Two Logics of the Gift and Banquet: A Genealogy of China and the Northwest Coast

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Abstract

This Chapter discusses two logics of the gift and banquet and traces their genealogies from ethnographic examples in China today back to ancient China and Northwest Coastal cultures of America. One logic of the gift is reciprocity as examined by Marcel Mauss, while the second logic is the non-reciprocity of excessive generosity and ritual expenditures expounded by Georges Bataille. Both logics can be found in the classical texts of ancient China as well as in contemporary cultural practices. Northwest Coastal native cultures inspired Mauss and Bataille's theories of the gift, enabled them to mount different critiques of capitalist modernity, and to address such problems as utilitarianism, the lack of social cohesion and integration, and the unsustainability of endless accumulation and productivism. Since the experiences of Chinese modernity are predicated on the very Western theories that Mauss and Bataille were critiquing, and these theories have been absorbed into Chinese discourse and practice, often unconsciously, theories of the gift may serve as an antidote to some of the ills of Chinese modernity. The fact that many similarities between the potlatch cultures of native Northwestern

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Coast cultures and those of ancient China can be found, and the possibilities for the migration of cultural elements from ancient Asiatic Mainland across the Bering Sea into the American Northwest Coast can be established, makes this endeavor all the more important. For it shows that what Mauss and Bataille discovered as valuable logics of the gift that have a powerful relevance for modernity, can also be found in China's own past, one of the places where they may have originated. In China's eager and blind rush into modernity and its willful rejection of its past, it discarded these two valuable logics of the gift that could help it address the trenchant problems of modernity encountered today.

Keywords: Mauss, Bataille, Northwest Coast, feasting and *potlatch*

禮物與筵席的兩種邏輯：中國與北美西北海岸之淵源關係

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摘 要

本篇論文討論禮物與筵席的兩種邏輯，並從現今中國人種誌的例子與古代中國與北美西北海岸文化中追溯其淵源關係。禮物的邏輯之一是牟斯 (Marcel Mauss) 所討論的互惠性，其二是由巴岱爾 (George Bataille) 所研究的非互惠性：過度慷慨的贈予與儀式上的花費。這兩種邏輯都可在中國古代的經典作品與當代文化的實踐中見到。北美西北海岸的原住民文化啟發了牟氏與巴氏的禮物理論，讓他們能夠針對資本主義現代性提出不同的批判並對下列議題進行討論：功利主義、社會凝聚與整合力之缺乏，以及永無止盡的累積和生產之無法持續性。由於中國現代化的經驗正是建基於牟氏與巴氏所批判的西方理論上，而中國在論述與實踐中常常不自覺地吸收了這些西方理論，因此，禮物理論可以成為中國現代性所產生之一些弊病的解藥。北美西北海岸的原住民文化與中國古老文化之間有許多類似的誇富宴文化，而亞細亞古代大陸的文化元素跨越白令海峽延展到北美西北海岸的可能性可以成立，這個事實讓本論文所欲探討的問題更顯重要。因為我們的探討顯示被牟氏與巴氏所發現與現代性有重要關聯的禮物邏輯也在中國的過去中顯現，而古代中國甚至還可能是此邏輯的原生之地之一。不過中國對現代性的渴望使她盲目地躍進並刻意拒絕自己的遠古，結果這兩種寶貴的禮物邏輯也遭到丟棄，而這些邏輯事實上可以協助今日的中國處理在面對現代性時所遭遇的尖銳問題。（王葳真譯）

關鍵詞：牟斯、巴岱爾、西北海岸、筵席、誇富宴

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I. Gift Culture, Anthropology, and the Critique of Modernity

I would like to discuss two important logics of the gift and their relevance for Chinese modernities by going back to the beginning of the 20th century, to the works of French sociologist Emile Durkheim, his nephew Marcel Mauss, and the surrealist and philosopher Georges Bataille. Durkheim founded the journal *L'Année Sociologique* in 1898 and Mauss was a key member of the editorial group. Bataille was influenced by both of their works and was a member of the Collège de Sociologie, an informal group of intellectuals that met from 1937 to 1939 in Parisian cafes that was dedicated to retrieving "the sacred" for modern society (Richman 2002).

Now, we often hear from nationalistically inclined Chinese intellectuals that, as Chinese thinkers, we should not be slaves to Western theory. Instead, we should seek to "sinicize" modern Chinese thought. After all, did not the ancient Confucian thinkers already recognize the social importance of gift-giving over two millennia *before* Marcel Mauss' classic *The Gift*, which was only published in 1925?

> 太上貴德，其次務施報。禮尚往來，往而不來，非禮也；來而不往，亦非禮也。 《禮記．曲禮》

> In the highest antiquity they prized (simply conferring) good; in the time next to this, giving and repaying was the thing attended to. And what the rules of propriety value is that reciprocity. If I give a gift and nothing comes in return, that is contrary to propriety; if the thing comes to me, and I give nothing in return, that also is contrary to propriety.
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> "Qu Li" in *Book of Rites* (Legge, trans. 1885: 65)

This is of course true, that many ideas in modern Western critical theory can be found scattered in many ancient Chinese texts, albeit in quite different configurations and contexts. However, the problem with native Chinese theories is that they were formulated in a vastly different world that did not experience the tremendous shocks and transformations of the modern age. There is indeed a wealth of ancient Chinese wisdom that can address our contemporary situation, but they are too deeply embedded in ancient discursive structures that no longer speak to the modern age. We need to formulate new discursive structures which can retrieve ancient Chinese culture and re-embed them into modern thought in new ways.

While the desire to avoid parroting Western theory is totally understandable, however, we must not be in denial of the vast transformations of culture that have already taken place in 20th century China that have cut off modern Chinese thought from the flow of ancient Chinese discourse. Much of these transformations took place through the uncritical absorption of earli-

er hegemonic Western theories and their modernizing discourses of evolutionism, nationalism, individualism, secularism, liberalism, Marxism, and so forth. This absorption has already taken place and has had deep-seated cultural impacts in every aspect of Chinese life, and that is why native theories no longer speak so compellingly to us. For almost all non-Western cultures around the globe, the entry into modernity was a step into a world which from the beginning, was not of their own making. If the modern world was constructed largely out of Western theories, then all modern societies are to different extents already caught up in this world, and so, even the wish to avoid Western theory may itself be based unconsciously on one set of Western theories which opposes another set of Western theories. My suggestion here is that certain alternative Western theories that have not had much impact in China can help us return to Chinese cultural traditions in a new way and retrieve those elements that can redress the excesses of the earlier Chinese embracing of hegemonic Western theories of high modernism.

The task before us now is not avoiding Western theory, for we cannot undo what has already occurred in the last century, but to be critical and selective as to which Western theories are beneficial or appropriate to deal with the current situation (and in which domains), and which native theories could be developed to address the conditions of modernity. This critical and selective attitude towards Western theory would be guided by how it can be reconciled with deep Chinese cultural imperatives or concerns, or how the theory could be reworked and adapted to them. Simply put, we no longer live in a world where it is possible to avoid Western thought because we ourselves are a part of it. However, we can be selective and deploy one set of Western theories against another that have become hegemonic and unconsciously ac-

cepted. By turning to Durkheim, Mauss, and Bataille, whose theories were critical of the very Western theories that have become hegemonic in China today, I hope to prepare the groundwork for a re-examination of native theories of the logics of the gift in Chinese tradition.

