THE WORLD

A Beginner's Guide

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Most of us are beginners on the planetary terrain of humankind. We are much more familiar with our own country, occasionally with our own continental region, be it Africa, Europe, Latin America, North America or a part of Asia, but rarely all of it. And each and all of us are beginners in the twenty-first century, a century which promises at least one thing – that it will be very different from the past one. Therefore, this is a beginner's guide, written for all those of us who are curious about this world, those of us who do not already know everything we want to know, who do not know everything we need to know about the evil, the good and the salvation of this world. On offer is not a primary of mainstream wisdom, it is an individual scholar's vision, coming out of half a century of social study and carried by his personal passion for human freedom and equality, and for empirical evidence.

In this book, you will find a sociocultural geological map of the world, a compass outline of the fundamental drives of human society and a specification of how they operate in the world today, a picture of the current world stage with its major actors. You will be invited to a worldwide human life-course journey, from birth to after-life. In another sense, this is also a guide of beginning, of snapshots never shown before (outside my Cambridge classrooms), although pixelled together from the vast archives of human research and experience.

This is a guide to the world after the stardust of 'globalization' has settled, when the global vista is clearing up. What is opening up then is a new space of social imagination, no longer just national, no longer the North Atlantic region writ large as the universe, of a first or second, solid or liquid modernity, or of postmodernity. It is a finite planet of enormous variety, interdependent and intercommunicating. This new world is a world of plural civilizations, each with its living

history, not the binary one of yesterday's North Atlantic leaders putting (our) civilization against the barbarians threatening it. It is a world of emerging powers and re-emerging cultures, and not just one of global markets, a world of alternative possibilities and of different life-courses.

Intellectually, this may the hour of global sociology, taken as scholarship, with its sensitivity to variety and limitations as well as to connectivity, and its refraining from policy pontificating. Half a century ago, I entered university, in Lund in Sweden, with a view to studying politics and economics, but in the process I learnt about sociology, as a more scientific approach, which may have reflected local circumstances more than a universal truth. Later on, in the Netherlands, I had a chair of political science, and political economy has always been prominent on my mind, although my favourite scholarly writers have mostly been historians, models of erudition-cum-style. Nevertheless, I think sociology offers the best vantage-point from which to comprehend the world as a whole, the past and the contemporary together. It is wide open to different expertise and disciplines, itself pluralistic, driven by an unbound, non-paradigmatic curiosity, and by an ambition of connecting as much evidence, as much human experience, as possible.

However, after all, academic disciplines are important only within the small compounds of academia, and this book is concerned with the world outside. It is written by a scholar-citizen to fellow citizens of the world. Suddenly, besides everything else we are, we have become fellow residents of a planet and members of humanity.

Finally, a word of thanks. I am a craftsman sociologist, neither an armchair theorist nor a research manager. Most of the empirical evidence on which this book is based I have dug out with my own hands, voraciously and gratefully picking up fruits from institutional data collectors as well as from scholarly colleagues of many disciplines. But I thankfully acknowledge the assistance of my student Maruta Herding on cultural exchange. I further want to thank all my students at Cambridge for a most challenging and stimulating teaching experience, and for intercultural learning. My editor and colleague, Professor John Thompson, is also one of my creditors, for his sharp critical acumen as well as for his generous support.

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INTRODUCTION: HUMANKIND
AND ITS WORLD

Human society and human history can only be grasped by their contradictions. The twentieth century was homicidal, the worst since the sixteenth century and the European conquest of the Americas – as well as the peak of human net population growth. It produced the worst genocidal racism of human history, and it left us with a legacy of an awareness of one humankind existing in a common, finite world.

Human rights, the internet, 'globalization' and the Kyoto Protocol – all products of the last quarter of the previous century – have opened a new horizon of social understanding and of social action, i.e., humankind and its world. While we go on being, say, Chinese or Americans, Muslims or Hindus, workers or bankers, African women or European men, young or old, we have also become members of a common humankind and stakeholders in the same planet.

