital powers – essentially reciprocal if characteristically hierarchical. Speaking of such exchanges between Tai states and the subordinate hill peoples they call *kha* or ‘serfs’, Andrew Turton observes that the center “desires the resources, the potency and the potentiality, the ‘alien powers’ of the periphery, the wild, the forest. Both center and periphery seek to restore ‘vitality’ in the exchange of powers” (2000: 25-26). Similarly, the tributes of the Chinese borderlands, ensouled with the wild potency of these peripheral regions, empowered the Celestial Emperor and his officialdom. Indeed the necessity of sustaining a “Middle Kingdom” by means of exotic powers betrays the contradictions of the classical ideology of the barbarians’ transformation to civilization. As Magnus Fiskesjö points out, for all the notions of the Celestial Emperor’s civilizing mission, the Chinese always maintained a wild barbarian frontier, and in periods of imperial weakness, a nostalgia for its lost marvels.

Consider the circulation of power-effects by means of the aromatic plants of Southeast Asia, such as the camphor or sandalwood sent as tributes to the Celestial Emperor from as far as Malaya, Sumatra, Borneo and Java. For the Chinese the aromatics and other exotica from Southeast Asia, observes Edward Shafer (1967:193), “partook of the godly and the beneficial, and at the same time the deadly and the devilish.” This godly and deadly potency, moreover, was equally evident at the distant barbarian sources of camphor crystals and their aromatic like. In his useful compendium of *Malay Magic*.

W.W. Skeat (1900:212-218) notes that camphor was controlled by indwelling spirits who had to be propitiated so that it could be discovered, and that a special language had to be used – for communicating with the spirits? – when searching for camphor, as ordinary Malay was taboo.

Transported then as tributes to China and sent wafting through the T'ang emperor's court, incense from Southeast Asian aromatics “marked the presence of the royal afflatus, breathing supernatural wisdom through the worlds of nature and human affairs.” (Shafer 1963:156) In formal levees of the T'ang ministers, a table of aromatics was placed before the Son of Heaven. When inhaled by the court officials, the scent of camphor from Malaya or sandalwood from Borneo insinuated the ordering presence of the Emperor into their own persons, whence it was realized in imperial statecraft and spread through the world. Like the capitalist surplus value that returns in a fetishized form to rule its producers, the fetishized products of the barbarians return as the Chinese imperial power that aimed to control and civilize them. Responding to the news that the imperial protector general had been chased out of Annam by a rebellion, a T'ang poet and court official lamented:

“Remember when the North [China] was on good terms with the Yüeh {Vietnamese},

For a long time both were nourished by the southern fragrance.”

Conversely, the potency of the Chinese gifts of regalia, titles, and surnames gave long-lasting legitimacy to barbarian chiefs, indeed centuries of power resources, which helps explain how the Chinese empire could have more cultural influence than it had coercive force. In 255 AD, Zhuge Liang, the famous Shu Han minister and strategist, led an invasion into (what is now) Yunnan in order to reinstate the imperial authority that had lapsed with the decline of the Han dynasty. Convinced that he did not have the power to directly govern his conquests, Zhuge then withdrew, leaving the area to be kept in order by indigenous leaders who had been endowed with Chinese offices and surnames. For centuries after, however, many of the native peoples continued to erect temples to Zhuge and give him a place among their own deities. Other long-standing traditions of local peoples told that “their chieftain's bronze drums, the universal symbol of authority in the

southwest, were originally bestowed by Zhuge Liang.” Richard von Glahn (1987:15) relates that when one of the local chiefs was forced to surrender his drum of office in 1573 to a victorious Ming army, he measured his loss by saying that “with two or three of such drums, one could proclaim himself king. Striking the drum at the summit of a hill will cause all of the tribes to assemble. But now, all is lost.” Zhuge’s drums, in other words, had internal power-effects in the native society. Which perhaps helps explain why such signs of his conquests, including the temples honoring him, have been preserved into modern times even by peoples of western Yunnan – a region his army never got to, according to recent Chinese scholarship. Moreover, many of the chieftains in the areas he did pacify proceeded to covert the Chinese surnames he gave them into claims of Chinese ancestry, though of course they were not Han Chinese people. (Parenthetically, many Gaulish notables allied with or defeated by the Romans took the family names of Julius, Augustus, or Ptolemy.) Similar warrants of Chinese ancestry have long been asserted by grandees large and small among the non-Han peoples of the Sino-Southeast Asian borderlands, including ruling families of Shan states who functioned as Chinese officials (*tusi*) in the Ming and Qing periods. It is as if the attractions of the Emperor’s virtue for the “barbarian” rulers consisted more effectively in the long-term legitimation and enduring competitive advantage that imperial recognition afforded them over local rivals. Yet precisely by encoding their own authority and identity in Chinese terms, the native rulers effectively manifested virtuous powers of the Celestial Emperor.