Although Durkheim, Mauss, and Bataille never undertook the study of Chinese culture, each of them devoted much time exploring premodern and non-Western societies, through works written by anthropologists and travelers. Durkheim's notions of "collective effervescence" and social solidarity would not have been possible without his consideration of the Australian aborigine examples. Marcel Mauss' detour through the *potlatch* (or feasting) cultures of Native Americans in the Northwest Coast and the *kula* exchange of the Trobriand Islands in Melanesia allowed him to conceive of the relationship between gift-giving and social cohesion. Cultures as diverse as Northwest Coast Native Americans, the Aztecs, Tibetan Buddhists, and medieval European Christendom, all provided contrastive examples that inspired Bataille's critique of Western industrial modernity. All three writers derived much inspiration from non-Western cultures for their theories addressing the problems of modernity.

We all know how the May Fourth Movement and the Chinese Communist Revolution have led to the wholesale rejection of ancient Chinese thought and culture, and the eager adoption of Western linear history, teleology, and narratives of "progress." This is because sadly, many modern Chinese intellectuals had accepted Western social evolutionism and the Orientalist binary categories of "advanced" and "backward" cultures, "the East" vs. "the West," and were not able to step outside of these powerful categories and see Chinese culture in any other terms. Nor did native theories have much of

a chance to engage adequately with the conditions of modernity, except briefly during the Republican era, before they were snuffed out. Whether Marxism, liberal individualism, utilitarianism, democracy, or other Western doctrines or solutions, they cannot work in modern China without being integrated and reconciled with deep cultural and often unconscious channels of social meaning and practice. Today, we need to find new non-dogmatic, non-defensive, and creative ways to re-engage with ancient Chinese culture to address the issues and problems of Chinese modernities.

What Durkheim, Mauss, and Bataille all shared, was their anthropological interest in archaic non-Western cultures, and I am especially interested in how their anthropology can help us to appreciate ancient Chinese cultural knowledge in a new way. They used the anthropology of primitive and archaic societies as an external fulcrum from which to reflect upon and critique Western modernity. Contrast this Western interest in what primitive societies have to offer modernity with May Fourth and some contemporary Chinese intellectuals who assume that only modern Western societies have anything to offer the Chinese in their efforts to critique and reform Chinese culture. Due to the May Fourth and Communist acceptance of Western social evolutionism, they hardly considered that primitive or archaic societies had anything to teach them, so anxious were they to escape the state of "backwardness." I believe that the anthropology of these three French thinkers can enable Chinese thinking to escape the Orientalist binary that has beset Chinese thought for too long. By going through a "third party," *i.e.*, primitive and archaic societies, we can re-examine and re-valorize some aspects of ancient Chinese culture and think about their relevance for addressing problems we face today.

II. Durkheim: Modernity & the Problem of Social Solidarity

Durkheim was very concerned about the problem of social integration and social solidarity in modern life. With the loss of religion, and the alarming increase of social isolation and *anomie*, how could modern Western industrial societies hold together without the old social cement? All his works address this issue. His *Division of Labor* contrasted the "mechanical solidarity" of small-scale societies with the "organic solidarity" of modern complex divisions of labor, and he found some solace in the thought that the necessary interdependence of modern highly specialized societies would confer a degree of social solidarity and prevent the social whole from flying apart. His work on suicides brought attention to a new modern category of suicide, "anomic suicides," which was the product of individualism and social isolation, and contrasted the higher incidence of suicides among Protestants, who were more individualistic, than among Catholics, who stressed social control and community life. It was in his work *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* that he turned to non-Western cultures such as the Australian aborigines, Melanesians, and Native Americans for inspiration on modern Western society. In the age of scientific reason and the decline of religion in the West, Durkheim not only introduced an unprecedented non-Christian definition of religion (Richman 2002), but also discovered an important social function of religion. Religion produces the "collective effervescence" that is the sacred force that can create a moral community and hold the disparate parts and individuals of society together. Hallowed and potent social symbols invested with the sacred force or whose use are restricted by taboos or prohibitions, are how societies represent their integrity and solidarity to themselves.

Since the 1960's in the Western academy, Durkheim's structural functionalism is regarded as old-fashioned and conservative, since it is seen as emphasizing the status quo instead of challenging social powers and promoting social change. However, I would suggest that Durkheim is still very relevant for Chinese today, since the issue of social solidarity for modernity in China is extremely pertinent. With the challenges and destructions of Western and Japanese imperialism, warlordism and the civil war, and the two revolutions, first to overthrow two millennia of dynastic rule, and then to overthrow the Guomindang, China's 20th century was beset by the repeated collapse of social order, as conflict and warfare took over. There was a desperate need to figure out effective models of social solidarity for modern times. Historical events conspired to solve this problem of social solidarity in modern China through the unprecedented expansion of the centralized state. In the Maoist era, never before had the state encompassed so many diverse aspects of social life, nor penetrated so deeply down into grassroots local society, and even the family and individual interiority, as found in Maoist confessional practices, diary-writing, and surveillance of family and individuals. The state not only owned and managed all means of production, whether agricultural or industrial, it was also the only social organization available for ethics, education, religion, art, and politics. Like other Soviet-type societies, Maoist China can be called 'mono-organizational society" because it allowed no other organizations, and all social organizations belonged to or were a part of the state apparatus. I think most of us understand the enormous price to be paid by relying on the state as the single force to produce social solidarity.

In the post-Mao era, people are now tentatively trying to figure out how to produce social solidarity without relying on the state; how to engen-

der social responsibility in the face of the ravages and greed of the new capitalism; and what sorts of social mechanisms can be used *instead of* the state, whose officials have become increasingly corrupt. That these mechanisms are woefully lacking and yet to be developed can be seen in the general outcry in China today that Chinese people now have very little ethics, and are ruled by the worship of money. It can also be seen in the various food poisoning and infant formula scandals of recent years, the increasing lavish lifestyles and impunity of officials and the powerful, and the various outcries on the internet about the callousness of passersbys to the plight of accident victims on the streets.

III. Mauss: Reciprocity and Generosity as Social Solidarity

I would like now to turn to the *first* of our two logics of the gift. In his classic *The Gift*, Marcel Mauss followed Durkheim's lead by showing that primitive exchange and economy could not be reduced to barter, but was highly social, generating impacts not only in the economic realm, but also in ethics and morality, politics, and religious realms. The delayed reciprocity of gift exchange means that the significance of gifts lies beyond the utilitarian or material gain of the gift itself, for gifts compel social obligation and reciprocity, and establish social relationships between persons and communities. Employing the Maori notion of "*hau*" or "spirit" of the gift, Mauss explained the compulsion to repay the social debt buried in the gift:

> One gives away what is in reality a part of one's nature and sub-

> stance, while to receive something is to receive a part of someone's spiritual essence. To keep this thing is dangerous, not only because it is illicit to do so, but also because it comes morally, physically and spiritually from a person… it retains a magical and religious hold over the recipient. The thing given is not inert. It is alive and often personified, and strives to bring to its original clan and homeland some equivalent to take its place. (Mauss 1967: 10)

Indeed, since each gift carries along a part of the giver as it changes hands, gift relations embed the person of the giver into the person of the receiver, whose social standing is thus lowered in the act of receiving, until the recipient is able to repay the gift. Thus, Mauss recognized reciprocity and generosity and their power to shape and control persons in a relationship—this is the first logic of the gift.

As we know from the *Book of Rites* quotation above on the back and forth of gifts, this mutual imbrication of the persons of giver and receiver, where part of the giver is in the gift, and the receiver loses part of his autonomy to the giver, is found in Chinese culture too. The creation of incomplete and interlocking persons through gift relations is part of Confucian teachings about the proper conduct of social relations. Indeed, it can be said that unlike post-Reformation Western culture, the basic unit of Confucian discourse is not the individual, but a social relationship, and traditional Chinese culture promoted the relational construction of persons. Thus, we can see that traditional Chinese culture produces a strong antidote to modern capitalist commodity relations, where economic transactions produce alienated individuals.