It was an extraordinary confluence of events. The post-fascist 1948 UN Declaration of Human Rights was an avant-garde publication of little importance for a long while. Its affirmation of the freedom to marry (or not), for instance, was systematically violated in most of Africa, Asia and the USA (inter-racial marriages), often in the rest of the Americas and in Eastern Europe, although there recent legislation had at least formally freed young people from parental control. Human rights began to emerge as a serious issue in the 1960s, thanks to Amnesty International, but reached the geopolitical mainstream only by the mid-1970s. The Western powers had them inserted in the Helsinki Accord of 1975, recognizing the post-Second World War borders of Europe, crucial to Poles and most other East Europeans, communist or anti-communist. In the Americas, human rights also became a key issue in the second half of the 1970s. In Latin America, they became a defence in defeat, after all attempts at progressive social change (outside Cuba) had been crushed by military dictatorships. In the USA, there was, for once, a positive resonance during the Carter administration. The completely unforeseen interlocking of

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Cold War diplomacy and a US recognition of human rights in the Americas made human rights irremovable from the international political agenda, accepted in violation even by the Reagan and the two Bush administrations.

Segments of humanity have been in global, or at least transcontinental, transoceanic, contact for a long time. There were trading links between ancient Rome and India about 2,000 years ago, and between India and China. The foray of Alexander of Macedonia into Central Asia 2,300 years ago is evident from the Greek-looking Buddha statues in the British Museum. What is new is the mass of contact, and the contact of masses, mass travel and mass self-communication. Global TV broadcasting by satellite emerged on a large routine scale in the 1980s. The internet became public in 1991. Global chat and picture-exchange clubs appeared in the 2000s, soon acquiring tens, nay hundreds of millions, of members worldwide. The net and the satellites now reach almost every corner of the planet, whereas in my mid-life career (in the 1980s), one could hardly correspond with colleagues in Italy, because of the dreadful state of the Italian mail.

When the Cold War ended, 'globalization' became the most popular of social concepts, its usage exploding in the 1990s. It captured the moods of the time, in plural because it had both positive and negative vibrations. In both cases, it referred primarily to a global extension of what existed, capital and markets above all, but also cultures. Social change had ceased to have structural or cultural content, and had become only or overwhelmingly spatial. Anyhow, whatever critical quarrels one might have with globalization discourse, it was right in drawing attention to the new interdependence of humankind, through capital flows, commodity chains, foreign penetration of domestic markets, migration flows picking up and cultural exchange intensifying and cross-fertilizing.

The planetary environment of humankind first emerged into the limelight in 1972, with the *Limits to Growth*, put out by a tiny, rather aristocratic outfit called the Club of Rome. It had great resonance because of the oil crisis of 1973–4 in the wake of the US rescue of Israel in the Egyptian-Israeli Ramadan/Yom Kippur war of 1973. The United Nations took up the environmental challenge rapidly, with conferences in Stockholm in 1972 and in Rio in 1992, and with its attempt at global legislation in the Kyoto Protocol of 1997. Because of the refusal of the US Congress to participate, not much concrete action came out of Kyoto, but awareness of a common human environmental challenge from manmade climate change increased in the 2000s. Again, the UN effort at Copenhagen in December 2009 was

largely unsuccessful in terms of action, but there was an almost universal consensus that there is one humanity facing a planetary environmental problem.

This is a novel situation in the history of humans, a mass awareness of a common humanity, electronically directly interconnected and a common target of satellite beams of communication, in one global economy, in one planetary environment. Among intellectual elites, visions of a world community have a history. Just in the European tradition, there is the 'world citizen perspective' (*welbürgerliche Sicht*) of Immanuel Kant and the Enlightenment, and even before that the medieval universalism of Dante and the sixteenth-century defence of Amerindian humanity by Bartolomé de Las Casas (see Bartelson 2009). But that was only single intellectual vision, and Kant's hope for a 'perpetual peace' was followed by the mass carnage of the Napoleonic wars, the last phase of the Franco-British world war.

The world as otherness has a long history of mass fascination with exploration and conquest. We are all indebted to the intellectual as well as the physical courage of the great geographers and cartographers, from Strabo and Mercator and on, of the great travellers and explorers, from Ibn Batuta, Marco Polo, Zheng He, Fernão de Magalhães, James Cook, Alexander von Humboldt etc, and we are also heirs to the more ambiguous legacy of the big conquerors, from Alexander, to Chingiz Khan and Hernán Cortés and their later followers.

The new challenge is to comprehend, and to be able to act upon, this new common human world. A very elementary start is to recognize that commonality necessarily entails neither sameness nor equality. Rather, any proper understanding of contemporary humanity had better be prepared for its diversity and for its inequality, not a priori less than that of the manorial village, the plantation, the Indian caste system or the current 'global city', all supposed to manifest a common society. But that is only a precaution against short-circuiting common awareness of existence and conditions for sameness or equality. The real task begins, then.