Local rulers claiming Chinese ancestry they invented themselves, worshipping victorious Chinese generals whose campaigns never reached their territories, cherishing as palladia of their realms precious objects reputedly bestowed by powerful Chinese officials a thousand years before, sending tributes to the Chinese Emperor from lands too distant for him to rule or perhaps even threaten: everything suggests that, for all its apparent ideological air, there is an element of truth in the Celestial Emperor’s power to civilize the world by the force of his wisdom and his virtue. No doubt there have been compelling demonstration-effects; that is, military and naval campaigns that could induce compliance even beyond the range of actual conquests. But the sphere of a given Emperor’s influence, for one thing, is not just a real-politics of the moment. Embedded

and diffused in objects with agentive ruling powers, and in traditions of regal magnificence and spiritual efficacy, the cultural cum political authority of the Son of Heaven extends thousands of years in time and thousands of miles in space. Even the reported military conquests of Chinese armies may be effective fantasies. C.P. Giersch tells of Shan state chronicles of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that relate how a fourteenth century ruler who defied the Ming Emperor thus provoked a punitive Chinese invasion. According to Giersch, however, there is no evidence of any such military action in Ming historical records, and he concluded it never happened. This is a hierarchally organized, spatio-temporal field of ordering influences, involving certain dynamics of acculturation and differentiation.

The Real-Politics of the Marvelous

Differentiation by assimilation – this dialectic that A.L.Kroeber called “antagonistic acculturation”—ripples through the secondary and tertiary centers of the galactic system, on out to the tribal hinterlands. One might even recognize a Chinese pattern in Islamic guise as far off as the coastal waters of western New Guinea, where Biak islanders return from rendering tribute to the Sultan of Ternate (in the Moluccas) with honorary titles, prestige goods and *semangat* – like power they absorbed in the ruler’s presence. The successful voyagers could thus earn the respectful Biak title of *amben*, ‘foreigner.’ Their quasi-foreign identity, however, did not make them less Biak, only more appreciated by their countrymen. The same for the Kachin chiefs who take on “sophisticated” Shan ways and enter into subordinate wife-taking relations with Shan aristocrats. They “do not thereby surrender their status as Kachin chiefs,” Leach reports, but on the contrary “their chiefly status as Kachins is enhanced.” The Kachin leader becomes a stranger-prince, not by a foreign imposition on the locals but by a local appropriation of the foreign—at least until a *gumlao* [egalitarian] revolt.

The differentiation by assimilation I am discussing would fall under the general heading of “schismogenesis” as Gregory Bateson designated it, in the first instance by reference to certain interdependent cultural oppositions in Melanesia. This is “complementary schismogenesis” in Bateson’s terms, rather than “symmetrical schismogenesis,” a competitive dynamics also involved in the historical ethnographies at

issue here—and to which I will return momentarily. Complementary schismogenesis refers to the generation of structurally opposed forms among interacting peoples: symmetrical and inverse forms that at once match and negate each other. It is as if each of the competing groups strives to be the same as and different from, equal to and better than, the other. I began this lecture with a classic example of complementary schismogenesis in the way the Germans opposed French *civilisation* with their own *Kultur*. If civilization is a matter of degree, cultures differ in kind; if civilization may be imposed from without by an imperial state, culture only grows from within as an expression of the people. *Civilisation* versus *Kultur* remained fighting words for the French and Germans right into World War I.

Rather than opposition by negation, symmetrical schismogenesis is like an arms race in which each side tries to outdo the other by doing more of the same, on the principle of “anything you can do, I can do better.” At the extreme, however, competition in quantity is exchanged for competition in quality: one goes beyond the existing terms of the opposition, trumping the adversary by shifting the contention to means of another kind and a superior value – like introducing a new, devastating weapon into the arms race. This is the kind of competition we saw in the external sectors of galactic polities: ambitious persons or groups taking on prestigious foreign identities of the center in order to outdo their local rivals, the way Yi tribal leaders acquire status by claiming Chinese ancestry. The strategy is to win out in the native competition by engaging transcendent powers in one’s own cause: powers above and beyond the society and its customary bases of authority.