Potlatch and Feasting

Thanks to the fieldwork of Franz Boas and others, Mauss's thinking about gift culture was greatly influenced by the *potlatches* of the Northwest Coast Native American cultures.[1] Potlatches were great community gatherings and feasts held during the winter months, which could last several weeks. Banned by Canadian colonial authorities in 1885, and only legalized in 1951 (Cole 1991), they continue to be held today among the Native American communities of British Columbia. However, the current forms are a pale shadow of the "total prestations" that they used to be in the 19th century, when they served as the pivotal axis of the whole culture. The hosts were usually chiefs or influential persons representing powerful clans or families. Tremendous amounts of gifts and food were distributed to the guests with exaggerated generosity bordering on profligacy. Today in the Anthropology Museum of the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, one can see the giant carved and painted wooden food bowls, basins, and utensils that were used to serve the feast to guests, as well as the carved wooden masks that were used to impersonate the ancestors and animal totems of clans in ritual dancing.

Mauss discusses how the reciprocity engendered by potlatching was a primary way through which, not only wealth was redistributed, but politics was transacted, education was dispensed, and religious rituals were conducted. This is what Mauss meant by "total prestation," that the potlatch was a social institution that had reverberations in all aspects and domains of the

[1] The Northwest Coast Native American cultures of what is now British Columbia include such tribes as the Tlingit, the Kwakiutl (Kwak'waka-wak), the Haida, the Bella Coola, the Tsimshian, the Coast Salish, and the Nootka.

society. The generosity of giving at these feasts was expressed as a jostling for power and prestige between rival chiefs and clan heads. The presiding chiefs and heads represented, or were extensions of their communities, and when they engaged in rivalry, it was not just personal rivalry, but also rivalries between their respective communities, who collectively helped their chiefs put together the potlatch, which was both labor- and wealth-consuming. The amount of wealth given away was directly related to the amount of honor and authority the host and his community would gain. Among the important guests who were rivals with the host for prestige, whoever could not reciprocate in excess of what was given away at this potlatch, by holding a bigger and more expensive potlatch later, would be diminished in social stature. Since the Northwest Coast cultures did not have a state, but was what anthropologists call a "chiefdom," potlatch culture and its competitive generosity was the way in which rivals to positions of authority jostled for power. The anthropologist Helen Codere titled her book about the potlatch cultures *Fighting with Property* (1950), using a native phrase. Along with Boas, she observed that in the natives' view, before colonization by Westerners, they engaged in more warfare, but after the assertion of Western authority, they engaged instead in more frequent and costly potlatching. Thus, once a Western colonial state was established in the New World with a monopoly on violence, the Northwest Coast cultures turned most of their attention to social status competitions in civil society, where power was embedded in the social mechanism of the potlatch.

It is curious that Mauss compared this culture of agonistic male honor-jousting with Chinese culture, writing:

> Kwakiutl and Haida noblemen have the same notion of ‘face’ as the Chinese mandarin or officer. It is said of one of the great mythical chiefs who gave no feast that he had a ‘rotten face’. The expression is more apt than it is even in China; for to lose one’s face is to lose one’s spirit, which is truly the ‘face’, the dancing mask, the right to incarnate a spirit and wear an emblem or totem. (Mauss 1967: 38)

China has had a powerful centralized state apparatus since 221 BCE that long ago put in place mechanisms to clamp down on inter-clan and inter-regional military contestations of power. Yet, before the modern period, the Chinese imperial state was not totalizing, but allowed a great deal of local autonomy to local elites and local communities, so long as they delivered taxes and corvée labor. Just like the Kwakiutl and Haida nobles and chiefs who threw big potlatches in which the whole community was fed, rivalry between Chinese local elites and gentry took the form of showing who could benefit the community more, in generous donations to local temples, charities, disaster relief, or community festivals. Unlike India, which was also a hierarchical society, in China the hierarchy was not primarily determined by the circumstances of birth, and there was no caste system, leaving much more room for social mobility and active efforts in status rivalry. In China, the imperial examination system became an important avenue to social mobility, as was the holding of political office, for which education was a prerequisite. However, at the local level, neither education, political office, nor wealth by themselves could sustain social prestige for long. In keeping with the social obligations and reciprocities cultivated by gift cultures, generosity to the community was

still important in establishing honor and "face." Although China experienced a commercial revolution in the Song Dynasty, much earlier than the emergence of modern capitalism in 18th century Europe, China's pre-industrial commercialization did not displace older modes of social mobility and establishing of social status. In other words, unlike modern capitalism where ownership of property and wealth introduced the conversion of social status into economic class, premodern China still shared with the Northwest Coast cultures, an emphasis on honor and generosity as a way of establishing social status. For all these reasons, despite the ostensible differences between China and the Northwest Coast, they still shared the importance accorded to "face," honor, obligation, reciprocity, and community generosity, key elements of gift cultures.

The connection made here by Mauss between Northwest Coast and Chinese cultures, which both have the notion of "face," may be due to more than mere coincidence. Here I would like to take a short side excursion and explore some other similarities, and possible ancient links between Northwest Coast and Chinese cultures.

Possible Ancient Asia–America Connections

As we all know, Chinese culture also places a great emphasis on feasting and banqueting, complete with the etiquettes of exaggerated generosity and rivalry with other hosts. When I first arrived in Beijing in the early 1980's, I was riding in a car with a Chinese friend. We passed by a small gathering on the street, with people pulling and shoving each other, and the reluctant victims kicking up dust as they dug in their heels to resist being

pulled off somewhere. With a twinkle in his eye, my friend turned to me and asked what I thought was going on. I replied that the people were having a fight, perhaps passersby were trying to intervene in a couple's domestic squabble. He laughed heartily and told me that actually, it was one family trying to persuade the other family to stay for dinner at their home. My experience in China was that often, the lower the social rank of the host, the more the exaggerated or forceful the generosity. Once I visited a worker in Beijing, and he wanted me to stay for dinner with his family. I was very tired that day, and really wanted to go home to write up my fieldnotes, so I politely insisted that I could not stay. After some physical struggles in which I tried to get out his front door, and he restrained me, he finally and decisively pushed me down into a chair and immediately bolted his front door. I had no choice, but to stay for dinner, feeling a bit like a prisoner. During many banquets in China, I have also experienced the forceful generosity of the hosts, where food was piled up high on my plate, my glasses were constantly filled with beer, wine, or *baijiu*, the overpowering rice liquor, and I was repeatedly enjoined to eat and drink. I was often concerned and embarrassed by how much people were willing to spend on a banquet, a much higher proportion of their monthly earnings than I could or would ever spend myself. There was always some wasting of food, because the host would always offer much more food than anyone could finish, and sometimes the last dishes were left untouched because everyone was too full. I learned of the importance of seating positions, where the honored guest sits farthest from the door, and frequent tussles occurred in which different guests struggled to give each other the seat of honor. I also experienced innumerable times the same intense pressure to accept gifts which, however well-intentioned and generous, I could not fit

into my suitcase. In Taiwan in the 1980's, I remember encountering several situations where the entrance to a restaurant was blocked by the struggle between hosts and guests, each party insisting on giving precedence to the other to enter first.

In the Confucian classics, the host-guest (主人—賓客) relationship is a frequent trope for discussions of propriety, ethics, and social relationships, as in the "Country Feast" (〈鄉飲酒義〉) chapter of the *Book of Rites* (《禮記》), a Han Dynasty text.[2] Here, we see an important commonality between Northwest American Coast and Chinese cultures, of the social importance of banquets and feasting. Certainly, in both cases, there is an elaborate banquet etiquette and emphasis on social rank, proper seating arrangements, and order of precedence. As Aldona Jonaitis, a curator at the American Museum of Natural History,[3] writes about Northwest Coast potlatch rituals:

> This emphasis on correct procedure was applied alike to ordinary meals and opulent feasts sponsored by high-ranking chiefs. Acts that publicly demonstrated the relative social position of each member of the community, such as the right of noble individuals to eat and drink before others, were an important component of the public dining experience. (Jonaitis 1991: 25)

[2] Eugene Cooper has suggested that the "country feast" as depicted in the *Book of Rites* and the *Yi Li* (《儀禮》) may describe something like ancient Chinese potlatches (Cooper 1982), but this seems far-fetched, for reasons explained below.