To get a handle on humankind and its world, for action as well as for understanding, we need to know something about the following. Why are we who we are? From where come our characteristics, our knowledge and our ignorance? It will be argued that these questions will require a recourse to *sociocultural geology*, of enduring, layered history, looking at enduring effects of ancient civilizations, multiple waves of globalization, different pathways to modernity. Our views of the world, our fundamental beliefs, aesthetic tastes, our languages,

our ways and manners of social interactions, our politics and our sports interests can all be traced back to our historical formation.

Secondly, why do we and others act the way we/they do? I will argue that there are five irreducible drives of humankind which constitute the *world dynamics*. By no means do they exhaustively constitute the human condition, but they are propelling the social world. Where they will take us, neither God nor academia can tell. But they can be understood, and put to use.

Thirdly, there is the *world stage* of geopolitics and geoeconomics, but also of a media show. While world idols and celebrities do form a significant part of current humanity, focus here will be primarily on the small set of big collective players dominating the field of world power.

Then, there is the human *life-course*, our finite time on earth. We are living our lives in almost seven billion different ways, but we are all subjected to a pre-programmed life-course, truncated or extended, with its different stations, characteristic challenges and rites of passage, from birth and infancy to old age and death. This life-course, and its probabilities in the different parts of the planet and in different sociocultural milieus, are amenable to social comprehension and analysis. Current human courses of life are set out on the base of the geology of human history, propelled – or blocked – by the dynamics of the contemporary world stage.

Finally, we shall take stock of why we got where we are, and venture some answers to the unanswerable question: where are we going?

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WHY WE ARE WHO WE ARE: A SOCIOCULTURAL GEOLOGY OF TODAY'S WORLD

Coming together as members of humankind, we need, in order to relate and interact properly, to understand our differences – and not just the obvious ones, i.e., that we do not look alike, and talk in different tongues. Our basic values and tastes differ and our conceptions of the world and our expectations of life are different, as are our sense of body, sex and family. While no social scientist or psychologist will ever be able to grasp the infinite variety of human individuality, our differences tend to be historically and geographically patterned, and are thereby comprehensible.

As humans, we descend from different historical cultures and experiences. Our first task in grasping the world of humankind is to get a handle on this historical descent and experience. The most promising, if so far hardly used, approach, then, is to look at contemporary human societies and configurations from a perspective of social geology. The sociocultural mould, in which we have been formed, is not just of yesterday. It had better be understood as layered by different social processes of different age.

Sketching the contours of a contemporary global social geology depends on world history, of which the 1,300 or so pages of a 'brief' world history by Felipe Fernández-Armesto (2008) are a wonderful start. But this book is neither dabbling in it nor competing with it. It is looking at the sedimentations of history from the special vantage point of the present. Our focus is not the historical record, but the historical DNA which we are carrying in our social and cultural make-up.

In this vein, I have found three extensive layers of human social formation, around the myriad of local strata, particularly pertinent. The most ancient we may, in accordance with much everyday language, call 'civilizations', in plural, spatially grounded cultural configurations of enduring importance, with 'classical' languages, texts and/or oral traditions, views of life and after-life, sense of beauty, notions of family, sex and gender.

Secondly, world patterns of society and culture history have been lastingly shaped by transcultural, transpolity, transcontinental processes, which we may term 'waves of globalization', even if, prior to 1492, they were not literally global. Thriving from long-distance travel, communication and exchange, these waves have by no means all been primarily economic in dynamics and significance. Religion and politics have also been at the forefront. These waves have further given rise to two important hybrid family-sex-gender systems, in Southeast Asia and in the Americas.

The third layer is 'modernity', the modern world. In the same way that art museums nowadays distinguish contemporary from modern art, so we should distinguish the contemporary from the modern world. The latter is a crucial historical layer of our formation, for two reasons. One is that modernity fought its way into cultural domination along different routes and across different constellations of proponents and opponents. These pathways have left their imprint on how much weight we give today to religion, to ideology, to class, to language. Secondly, the birth of the modern world was also the establishment of the current divide into what is now euphemistically referred to as 'developed' and 'developing', aka 'underdeveloped', countries. For almost all of us, being born in one or the other makes an enormous difference. Why that rift opened up and has divided the world for, by now, two centuries remains subject to seemingly interminable controversy. How it happened is somewhat less controversial. In the geological perspective of this book, the divide was established through the confluence of the roads to modernity and the fourth wave of historical globalization.

In other words, we are who we are because of the civilization and the family-sex-gender system in which we were brought up, because of our home's location in the recurrent historical waves of globalization, piled upon each other, and, finally, because of our society's experience of the struggles for and against modernity. Individualists are not wrong in adding that these are moulds that can be broken and rejected, but they are naive if they assume that their impact can be wished away.