Or, to return to Oceania, Simon Harrison writes:

“The driving force of many Melanesian prestige economies was rivalry between men of the same group; it was their struggles for status that spurred them to seek valuables from partners in other groups. It seems to have been these same struggles that also drove men to seek to acquire foreign ritual forms....[T]ransactions in such forms...were a measure of the scale of their power.”

In many Polynesian islands a similar striving for transcendental powers, strikingly manifest in the contact with Europeans, was already inscribed in the indigenous lineage politics. During the early colonial period, a number of local ruling chiefs became in effect stranger-kings by assuming foreign identities on their own part – especially British identities and particularly that of “King George.” (The sons and heirs of three prominent Hawaiian chiefs in the late 18th century were named “King George”). This form of symmetrical schismogenesis – or should we not call it “transcendental schismogenesis”? – was practiced notably by ambitious chiefs who could not claim by ancestry the authority to which they now aspired by force and wealth. Here were charismatic, upstart rulers who sought to lend the divine potencies of the foreign to their local ambitions of sovereignty. Kamehameha of Hawai’i for example, whose rise to power over the archipelago was marked by the sacrifice of his close senior kinsman, legitimate heir to the rule of Hawai’i Island, and the raising of the British flag over his house and war canoe even before he ceded the islands to his “brother” (as he called him), King George of Beretania. In the early nineteenth century, John Adams Kuakini was ruling Hawai’I Island, Cox Ke’eaumoku was in charge of Maui, and Billy Pitt Kalaimoku was the so-called “Prime Minister” of the kingdom. Analogous observations could be made of Iotete of the Marquesus who declared himself an Englishman, King George Tupou of Tonga, the Pomare rulers of Tahiti and others. Their behavior was not without precedent in the native Polynesian tradition, which knew many legends of the usurpation of ruling chiefs by younger brothers or junior kinsmen: warriors whose demonstrable *mana* trumps the ascribed powers of the senior line. One might judge that transcendental schismogenesis is an inherent structural disposition in lineages that are ranked by seniority of descent and succession passes by primogeniture, inasmuch as junior kinsmen and their descendants are then destined to decline in rank as their senior kinsmen increase in numbers. Hence the many tales of younger brothers who overcome this fate by acts of violence that manifest a divine power (*mana*) stronger than that inherited by descent.

Gregory Schrempp (2002) brilliantly analyzed this politics of transcendence as it appears in the well-known cosmogonic narrative of the Maori of New Zealand concerning the godly sons of Rangi (Heaven) and Papa (Earth). The younger-brother Tu, ancestor of mankind, is able to defeat his elder sibling and celestial enemy Tawhiri, and

by his victory Tu gains superiority over all his older brothers as well as control of the earthly species descended from them. Tawhiri was the only one of the several divine siblings to join the Sky Father (Rangi) when the others forcefully separated their heavenly parent from the Earth Mother (Papa). In retaliation for this crime, Tawhiri let loose devastating squalls, whirlwinds and hurricanes on earth, scattering the brothers hither and yon – which accounts for the distribution of natural species respectively sprung from them. Only Tu stood up to Tawhiri, battling him to a standstill. “Tu alone was brave,” Maori say. And because his brothers had fled before Tawhiri, Tu then turned upon them, defeated, and consumed them, rendering them inferior to himself. He became the senior brother. As Schrempf concluded, bravery is thus able to dominate as a political value, not merely as a physical force, because it is expressed and legitimated on a cosmic plane. Because Tu was victorious in this celestial sphere, his human descendants are able to control the earthly species, including the staple foods, that instantiate his defeated brothers. The earthly privileges of the Maori are backed ultimately by higher cosmic values.

The same sort of cosmic legitimation is entailed in the claims of descent from Alexander the Great on the part of certain sultans in the Malay Peninsula, Sumatra, and Borneo. As noted earlier, the historical Alexander was already a member of a stranger-king dynasty in Macedonia, purportedly descended from the Heraclid kings of Argos – not to mention the native kingships and the daughters of kings that Alexander, following the lead of his father Philip, acquired in his military campaigns. Alexander once had occasion to remind his Macedonian soldiers that his father had transformed them from small groups of poorly-clad nomads following their few sheep in the mountains to prosperous, well-clad dwellers of cities in the Macedonian plains. (Thus literally in Greek terms, a civilizing [city-dwelling] mission.) Among the fanciful romances of Alexander, however, the Arabic and Persian versions identified him with Iskandar D’zul-karnain of Koranic fame, the militant propagator of the Faith from the setting to the rising sun (the same direction as Alexander’s conquests). Hence the appearance of Alexander’s descendants as local ruling kings in the *Sejarah Melayu*, the ‘Malay Annals’ written on behalf of the sultans of the flourishing 15th century state of Melaka. Apparently redacted shortly after the fall of Melaka to the Portuguese in 1511, the schismogenic argument was

apparently directed at the rival Sumatran state of Melayu-Jambi. At issue was which 15th century sultanate was the legitimate successor of the ancient powerful kingdom of Srivijaya, centered in Palembang, Sumatra.