[3] The American Museum of Natural History possesses a major collection of Northwest Coast Native American artifacts, collected by Franz Boas and others over the course of many ethnographic journeys in the late 19th and early 20th centuries to northern Vancouver Island and the west coast of British Columbia.

Similarly, in the Chinese “Country Feast,” there is a rule that:

> Those who are sixty years of age and above should be seated, while those in their fifties and below must stand and wait upon them. This is to make clear the respect accorded to seniority. Those who are in their sixties will be served three dishes; those in their seventies will be served four dishes; those in their eighties will be served five dishes; those in their nineties will be served six dishes. This is to make clear the importance of taking care of the elderly.
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> “Country Feast” in *Book of Rite* (Wang 1987: 976)

The “Country Feast” passage then goes on to explain that these ritual requirements are intended to instill in the feast participants an ethic of filial piety and respect for seniority and elders, which are hallmarks of a socially educated populace, and such a populace will produce a harmonious state. Furthermore, it is not necessary to go door-to-door to promote filial piety to each family, or constantly admonish people on a daily basis, for merely gathering people for these feasts and having them observe the correct ritual procedures are enough to inculcate them with these ethics. Thus, both Northwest Coast potlatches and the Chinese country feast are highly ritualized social feasting events that produced social dispositions and re-enforce the social ranking system.

From the Shang and Zhou bronze ritual vessels that have been the mainstay of the archaeological findings of these periods, we know that a feasting culture existed much earlier than the Han Confucianism of the *Book*

of Rites and the *Yili*. In contrast to the wooden food vessels of the Northwest Coast potlatches, the Chinese bronze ritual vessels were used to hold the raw meats of animal sacrifices offered to the gods and ancestors, and also as cooking vessels for the meat and other ingredients. If the Confucian classics are any guide to earlier Shang and Zhou ritual sacrificial practices, after the food was offered to the ancestral spirits, they were divided up and fed to the ritual participants according to social ranking. This means that the Shang and Zhou rituals involving the use of bronze ritual vessels were different from Northwest Coast potlatches in that they featured sacrifices to ancestors and gods above rather than gifts to human clan rivals. Nevertheless, what they share are ritual transactions of food gifts and the cultivation of generosity and reciprocity in the context of feasting. What Confucian moral reasoning did to the earlier Shang and Zhou sacrificial feasts was to harmonize them in order to inculcate a more sedate culture through ethical teachings.[4]

The Confucian textual treatment of the ancient Chinese country feast seems to describe something quite different from a potlatch. The *Book of Rites* Chapter focuses on the etiquette and ritual steps of a collective feasting and drinking event, and there is no discussion of giving away gifts or property during the event. Among the Kwakiutl people of the Northwest Coast, feasts and potlatches are clearly distinguished: the potlatch includes a feast, but also involves giving away gifts or payments of nonperishable goods (Jonaitis 1991:104), such as animal skins in the time before the arrival of Westerners, and later Hudson Bay blankets introduced by Europeans. Another important difference between them is one of style and ethos. The Confucian

[4] See my earlier discussion of the tension between Confucian ritual ethics and Legalist state discourse and sovereign law and punishment (Yang 1991; 1994).

descriptions of polite and sedate ritual banquet movements are in stark contrast with the rivalrous potlatch rituals of the Northwest Coast cultures. From Boas, we get a taste of the agonistic ethos of potlatches:

> Boys and men are vying with each other in … the distributions of property. Boys of different clans are pitted against each other by their elders, and each is exhorted to do his utmost to outdo his rival. And as the boys strive against each other, so do the chiefs and the whole clans, and the one object of the Indian is to outdo his rival. (Boas 1966: 81)

In contrast to this combative one-upsmanship, the Chinese "country feast" describes the relationship between host and guests as polite and harmonious. For example, even the brief ritualistic vying between host and guest, each trying to give the other the honor of the first move at the entrance, is portrayed in the *Book of Rites* as a dainty formal procedure. After the host brings the guest into the room, they bow to each other three times and then each tries to give precedence to the other three times before the guest finally ascends the stairs (三讓而後升). After the guest ascends, the host bows to thank him for doing so, then he washes a wine goblet for the guest, which is acknowledged with a bow from the guest. Then the host fills the goblet with wine and graciously presents it to the guest, who bows to receive it. The host bows to acknowledge the guest drinking the wine. The passage then moves on to explain the ritual efficacy of this ritual procedure:

> 君子尊讓則不爭，絜敬則不慢，不慢不爭，則遠於鬥辨矣；不鬥

辨則無暴亂之禍矣。　　《禮記・鄉飲酒義》

> The gentleman respectfully gives precedence [to the guest], therefore [the ritual] promotes an ethos of avoiding struggle. Pure and dignified is he, therefore he is not arrogant or lacking in courtesy. Not lacking in courtesy and not indulging in contestation, therefore he distances himself from struggle and argument. Not engaging in struggle and argument, therefore [the ritual] enables people to avoid violent social outbreaks and disasters.
>
> "Country Feast," *Book of Rites* (Wang 1987: 972-73)[5]

Thus, the Confucian descriptions of the country feast stress how the ritual steps solidify and confirm *pre*-existing status and ranks of host and assistant host, primary guest and secondary guests, and the different age-grades. In contrast, the Northwest Coast potlatches were the *very means* through which hosts could change or upgrade their positions, so they are predicated on shifting and fluid social statuses. This is in line with the fact that China had already become a state-ordered society, with the state providing more social stability, and the state or its representatives could promote or demote people in rank, instead of relying on rituals of generosity to do so. The ethnographic descriptions of Northwest Coast cultures were made just at the point when these non-state societies were starting to be brought under the authority of a Western colonial state power, but their ranking system was still being worked

[5] Unless otherwise indicated, the translations from Chinese into English are my own, after consulting the modern Chinese annotations and translation into modern Chinese by Wang Meng-ou (王夢鷗) (1987).

out through potlatches.

Although the ethos and style of the Confucian banquet is quite different from the Northwest Coastal potlatches, nevertheless, what is significant is that for both cultures, the reciprocity of feasting and gifting enjoys a pivotal social role. As I see it, the ancient Confucians sought to ritualize all social transactions, not by inventing new social relations, but by subjecting existing social institutions and relations to higher ethical and ritual standards. They sought to build upon what was then already a deeply ingrained culture of reciprocity and banqueting, in order to promote a system of harmonious, but hierarchically ordered social ethics. Just as the ancient Confucians found the music of the Shang people too wild and undisciplined, if they had encountered the rivalrous potlatches of the Northwest Coast, they would also have sought to impose their polite and harmonious ethos on the potlatch, and undercut its contentious qualities. In 1980's and 1990's China when I experienced the forceful generosity of banquets and gifts, it was after a century of attacks on Confucianism. The culture of reciprocity and banqueting was still strong, but the sedate and polite Confucian ethos had disappeared. Thus, in many ways, my experience of Chinese banquets may have been a bit closer to the spirit of potlatches than to the *Book of Rites* "country feast." There was the same excessive and forced generosity and wastefulness of food, and the same showmanship of offering more food than the guests could eat.