The Rock of Civilizations

The global geological perspective adopted here focuses, and narrows, our look at civilizations, which may be approached in several different ways (see Braudel 1963/87; Fernández-Armesto 2000, Huntington 1996; International Sociology 2001). The comparative study of (Eurasian) civilizations had already become a 'fine art' in ninth-century Baghdad (Chaudhuri 1990: 67). What we are concerned with are large, enduring cultural configurations, pertinent to our contemporary world. Historically, they have been shaped by geospatial forces – Braudel's first rule of the grammar of civilizations was 'civilizations are spaces' – which now may elude the non-specialist. In such configurations we expect to find a cosmological and moral worldview, a pattern of symbolic imaginations, and, in literate civilizations, one or more classical languages and a classical canon, of cosmology, ethics, politics and aesthetics. Eventual clashes or dialogues between civilizations are out of focus here. To what extent they bear upon the dynamics of today's world will be considered below.

For this purpose we may identify five ancient major civilizations of enduring importance. This is not meant to be an exhaustive list; my only claim is that there is no other of as much or greater importance in terms of numbers of people encultured by it. It should be remembered that here we are not aiming at a brief historical summary of civilizations, or of any other layer of the world's sociocultural geology, but at grasping key features of their current significance.

The Sinic

Sinic civilization is the largest of all. Developed and centred in China, it spread far outside *Han* culture, to Korea, Japan and Vietnam. The adjective 'Sinic' is used in civilizational analysis precisely to convey this larger configuration. A recent scholar (Fogel 2009) has called it the 'Sinosphere'. Its Chinese core, developed around and between the Yangtze and the Yellow rivers, is the oldest of all major civilizations today. It is the only continuously surviving of the great ancient fluvial civilizations, including those of the Euphrates and Tigris, of the Nile and of the Indus. A civilization of dense population, fed by wet-rice and millet, governed by a large centre of political organization, only by exception divided among different rulers. A sedentary civilization, which more than 2,000 years ago as a defence against nomadic 'barbarians', built the largest construction in human history, the Great Wall.

The most distinctive feature of the Sinic worldview is a non-transcendental moral and social philosophy, usually summarized as 'Confucianism', without God or gods. The currently world-spreading Chinese cultural centres bear the name of Confucius (who died in 479 before Christ). Sinic civilization is distinctively this-worldly, without sacred texts of godly narratives and revelations. Human life runs along bloodlines, which it is a moral duty to keep and to venerate. House altars are devoted not to gods, but to one's ancestors. 'Filial piety', a son's love and respect of his father, is the prime social norm.

True, the tradition has recognized something extra-worldly and sublime: the emperor was the Son of Heaven ruling with a mandate from Heaven. But this heaven was nebulous, harbouring no commanding patriarch like the Jewish-Christian-Muslim God, no godly dramas and impersonations as in the Hindu world, nor the spiritual animation of extra-worldly Africa. The imperial mandate could be lost, but not because some divine law had been violated. 'Heaven sees as people see; Heaven hears as people hear', Mencius, the paradigmatic disciple of Confucius, explicated (Tu 1990: 119). The Master himself had established a this-worldly focus: 'When still unable to do your duty to men, how can you do your duty to the spirits?' 'Not yet understanding life, how can you understand death?' (Bodde 1981: 321). This moral philosophy has left ample room for different religious faiths – Buddhism and Taoism together with Confucianism constituting the 'three teachings' in China – as well as for all kinds of magical beliefs and practices. But always off-centre, as if in Europe and West Asia, Christianity and Islam had remained a popular under-vegetation to a reigning Aristotelian philosophy.

To the contemporary world, Confucianism has left a legacy of secular politics, of meritocratic educational credentialism and patriarchal familism. While understandable pride in ancient power and glory sustained conservatism, political modernizers in the Sinosphere have never had to confront a powerful religious reaction – not the late nineteenth-century Westernizers of Japan, nor the Chinese, the North Korean or the North Vietnamese (the South was different) communists, nor the birth-controlling military men of post-Second World War capitalism in South Korea and Taiwan. The extraordinary Mandarin examination system, formally recruiting officials on a meritocratic basis of classical education, which was not fully institutionalized in Japan but which covered China, Korea and Vietnam, put a high value on education, and on education that was, in principle, accessible to everybody. Mass education emerged as a trump card

of East Asian development in the twentieth century. To the family system, inherited and reproduced, we shall return below.