Without going into the fine details of the Melakan tradition, it tells of three handsome descendants of Iskander/Alexander who appear in royal garb on a mountain above Palembang and turn the rice fields into gold and silver – “where there is sovereignty there is gold.” The youngest and most prominent of the three, Sri Tri Buana, marries the daughter of the local Raja and succeeds him as ruler. Among other classic aspects of stranger-kingship in the *Annals* account is the neutralization of the harmful aspects of the hero’s potency by this union. Until his marriage to the Raja’s daughter, the effect of Sri Tri Buana’s liaisons with the many native women was to infect them with a disfiguring skin disease. But when the daughter of the Raja was unharmed by sleeping with the Alexandrian prince, her father consented to enter into a pact of mutual regard in which he effectively surrendered the rule to him. In a few generations the lineal descendants of Sri Tri Buana converted to Islam and founded the Melakan sultanate.

Still, Melayu-Jambi may have had the last word here. On an edict issued in the late eighteenth century by the Sultan of Minangkabau, successor of the Melayu-Jambi rulers, were affixed three seals representing three sons of Alexander the Great: they were the Sultan of Rum (Rome/Istanbul), the Sultan of China, and his own seal as Sultan of Minangkabau. The youngest of the brothers, the Manankibau ruler was nevertheless the most powerful: indeed as the edict read, he was “king of kings. . . lord of the air and clouds. . . possessed of the crown of heaven brought by the prophet Adam” (Marsden 1811:339).

The Alexandrian tradition in Indonesia is linked to many more narratives of the marvelous, some of epic proportions, of which I only mention a couple by way of conclusion. Sri Tri Buana’s mother was the daughter of the King of the Sea whom his father had married when he went under the ocean and thereby succeeded to the rule of that underwater realm. One is reminded of the Queen of the South Sea, the mystical bride of legitimate Javanese kings, herself descended in the ruling line of the ancient Sundanese kingdom of Pajajaran. Another Javanese hero, Baron Iskandar – whose moniker, as Anthony Reid (1994:92) points out, combines a European title with the

Javanese name for Alexander the Great – had a brother who also married a Pajajaran princess, and among their offspring was J.P. Coen, the Governor General of the Dutch East Indies Company who established its headquarters at Batavia in 1619. In his own career, Baron Iskandar had been a stranger-king of Spain before conquering the lands from Arabia to China. Eventually he wound up in the service of the Islamic ruler of Mataram – thus proving the superiority of that Javanese state to the intruding Dutchmen (Ricklefs 1974:373ff). Like the Polynesian chiefs' identifications with European rulers or the Chinese ancestry of “barbarian” rulers, there is a real-politics of the marvelous in these Javanese traditions. We would lose a lot of anthropology if we followed the lead of too many historians and were content to ignore or debunk them.

But there is another lesson to be learned from the anthropology of the marvelous, for perhaps nothing so much as these transcendental representations of Hawaiian or Indonesian political authority would demonstrate the insufficiency of our received paradigms of *sui generis* cultures. Plainly it would be impossible to generate such global concepts and practices of power out of the internal relations of production or coercion in the societies concerned. Rather than the simple expression of an endogenous dynamic, the local system – in political, economic, and doctrinal dimensions – is to a large extent a function of relations in a greater cultural-historical field. The peoples situated in a regional network of center-periphery relations often engage in a kind of upward political mobility, insofar as their own rulers model their sovereignty on neighboring galactic superiors, and perhaps ultimately on distant legendary sources. “Galactic mimesis,” one could call it. Kachin chiefs take on the ruling style of Shan princes, retreating from active life in the same way that Shan rulers withdraw into their palaces and delegate affairs of state to underlings. Yet then again, the Shan princes fancy themselves divine beings and absolute monarchs – precisely on Burmese or Chinese models. We cannot explain these developments from within, on the Herderian model or any such program of cultural autonomy. The scandal is that the human sciences should have had a more encompassing vision of culture and history from the beginning.