There are many other similarities between Chinese and Northwest Coast cultures besides feasting, such as ancestor worship, clan solidarity, and shamanism, which I cannot address here. I will just turn to the striking similarities in art motifs and styles between the cultures of the Northwest Coast and the Shang Dynasty (1700-1027 BCE) in northern China. In an article on

Shang Dynasty bronze ritual vessels, the sinologist Herrlee Creel wrote:

> In studying Shang design I have constantly been aware of the feeling that this art had great resemblances…to that of the group of Indians… known to American anthropologists as the Northwest Coast Indians… I have found one incontrovertible case of a design which gives the effect of the splitting and spreading out of an animal, over the whole front of a house, in a manner quite like that of the Shangs. In another case, the head of an animal only was represented as if split and applied flat to the surface; the chest on which it occurs is said to be "typical of carved and decorated wooden chests fashioned by the northwest Pacific coast Indian tribes." Such use of the split head only was also common with the Shang designers… In so far as I know, this representation of the animal as if split and laid out flat is characteristic only of Chinese art and of that of the Northwest Coast Indians. (Creel 1935: 64-65)

Creel suggested that the origins of the Shang people was most likely not from western China, but from China's northeastern area, which is close to Siberia and the islands that stretch across the Bering Strait, linking north Asia with the Northwest Coast of North America. Almost three decades later, the structuralist anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss, was also moved to make this observation in a study of art motifs in Asia and America:

> We are still faced with the question of finding out whether these

> hierarchical societies based on prestige appeared independently in different parts of the world, or whether some of them do not share a common cradle. With Creel, I think that the similarities between the art of archaic China and that of the Northwest Coast… are too marked for us not to keep this possibility in mind.… It would not be a diffusion of details—that is, independent traits traveling each on its own and disconnected freely from any one culture in order to be linked to another—but a diffusion of organic wholes wherein style, esthetic convention, social organization, and religion are structurally related. (Levi-Strauss 1963: 265)

Being a structuralist who is convinced of the basic binary structure of the human mind and of cultural categories of thought, Levi-Strauss was of course attracted to the symmetric binary split representation of animal motifs, called *tao-tie* designs, found so vividly on Shang and also Zhou Dynasty bronze ritual vessels and Northwest Coast art objects such as wooden masks, bent-wood chests, Chilkat blankets, totem poles and even wooden house fronts.

There continues to be debate among archaeologists, linguists, and geneticists about just how and when Native American cultures began to settle in North America. The major theory is that they arrived from northern Asia across the Bering Straits on the land bridge that used to connect the continents of Asia and North America. Many archaeologists believe that the Northwest Coast cultures were among the last wave of ancient Asian migrants to arrive in America. This last wave used to be dated to about 6,000 to 10,000 years ago, but more recently, some estimates have been shortened, to

about 3,000 years ago or less for Athapaskan-speaking people (Paper 1993: 9; Dzeniskevich 1994: 54), since boats can easily cross the narrow strait of only 56 miles, even after the sea has inundated the ancient land bridge (Gurvich 1988: 17). Some archaeologists surmise that strong cultural links persisted between Siberia and the Northwest Coast until the later arrival of the Eskimos, a different culture, into western Alaska, cutting off or greatly attenuating these cultural ties (Dzeniskevich 1994: 57).

In a landmark joint exhibition by the Smithsonian Institution and the Soviet Academy of Sciences in 1988 of prehistoric artifacts from Siberia, Bering Sea, Alaskan, and Northwest American Coastal cultures, North American archaeologists and anthropologists who study Alaskan and Northwest American Coast cultures were connected with their Soviet counterparts who study the cultures of Siberia and northeast Asia (Fitzhugh and Crowell, eds. 1988). In this scholarly encounter, many shared cultural features were found stretching across the far north of the Pacific Rim, between Asia and North America. Such common cultural items as snowshoes, snow goggles, clothing and boot styles, subterranean dwellings, seasonal animal harvest festivals, mortuary practices, the flat drum of shamans, and anthropomorphic and zoomorphic masks made of wood and leather used in ceremonial dances can be found stretching across the Siberian cultures of the Koryak, Chukchi, Tungus, and Itelmen to the Eskimos, Tlingit, and Athapaskan cultures of Northwest Coastal America. A striking commonality that is shared on both sides of the Bering Strait are the myths of the Raven as hero-creator (Gurvich 1988: 18-19; Dzeniskevich 1994: 53).

Stylistic parallels with Shang and Eastern Zhou Chinese burial masks have also been discerned in Ipiutak burial masks that were unearthed in

northwestern Alaska (Collins 1971; Arutiunov & Fitzhugh 1988: 127). The Ipiutak site in Alaska is believed to belong to a culture that existed from around the second century BCE to about 800 CE. The striking similarities, including large *tao-tie*-like protruding eyes, have led Henry Collins, an archaeologist, to write, "we are dealing with a similar class of objects, having a similar function in mortuary practice" (Collins 1971: 276). The Ipiutak masks are squarish frames made of walrus ivory, with a nose and downcurled mouth. They are strikingly reminiscent of masks made of shell and marble shaped into a squarish frame, with nose and open mouth full of sharp teeth that were dug up from tombs at Kaifeng and Xun Xian near the Shang capital of Anyang in Hebei Province, and at other Shang and Zhou Dynasty tombs. Both the Shang and Zhou shells and marble pieces in China were attached to a wooden backing, as were the ivory masks in Alaska. Thus, it would be plausible to think that, between the second millennium BCE that was the period of the Shang in China, and the beginning of the Common Era, some groups who had contact with the Shang, or were offshoot groups of the Shang, had wandered across the continents of Asia and North America. Besides Chinese influences, there also seem to be connections between Ipiutak and Siberian shamanism (Collins 1971: 271), suggesting links with the Iron Age cultures of Eurasia that was contemporary with Ipiutak culture.

Soviet and North American archaeologists on both sides of the Bering Strait have suggested that "the great number of masks and zoomorphic images in the Old Bering Sea complex seems… to have been related, though through a process not yet understood, to the art of Scytho-Siberian, Shang, and Eastern Chou peoples on the one hand…, and to Northwest Coast Indians on the other… Art, technology, funeral practices, and shamanism somehow

seem to be deeply involved in these transfers" (Arutiunov & Fitzhugh 1988: 125). Although the Chinese influence in art and religious motifs may not be direct, but likely mediated by different groups that stretched across Asia and North America, the similarities across the continents warrant the suggestion that theories arising out of cultural formations on one side of the Bering Strait may frequently be relevant to cultures on the other side. The common emphasis on feasting, and the presence of elaborated food containers, whether carved wooden bowls and dishes in the Northwest Coast, or bronze ritual vessels in the Shang and Zhou, further suggest that theories of gift and feasting reciprocity and rivalrous or excessive generosity may be applicable to both northeastern Asian and northwestern American cultures. The archaeologist K.C. Chang has directed our attention to the pervasive animal motifs on Shang and Zhou bronze ritual vessels, which he suggests are the hallmarks of a shamanistic culture where animals assisted humans in shamanic voyages to divine other worlds (Chang 1986: 366, 414-18). Thus, if there is indeed a cultural link and shared or overlapping cultures between the ancestors of the Northwest Coast peoples and the Shang people in China, then all the more should scholars of China pay attention to Mauss and Bataille, two theorists who were inspired by the gift and banquet cultures of the Northwest Coast.