To the heirs of the Sinic civilization, a key feature of it is the language – that is, the written language, the ideographic Chinese script. This script is the classical language of this civilization. It was the common language of educated communication throughout the region at least until the Second World War, in spite of the fact that the spoken languages are mutually unintelligible, and that separate scripts had been developed in Japan, Korea and Vietnam. Communication in this classical Chinese script was known as 'brush talking' (Howland 1996: 44ff). The ideograms could be understood by educated people across national boundaries throughout the civilization, like numerals and mathematical symbols between, say, English and Russian. The Japanese and the Koreans developed their own, simpler syllable scripts, which in the twentieth century became dominant, and late nineteenth-century colonial French missionaries succeeded in converting the Vietnamese – who had also produced an indigenous lower-culture script of their own – to the Latin alphabet, supplemented with a set of diacritical marks.

Chinese characters, *kanji*, are still part of Japanese writing, and part of East Asian classical education. Upon the insistence of its main corporate donors, a major private university of Seoul, Korea University, where I taught in 2007, demands a knowledge of 2,000 Chinese characters for student admission. The script has also given rise to a special art form: calligraphy. While not unique, it is cultivated also in the Islamic civilization and it maintains an unrivalled position in Sinic civilization. The main monument of the Beijing Tiananmen, in front of the big Mao mausoleum, was a column to the 'Heroes of the People'. Its original inscription was in Mao's calligraphy, and the text alongside in that of Premier Zhou Enlai.

A classical education in Sinic civilization is nowadays usually as fragmented, intellectually as well as socially, as a classical education in Europe, but my Chinese students at Cambridge have studied Confucius. A proper classical Sinic education included, above all, the *Analects* of Confucius, and the Five Classics, the *Book of Documents* (on just government), the *Book of Poetry,* the *Book of Songs* (on emotions), the *Book of Rites* (on social relations), the *Spring and Autumn Annals* a state chronicle) (Tu 1990: 123ff). There were also the canonical *Book of Changes* and the *Book of Music* (Poceski 2009: 37).

Classical forms of architecture were consolidated during the Tang Dynasty (seventh to tenth century CE), but classical principles of

urban layout are much older. They still govern central Beijing, the Forbidden City and its surroundings, the layout of Kyoto and of central Seoul, and characterize the Van Mieu Confucian complex in Hanoi, nowadays often referred to as the Temple of Literature (Logan 2000: 26ff). Contemporary East Asian skyscrapers in their basically international style often add a roof reference to the East Asian canon – an upside-down reverence as classical Sinic architecture which was low-rise horizontal – and they regularly take *feng shui* principles of geomancy into consideration. Regional and national variants have developed across East Asia, but a 'neo-classical' building there remains recognizably different from, say, South Asian or European, neoclassicism.

The East Asia of Sinic civilization is a densely populated area, still largely governed by its ancient norms of obligation and harmony. Crime and family disruption are more marginal than in the rest of the world. Politics may be authoritarian and repressive of dissent, but social harmony and consensual decision-making remain important norms. Ancient historical traditions are kept alive, as in the imperial rituals of Japan, the recent museums of Seoul, the new monumentality of Hanoi, and in the recent Confucian robing of the Chinese state. In Pyongyang – in the early twentieth century known as the 'Jerusalem of the East' because of the successful proselytization by Scottish Presbyterians – there may be more rupture with the past, but in China Mao was proud of, and used, his classical education of history, poetry and calligraphy. He had read the 24 dynastic chronicles, covering all the emperors of China from 221 BC to 1644 CE several times, eagerly discussing them with his physician and private conversation partner. Before his numerous sexual encounters, he often gave the girls a classical Daoist sex manual, with ancient, rare characters, to read (Li 1994: 122ff, 358).

The identities produced by this civilization are not me-centred, but sociocentric or contextual. The languages of the area have several different words corresponding to the English 'I', used according to social context. In Vietnamese, when talking to one's parents and referring to oneself, the first pronoun should be avoided altogether, and, instead, expressions like 'your son/daughter' should be used (I owe this piece of knowledge to my Vietnamese former star student, Pham Van Bich; on Chinese, Japanese and Korean, see Nisbett 2003: 51ff, 178).

From ancient Greece to contemporary Euro-America, there is a focus on, a concern with, the acting individual, with agency and its constraints – recycled as agency and structure in 1980s sociologi-

cal debates. Their East Asian counterpoint is a concern with interrelations, totality and the 'harmony' of the whole, in which all individuals and groups have their proper place, like a successful blend of herbs and spices in a good dish. And 'harmony' is a current explicit policy goal of the Chinese government. To Euro-American confrontation of right against wrong is counterposed East Asian avoidance of division, and adjustment. That is the civilizational heritage underlying, for instance, Japanese government policymaking and corporate board management, as well as ASEAN decision-making. The opaqueness of contemporary Chinese top-level decision-making had better not be abused for ungrounded exemplifications. However, there is another aspect of the latter which is visible. That is the long-term view, radical and patient at the same time, which characterized the modernist political planning of nineteenth-century Meiji Japan and which is characterizing the Chinese post-Mao era of socioeconomic reform.

In an impressive work – using a range of hard evidence running from ancient Chinese and Greek philosophy to contemporary comparative child development, psychology and managerial studies, via cross-cultural student experiments – the American psychologist Richard Nisbett has demonstrated how Sinic and European civilizations have generated distinctive ways of seeing and knowing the world. The differences were there among the great philosophers 2,500 years ago, and they are here among parents, toddlers, students and managers of the 2000s. Of course, the differences are probabilistic, and are not inscribed in every single Chinese, Japanese, European or American of European descent.

Europeans tend to see the world in analytical categories, East Asians in a web of relationships. A simple example, used by Nisbett in his experiments, which also caught this writer off-guard as Eurocentric, is to ask people which two phenomena belong together from a triplet – in one version, panda, monkey, banana. Europeans tend to group the panda and the monkey as belonging to the same category, of animals. East Asians, on the other hand, mostly opt for monkey and banana as related, monkeys eating bananas. Euro-Americans tend to see the world in either – or categories, whereas East Asians more often see it in contradictory dialectical terms, of x as well as non-x. Mao Zedong may not have been the great thinker his adulators once claimed, but his contribution to Marxism was precisely his Chinese sense of dialectics.

The Sinic civilization today holds an immense cultural pride in a rich, ancient, continuous civilization, which, after its decline and

intellectual rejection in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, is still there in modern, prosperous or rapidly growing countries. This pride is most general in China (cf. Jacques 2009: chs. 7–8), the centre of the civilization, whereas in Japan, Korea and Vietnam it is grafted onto national cultural traditions. Its main historical weakness has been its self-centredness, which finally led to self-isolation from the rest of the world, in turn causing a stagnation of science, technology and economy that, by mid-nineteenth century, had become nearly fatal. Its most important strengths are probably its tradition of large-scale collective work organization, of civic discipline, its high evaluation of education and learning and its secular framework, which provides little room and basis for religious conservatism and inter-religious strife.

The Indic

India and Indic as well as Hindu all derive from the river Indus, in today's Pakistan, but none of them has any known direct connection with the Indus valley civilization, which disappeared about 4,000 years ago. Indic civilization began emerging 500–1,000 years later, developed by peoples coming from the northwest of Iran and Central Asia, 'Aryans' – from whom the current name of Iran stems – through today's Afghan passes and by the five-rivers country, Punjab. From its northwestern beginnings it fanned out eastwards, along the plain of Ganges – which has become a holy river of Hinduism, on which lies also what is perhaps the main religious centre of this polycentric faith, Varanasi (or Benares) – reaching southern India much later.

Indic has a similar relationship to India as *Sinic* has to China, extending conventional India south- and eastwards, to current Sri Lanka, to Bali and Java, and to what is now Myanmar/Burma, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and into southern Vietnam. It also grew north, into and across the Himalayas, into Nepal and Tibet, whose Lamanism is an offshoot of Indian Buddhism. The European expression 'Indochina' captures the meeting-ground of Sinic and Indic civilizations. It is the southwestern end of Chinese characters, architecture and chopsticks, and the mainland eastern end of Sanskrit inscriptions and sculptural Indic temples, which reached into the Cambodia of the Angkor Wat temples, Laos and southern Vietnam under the Champa of the first half of the second Christian millennium, and of reading the *Mahabbarata* and the *Ramayana*, still part of the royal rites of Thailand (Coedès 1966, 1968).

Cognitive psychologists have discovered some similarities of causal attribution, emphasizing context more than actor's disposition, between East and South Asian cultures, in contrast to Euro-American ones (Nisbett 2003: 114ff), and there may be others, e.g., a holistic worldview in which individuals are embedded in larger contexts (Singh 2002: 32ff). In different ways, both civilizations have been able to tolerate and to manage religious pluralism, although in both cases these have been occasionally violated by bigoted rulers. The secular Confucian tradition of moral and political philosophy left a space open for different personal beliefs and practices – Daoist, Buddhist, Shintoist, Christian. Infinitely polytheistic Hinduism, on its side, could easily coexist with Jainist, Buddhist, Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Sikh gods and beliefs.