Reciprocity Up and Down

For Mauss, the reciprocity of potlatch gifting produced a social solidarity of clans and tribes in two ways. *First*, members of a common clan cooperate and help the host accumulate wealth to throw a potlatch whose success will reflect on the entire clan. *Second*, through the continuous cycles of in-

debtedness of guests who were beholden to hosts, and hosts who could lay claim to guests, rival clans and chief families are brought together in friendly and competitive interaction. Thus, in the absence of a state, the mutual embeddedness and entanglements of personhood in gift or banquet practices becomes a central mode of social integration. Being a socialist, Mauss was of course especially interested in how gift culture could overcome our modern commodity culture, where money payments do not establish social relationships that last longer than the impersonal economic transaction. However, Mauss was not sufficiently attentive to gift relations between superior and inferior, which are found in all hierarchical societies, especially China. For David Keightley, historian of Shang and Zhou Dynasties, these early states were a network of gift relations between the king and the nobility (who were related to him) and non-Chinese tribal chiefs (1981). In investiture ceremonies, the king sent off his male relatives, the nobles, to rule over far-off lands on his behalf, with precious gifts of bronze ritual vessels, silk, and other presents. What bound the dispersed nobility to the king in the capital was not the law or bureaucratic salaries, which were not yet developed then, but kinship obligations, gift ethics, and banquet relations.

In the Biao Ji Chapter of the *Book of Rites*, a passage shows clearly that for the ancient Chinese, reciprocity (報) also worked between superiors and inferiors.

> 子曰：「以德報德，則民有所勸；以怨報怨，則民有所懲。」詩曰：「無言不讎，無德不報。」太甲曰：「民非后，無能胥以寧；后非民，無以辟四方。」　　《禮記．表記》

> Confucius said: "When you repay virtue [or good deeds] with virtue, then the people can be persuaded to behave well and get along [with each other]. When you repay malice [or bad deeds] with malice, then the people will be forewarned and [will steer away from bad deeds]". The *Book of Poetry* says: "When someone speaks to me, I will definitely reply. When someone shows kindness to me, I will definitely repay his kindness." The Da Jia section of the *Book of Documents* says: "When the people do not have a ruler, it will not be possible for them to live in peace and harmony with each other. When a ruler does not have his people, then he cannot rule over the four directions."
>
> "Biao Ji" in *Book of Rites* (Wang 1987: 848)

Like Mauss's work, this passage emphasizes reciprocity, but shows how reciprocity can work to promote social solidarity, not only between people of comparable status, but ideally also within hierarchical relations between ruler and the people. It constructs this relationship as one of mutual interdependence between high and low, which produces social integration. While Confucian culture regarded hierarchy as a good way to instill social order and ensure mutual care between status groups, I found that in China of the 1980's and 90's, gift reciprocity served as a way to reduce the distance between officials and the people. In my book, *Gifts, Favors, and Banquets* (Yang 1994), I wrote about how in China's state socialist redistributive economy, the art of *guanxi* (關係學) was an important means to diminish state power, by transforming the official-subject relationship into a personal *guanxi*. When officials, bureaucratic clerks, or people with positions of power receive gifts,

favors, and banquets, they become indebted to the gift-givers, and thus open up informal access to the powers of office.

Another passage in the Fang Ji Chapter of the *Book of Rites* goes further into the reciprocity between high and low, prescribing that rulers must engage in consultations with the people:

> 子云：「上酌民言，則下天上施；上不酌民言，則犯也；下不天上施，則亂也。故君子信讓以涖百姓，則民之報禮重。詩云：『先民有言，詢于芻蕘。』」
>
> 《禮記．坊記》

> Confucius said: "If those occupying higher positions can consult with the people and use their suggestions, then the people below will appreciate the benefits handed down to them from Heaven above. If those above do not listen to the people's wishes, then they will violate the people's [goodwill]. If the people below cannot appreciate the endowments from Heaven above, then there will be social turmoil. Thus, the ruler must have an attitude of trust and tolerance towards the people of the hundred surnames, so that the people will be moved to repay him profusely according to ritual propriety. This is what is meant when the *Book of Songs* says: "There is a saying of the ancients: 'Consult down to even the woodcutters'."
>
> "Record of Dikes" in *Book of Rites* (Wang 1987: 828)

Here we see that, contrary to May Fourth, and later Communist reduction-

isms, ancient Confucian teachings had democratic leanings that could definitely speak to issues of governance in Chinese modernity. Indeed, officials at all levels of the Chinese state today could derive a valuable lesson from this passage.

The French anthropologist Pierre Clastres, provides another example of reciprocity between high and low in a different kind of society, the egalitarian societies of South American tropical forest native tribes. In his book *Societies Against the State*, Clastres suggests that across the South American continent, except for the hierarchical states of the Andes, the authority and power of the indigenous chiefs were generally quite low. One important social mechanism by which these societies reduced the power of their chiefs was by requiring generosity from their chiefs, and then abusing it so much that Clastres calls this system of reversed power, the "bondage" or "looting" of chiefs (Clastres 1987:30). Outsiders can generally identify a native chief because invariably, he is the one who looks the most poor, with the fewest material possessions because he had to give them away. The office of chief requires generosity and gift-giving to everyone in the society, and people continuously make demands on the chief's diminishing wealth. Thus, the chiefs are bound to generosity and are victims of virtual looting by those they rule. Here, the chiefs gain social status and influence at the price of material deprivation. The Confucians, who call for rituals observing hierarchical order, do not seem eager like the South Americans to undercut the power and wealth of the rulers. However, they share the same commitment to reciprocity between rulers and their people.

What happens when a society builds up a strong state structure? We can contrast the reciprocity between South American and Confucian rulers

and their people with a state that actively condemned this reciprocity. A rigid bureaucratic power based on inflexible laws was what the ancient Chinese Legalists (法家) called for in the build-up to the establishment of the centralized empire in the third century BCE. In the *Han Feizi*, there is a passage that states:

> 秦昭王有病，百姓里買牛而家為王禱。公孫述出見之，入賀王曰：「百姓乃皆里買牛為王禱。」王使人問之，果有之。王曰：「訾之人二甲。夫非令而擅禱，是愛寡人也。夫愛寡人，寡人亦且改法而心與之相循者，是法不立，法不立，亂亡之道也。不如人罰二甲而復與為治。」
>
> 《韓非子．外儲說右下》

> "King Chao of Qin was ill. The hundred surnames in every hamlet bought an ox and every family prayed for the King's earliest recovery. When Kung-sun Shu went out, he saw it. Therefore, he went in to congratulate the King and said, "The hundred surnames in every village bought an ox to pray for Your Majesty's earliest recovery." The King accordingly sent men out to inquire into the matter, and found it true. Therefore, the King said: "Make the people of every village pay a fine of two suits of armor. To be sure, who with no order offers prayers at his pleasure, loves me, the King. Indeed, when the people love me, I will have to alter the law and bend my will to comply with their requests. In this manner the law will not stand. If the law does not stand, it leads to chaos and ruin. Thus, the best measure is to fine the

> people of every village two suits of armour and restore them to order."
>
> *Han Feizi* (Liao, trans. 1959: 124)

Here, we see that the Legalists sought an impersonal state where rulers and officials reject engaging in reciprocity with their people. Since the people must serve the state without question, rulers cannot be indebted to the people, so they must refuse any gifts from them that would compromise their power. Readers may recall that in the 1970's "Criticize Lin Biao, Criticize Confucius" Campaign, Mao Zedong was promoting the hard-line statism of the Legalists and comparing himself with Qin Shihuang the First Emperor. However, such an impersonal machinelike system of unbendable laws in the Qin Dynasty did not last long, only 15 years, and in subsequent Chinese history, it was always tempered by a Confucian paternalism that both humanized and personalized the bureaucracy, but also led to official corruption, where special interests could bend official power to their ends.