But the Indic and the Sinic are also civilizations in some respects poles apart, in spite of their geographical proximity and of their Buddhist cultural exchanges 1,500–2,000 years ago.

First of all, while Sinic civilization is predominantly this-worldly and secular, the Indic is soaked in religion. The religiosity of Indians was a story already in the Hellenistic world, and at least apocryphally in classical Greece. An early fourth-century CE bishop told this anecdote: An Indian asked Socrates to define his philosophy and got the answer: 'It is a study of human reality.' Whereupon the Indian visitor burst into scornful laughter: 'How can a man study human reality while ignoring divine reality!' (Braudel 1963/1987: 66).

Arguably the most distinctive feature of Indic civilization, common to Hinduism and to Buddhism, is the notion of transmigration or rebirth of souls, and the idea that the lives of their incarnations are determined by deeds in a previous life. This provided a firm and deep religious foundation of a hierarchical social division, of *varna*, originally not very different from similar conceptions in East Asia or in Europe. In the Indian version there were four major rungs, the priestly Brahmins (also written Brahmans), the ruler-warrior Kshatriyas, the farming or trading Vaisyas and the Sudra servants and labourers. Below the latter there emerged a stratum of 'untouchables', whose duties included performing the most polluting tasks, like taking care of latrines or skinning dead animals. Gradually, a large number of inherited occupational *jatis* or castes were distinguished. Caste members all had to marry within their caste, and social interaction between castes was governed by religiously anchored rules of purity and pollution. A Brahmin could not accept food or drink from lower castes; an untouchable had to keep out of the way of all others, never letting his or her shadow fall upon them, etc.

Much of the rigid caste hierarchy and its 'pollution' taboos have now been eroded. Independent India has given disadvantaged, 'scheduled' castes privileged access to public employment. Democratic politics has brought forward prominent *Dalit* ex-untouchable politicians, from the extraordinarily brilliant Dr B. R. Ambedkar, a father of the Indian Constitution, to the mass-appealing prime minister of Uttar Pradesh, Mayawati, who, although she has been democratically elected – three times to date – is not unlike a nineteenth-century plebeian Caribbean *caudillo*. Former untouchables may now enter or approach many, if not all, village stores, and many village wells, if far from all. Although the marriage ads of the Delhi papers were still grouped by caste when I studied them a few years ago, there was also at the end a small section, 'Caste does not matter'. However, caste hierarchy, which spread also to South Asian Muslims, is still an important legacy of Indic civilization. While its hierarchy may be being eroded by the politics of numbers, caste identity and caste associations constitute obvious targets of political mobilization. And, for everybody to see, your caste is given by your name. (The literature on caste in India is huge. A few of the recent important works I have consulted include Yadav 2006; Rao 2009; Thorat and Newman 2010).

Mahatma Gandhi was an extraordinary embodiment of his culture, and an extraordinary political leader of his people. He was not representative statistically, but he was a major modern incarnation of Indic civilization, demonstrated by his iconoclastic attempts to get those from higher castes to clean Congress Party latrines. With his highly charged symbolic politics, his repudiation of industrial developmentalism, and his dramatic body asceticism, he would have been inconceivable (or dismissed as a freak) in any other part of the world.

India is still a stage of extraordinary religious performances, of naked, wandering *sadhus* or holy men, of *devadasis*, prostitutes dedicated (by poor parents) to their vocation as children in temple ceremonies, of Tantric awakeners of spirits from skulls, and of many more – performers who have little to do with the more familiar modern world of business, film or medicine (Dalrymple 2009). True, India embodies everything and its opposites too. Atheism also has a significant place in the overwhelmingly lush vegetation of Indic beliefs. A major regional political party, the DMK of the southern Tamil Nadu state, has been even more militantly secularist than French state *laïcité* or Turkish Kemalism, not only banning, in 1967, gods and goddesses from schools and public offices of the state, but also staging 'superstition eradication' conferences (Smith 2003: 147). The culture venerating its numerous ascetics also produced the

world's most famous erotic manual, the *Kamasutra*, and built the world's most sexually explicit temple, Khajuraho. But religious rites, at home as well as in temples or in the sacred river of the Ganges, remain important parts of Indian life. The subcontinent and its island appendix Sri Lanka, for all their diversity, are also sites of intercommunal religious violence, driven not only by *Hindutva* militants, but also, in Sri Lanka, by Buddhist zealots and, in Pakistan, by intra-Islamic conflict.