What about today in the post-Mao period? We would have to say that there is a *reverse reciprocity* in today's China that is totally the opposite of the South American natives: Chinese officials today demand constant gifts and extort wealth from the people. The looting is by rulers and officials, not the people, nor small entrepreneurs, who are robbed. The Chinese economist Wu Jinglian (吳敬璉) borrows the English term "crony capitalism" to describe this situation, but his Chinese translation (權貴資本主義) could be better translated as "aristocratic power capitalism" (Wu 2010a). This is a world where office-holding provides a privileged position from which to derive non-productive profits, just like a landlord can extract rent without en-

gaging in productive activity. This special ability which office-holding provides for "rent-seeking" (尋租) in the Chinese structure of state capitalism, spawns further rent-payers who are willing to pay bribes to these officials for shared access to the powers of office. Thus, "rent-seeking" refers to those who pay off officials for an official permit or stamp of approval, or officials themselves who extract levies and rents from those who would borrow his office for gain without contributing productive value (Wu 2010b). At the same time, those born into or married into the families of these powerful officeholders can benefit without paying any rent, simply because of their special access to office through their kinship relations. Thus, what we have today in China is not true to the spirit of either Legalism or Confucianism, but an aberration of both.

IV. Bataille: Excessive Expenditure, Waste, and Destruction

Now we come to the *second* logic of the gift. Whereas Mauss focused almost exclusively on reciprocity in gift-giving, Georges Bataille (1897-1962) pursued a very different and often overlooked direction with the gift, by focusing on a *non-reciprocal* dimension of the gift. In thinking about the decline of religion in modernity and the loss of religion's lavish and excessive ritual expenditures, Bataille presents a radically new appreciation for the modern "usefulness" of religion, which is its "uselessness".

> Religion is the satisfaction that a society gives to the use of excess resources, or rather to their destruction… This is what gives

> religion their rich material aspect, which only ceases to be *conspicuous* when an emaciated spiritual life withdraws from labor a time that could have been employed in producing. The only point is the absence of utility, the *gratuitousness* of these collective determinations. They do render a service, true, in that men attribute to these gratuitous activities consequences in the realm of supernatural efficacy; but they are useful on that plane precisely insofar as they are gratuitous. (Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, vol. 1)

Ritual or religious expenditures in which there is destruction of property or squandering of wealth, defies modern rationality, because they are expenditures without a return, or things given whose return is either meager, far from guaranteed, or explicitly made impossible. Contrary to Mauss, it is this very goal of *non-reciprocity* found in competitive potlatch-giving that Bataille wanted to salvage from the human past for modernity. When hard-earned wealth is recklessly squandered in exaggerated generosity so as to prevent any return, then people who cannot understand or accept this behavior call it "wasteful". So below, I would like to turn to discuss a second logic of the gift besides that of reciprocity and redistribution, a logic that was neglected by Mauss.

This is how Franz Boas describes the potlatches he witnessed at the end of the 19th century on Vancouver Island:

> The rivalry between chiefs and clans finds its strongest expression in the destruction of property. A chief will burn blankets, a

> canoe, or break a copper, thus indicating his disregard of the amount of property destroyed and showing that his mind is stronger, his power greater, than that of his rival. If the latter is not able to destroy an equal amount of property without much delay, his name is "broken." (Boas 1966: 93)

If we think about the potlatch, the aim of the hosts was actually *not* reciprocity from their guests, for they would be most happy if their guests did *not* challenge them back with a bigger potlatch. That way, the hosts could keep their exalted social status gained from the last costly ritual feasting. To destroy such huge wealth and have no challengers who could reciprocate was to attain the pinnacle of potlatch power, even though the family or clan would be reduced to difficult material conditions for years to come. It was this spirit of profligate destruction of material wealth in the potlatch, acts of bravado that reached for something beyond material reciprocity, and in the context of modernity, were transgressions of utilitarianism, that caught Bataille's theoretical fancy.

A potlatch usually had to be returned within a year if a guest wanted to challenge the host, and the interest rate for the credit incurred in being a guest was very high: the response must be a return potlatch worth 100% more (Codere 1950). Sometimes, a rival and his clan could never repay such a gift, and they must accept humiliation. If there was a return, over time, this would cause a spiraling inflation that would ultimately be unsustainable. Helen Codere noted that there was a built-in mechanism to defuse or dissolve the inflation, which involved the dramatic destruction of coppers (Codere 1950: 75-77). Copper-making was a native technology present even before the en-

counter with the West. The mineral was smelted and hammered into a rectangle of about 3 feet long, with a rounded head that flared outward, and raised ridges on the lower half. These coppers represented the accumulation of great wealth, and were mainly owned by powerful families and clans who could afford to gather the huge amount of blankets, animal skins, and other forms of wealth needed to purchase them. So rare and precious were these finished coppers, that they were each given their own names, and most potlatches did not feature the destruction of a copper. However, on occasion, a potlatch would involve the host engaging in the ultimate unbeatable act: he would break off a piece of his precious copper and either give it to a guest or throw it into the sea or into the fire, where it could not be retrieved. Sometimes a whole copper would be destroyed, and this might even lead to suicide on the part of his shamed rival who had no hope to match such profligacy. Great boxes of precious eulachon fish oil would also be thrown into the fire, singeing guests' blankets and smoldering roof rafters. Canoes were also burned, and in the old days, slaves were sometimes killed.

In comparing Mauss and Bataille, Mauss' emphasis on a return for the gift given, seems more compatible with the utilitarianism of modern capitalist societies. However, Bataille's work takes the Nietzschean spirit of anti-utilitariansim to new heights. Central to Bataille's passionate critique of modernity was his notion of "ritual expenditure" as a key form of "non-productive consumption" that has all but disappeared in our utilitarian and future-oriented modern life. These expenditures include religious festivals, massive rituals and sacrifices, competitive spectacles, lavish court luxuries and ceremonies, large non-productive monastic communities, and giant monuments like the Egyptian pyramids and medieval European cathedrals,

that we moderns consider “wasteful” and “useless” (Bataille 1985; 1989a). For Bataille, these expenditures allowed people to maintain a deep connection with the sacred realm of the gods, ancestors, and supernatural beings. He envisioned archaic humanity as being like the state of animality, where consciousness is in a state of original oneness and immanence with the world. This original non-differentiation between self and the world he called the state of “intimacy” (Bataille 1989b). Bataille’s notion of intimacy resonates with the Daoist state of original cosmic unity. However, what breaks up this originary monistic world for Bataille is not language, as in Daoist philosophy, but tool-use, reflecting the Marxist influence on Bataille. For Bataille, increasingly in human history, distinctions are drawn between human and animal, and between humans and supreme beings, whereas before there was a sense of continuity between humans, animals, and gods (Bataille 1989b). With progressive tool-use, not only animals become “things” for the use of humans, but humans themselves become increasingly objectified as “things.” According to Bataille, the longing for a return to our original lost “intimacy” is then partially satisfied through periodic effervescent religious rituals and festivals that refocus people on “the present” and allow them to indulge in an excess of material waste and loss. To destroy material wealth is to destroy the “thingness” that has come to imprison us and to allow us to get back to intimacy with the gods for a time. For example, Bataille points out that in animal sacrifice, wild animals are seldom offered in sacrifice. It is domesticated animals, draft animals or meat-bearing animals that are slaughtered, in keeping with this posited need to destroy the “useful” in the animal.

Non-Reciprocity and Wasteful Destruction in Chinese Rituals

Turning now to the Chinese cultural past, we find "waste" not only in banqueting, but also in rituals and festivals of a religious nature, when sacrifices are offered to transcendent beings residing in other worlds. Sacrifices in China are a form of religious gifts given to the gods and ancestors. The characters 祭祀, both with the "spirit" radical, refer to the act of making a sacrifice to spiritual forces or supernatural beings. The ancient Chinese characters 犧牲 display the "cow" or "ox" radicals, and referred to "animals used for sacrificial rites, such as oxen, goats, and pigs" (*Ci Hai* 1976: 872). In sacrifice, the gift that is given represents the transfer of wealth from this world to another world beyond this one, and return is quite uncertain or not at all. Sacrifice is an archaic mode of ritual common to all ancient cultures. In sacrifice, the simple Maussian notion of reciprocity in the gift does not suffice. Certainly there is the hope that in sacrifice to ancestors and spirits, these beings would respond (對) to such gifts and reward the sacrificers. However, sacrifice also reaches for something *beyond* a return. Sometimes, in excessive no-holds-barred sacrifice, there is simply the desire for destruction or self-destruction for its own sake, a transgression of the supposedly "natural" human instrumental pursuit of life, survival, and species expansion. So Bataille wanted to explore a dimension of sacrifice where it ceases to be a mere means to gain a repayment from the gods, but displays an excessiveness that becomes a spiritual end in itself. This second logic of the gift, found in the excess of the gift, enables one to transcend the means-end relationships that entrap us in the conventional world.