The East Asian Mandarins had to compete for their status as the guardians of knowledge in the world's first meritocratic system, whereas the Brahmins inherited their knowledge, which was to be off-limits to non-Brahmins. India and South Asia still have a high rate of illiteracy alongside a very developed system of higher education, churning out loads of IT engineers as well as masses of intellectuals.

Sinic civilization had a single political focus: the emperor and his empire. The Indic never had an established imperial centre. What is now the Indian Union was never politically united before 1947, and the largest political units of the subcontinent were all headed by non-Hindu rulers. Ashoka (third century BC) was Buddhist, the great Mughals of the seventeenth century CE were Muslims of Turkic-Mongol descent – 'Mughal' is a Persian word for Mongol – and their British nineteenth–twentieth-century successors were Christian. The great Mughal rulers of the seventeenth century CE were paramount on the subcontinent, but were never continental unifiers nor uncontested. The British rule combined areas of direct colonial rule, centred in Calcutta, Delhi, Bombay and Madras, and including most of today's Pakistan and Bangladesh – and of current Burma – with 'protected' princely states, of which Hyderabad, Mysore and Rajputana were the most important. It was a set of religious conceptions of life, and of before- and after-life, with its *dharma* obligations and its *kama* deeds and rituals, which polytheistically unified Indic civilization, through the Brahmins, who had ritual priority over the rulers, their temples and their knowledge of sacred rules and rites, conveyed in the subcontinental elite language of Sanskrit.

Today, most of the enduring features of the civilization of India may derive from Brahminic Hinduism, and there is a powerful political current, which emerged in national government office a few years ago, asserting its Hindu character. But to substitute Hindu for Indic civilization would be unhistorical. It is not just a polytheistic civilization; it is poly-religious, in a complex, interwoven way which Hinduism alone among religions could manage. Buddhism grew out of

Hinduism, as did Jainism and Sikhism. Jewish, Christian and Parsee minorities have more than a millennial presence in India. Major Muslim rule in India began in the early eleventh century, under Mahmud of Ghazni (in today's Afghanistan), was succeeded by the end of the twelfth century by a Sultanate in Delhi and became paramount in the sixteenth century with the Mughals. It has been estimated that a fourth of the subcontinental population converted to Islam, mainly low-caste people, while the Muslim elite tended to come from outside, from Afghanistan, Persia, Central Asia (Singh 2002: 66ff). Caste penetrated Indian Islam, Sufism attracted Hindu interest, while the converted Muslims tended to keep their pre-Islamic culinary tastes and festival practices. But the crucial point in this particular context is not the truth of historical multiculturalism. It is the abiding weight of an ecumenical religiosity, from the Buddhist emperor Ashoka, emblematically referred to in the Indian flag, 2,300 years ago, and the 'good Muslim' Mughal ruler Akbar 400 years ago, to the twentieth-century moral and intellectual models, Tagore and Gandhi, a tradition to which the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty of independent India has always paid respect (cf. Sen 2005: ch. 13).

Sanskrit is the classical language of Indic civilization, cultural as well as religious, like Greek and Latin, almost like the latter no longer a living language – with a few local exceptions (Goody 2010: 161n) – but currently taught at Indian universities and favoured, together with other features of Hindu-interpreted Indic cvilization, by the BJP federal government of the beginning of the millennium. While the language is maintained mainly as an exclusive sacred language by the Brahmin caste, 'Sanskritization' has become a concept of modern Indian sociology, denoting a kind of collective caste mobility upwards by imitating the manners and rites of higher castes (Srinivas 2002: chs 12, 13).

The Indic classics were compiled between 2,500 and 3,000 years ago – nobody really knows when, and the dating is still hotly controversial, among historians as well as ideologues. In contrast to the Sinic and the European, Indic civilization had little historiography. Its classics form a huge corpus, from the hymns and liturgies of *Vedas*, the philosophical *Upanishads*, the Code of Manu with its elaborate family norms, economic and erotic manuals, to the popular epics of *Ramayana* and of *Mahabharata*, the latter said to be 'India's equivalent to the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, and the Bible all rolled into one', 15 times the length of the Bible (Dalrymple 2009: 90), and the mythological and genealogical *Puranas*. Contemporary schoolteaching appears erratic on classical literary education, but the epics constitute