I must say here that I did *not* start doing fieldwork in rural China hav-

ing already read Bataille, but I discovered Bataille's relevance to Chinese culture *after* my fieldwork encounters with the frequent theme of prohibition of "waste" (Yang 2000). Local officials in rural and small-town Wenzhou in Zhejiang Province where I did fieldwork in the 1990's to 2012 were always calling on the people to scale down their rituals and avoid waste or going into debt to pay for lavish weddings and funerals. Many large-scale religious rituals and ritual processions were just banned altogether. The reasons that officials chastised the local people for excess ritual expenditure were that people would not have enough money for investing in their family businesses, in children's education, and that these activities were "superstitious."[6] While officials expected the people's excessive waste of money on rituals to decline with increased prosperity and exposure to the rational influences of modern urban culture in the area, the opposite occurred. As local people had more money to spend, their family and community rituals became more lavish.

Wenzhou local officials' attempt to scale down ritual expenditure reminds me of the Canadian colonial authorities in 19th century British Columbia who banned potlatches because they encouraged "heathenism" and "indolence" (even though they always noted how energetically the natives prepared for potlatches) (Cole 1991). Below are two entries by colonial agents in British Columbia:

> 1883 – The energy they display in collecting property is certainly remarkable… but unfortunately, so much is squandered at feasts

[6] Another unstated reason for banning large-scale rituals that people told me about was that large gatherings were considered dangerous, as an accident, fire, or death could endanger the local official's promotion, and large crowds might suddenly turn against the local Communist Party headquarters.

> and otherwise, that they have not as they ought to have, continuous comfort.
>
> 1890 – I am sorry to say that I cannot report any improvement among these Indians; they seem to have given themselves up again to the "Potlatch," which has absorbed the whole of their time and energies…, and, in conse-quence they have earned very little money, though they could all have ob-tained remunerative employment at the different canneries had they chosen to work. (Codere 1950: 82-83)

Anthropologists who have studied the Northwest Coast natives observe that they were quite hard-working, especially for their potlatch accumulations. They were also quick to adapt to the Western money economy and were skillful in becoming economically prosperous, compared to other Native American groups. According to Douglas Cole, amongst the four recorded reasons for the European banning of potlatches in 1885, the "economic reason was doubtless the most important: the [potlatch] system was based on the hoarding of goods, not for savings and investment, but for seemingly senseless waste… The potlatch was not only a waste of time, but a waste of resources, and incompatible with the government's goal of Indian economic and social progress" (Cole 1991: 140).[7] Thus in the entries by colonial

[7] The other three less important reasons for Canadian colonial officials banning the potlatch in 1885 were: 1) a concern for the health of the Northwest Coastal natives due to prolonged exposure to the cold in winter potlatch rituals; 2) potlatching supposedly encouraged the prostituting of native women as a way of accumulating the funds and wealth required to mount a successful potlatch; and 3)

agents above, what the colonial authorities really objected to was that the natives did not spend enough time working in the way that they approved of, in fulltime and permanent employment attached to the modern disciplinary apparatus of capitalist economy. Like the Canadian colonial officials before them, the Chinese Communist Party in contemporary Wenzhou are also trying to bend the local people to the modern rational enterprise of ascetic and disciplined savings, investment, accumulation, and productive expansion (擴大在生產). The local culture of Wenzhou, which indulges in excessive ritual waste, is today an anomaly in China, an obstinate holdout in an oceanic tide of utilitarianism.

Earlier in China, Rebecca Nedostup has shown how the Guomingdang government in the 1930's also tried to put an end to lavish expenditures in Nanjing for the lunar calendar Ghost Festival and other traditional festivals by switching to a solar calendar (Nedostup 2008). Later, the Chinese Communists of course went much further than the Guomindang in prohibiting public religious rituals altogether, and persecuting those who dared defy the ban. Thus, we can see clearly here that both the colonial Canadian authorities and the Chinese Guomindang and Communists were modern colonizing state forces who sought to systematically suppress archaic Bataillean cultures of excessive generosity and ritual destruction of wealth in order to promote modern utilitarian mechanisms of productivity and disciplinary power.

However, at the same time, I have also discovered that in China, the condemnation of wasteful ritual expenditures is not limited to either the Republican era or the Communist period, but has a venerable genealogy

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colonial school schedules were constantly interrupted when potlatches were held (Cole 1991: 140).

stretching back into ancient Chinese history. For example, one often finds sentiments by educated Confucian scholars like this one, traveling through the Wenzhou area during the Qing Dynasty, chastising Wenzhou people for their wastefulness:

> 溫郡之俗好巫而近鬼，大舉佛事道場，靡不盡心竭力以為之。不惜重費，乃若正月初旬，以至燈市十余日，晝夜游觀，男女雜沓，競制龍燈，極其精工，大龍燈一條，所費不下數十金，鑼鼓喧闐，舉國若狂，不數日間，付之一炬，此種妄費，亦當急為禁革者也。
>
> [清] 勞大與《甌江逸志》

> The local custom of the people within the Commandery of Wenzhou is to support spirit mediums and get access to spirits and ghosts. They hold elaborate Buddhist ceremonies and Daoist rituals, engaging in extravagant expenditures and exhausting their energies in these efforts. Unconcerned with heavy-duty wastefulness, each year during the first lunar month, they hold a lantern festival that lasts over ten days. These attract festival-goers late into the night, the men mixing freely with the women. They also get into competitions of dragon lanterns, each with fine detailed craftwork. Well over several tens of gold pieces are wasted on a single large dragon lantern. Gongs and drums are beaten thunderously, the boisterous din is insane. In just a few days, the dragon lanterns are then put to the torch. This sort of reckless wastefulness must be immediately prohibited.
>
> Lao Daoyu, *Leisurely Tour of the Ou River* (*Oujiang Yizhi*),

Qing Dynasty, 18th c.[8]

Unlike modern Chinese elites who wanted to end the "superstitions" that prevented China from developing modern science and economic growth, what disturbed educated Confucian sensibilities in late imperial China about popular religion was its wastefulness and the foolhardy ritual extravagance of poor people. Confucians in late imperial China did not oppose religion against science, or see religion as "backwards" or primitive in a linear history, but they looked down on the customs of the common people and decried the popular overindulgence in religious sentiments. In Qing Dynasty Quanzhou, a city that was China's greatest cosmopolitan port city in the Song and Yuan Dynasties, Confucian officials also objected to wasteful expenditures:

> During the Universal Salvation Festival, all households in Quanzhou put their offerings in the streets. They set up opera stages and display many precious things. These cost people all their property and exhaust the funds of temples… Even though poorer families are strained by the amount of expenditure, they never stop trying to make more offerings than the others. (Xu and Xu 1990; quoted in Wang, M.M. 1995: 62)

Popular religion in late imperial China was not the only culprit of excessive ritual expenditure. Going back in time, the Buddhists in China in the fifth to tenth centuries C.E. were also guilty of wasteful and destructive ex-

[8] Cited in Cai Keqiang, *A Cultural History of Ouyue* (《甌越文化史》, 1998: 80).

penditures. As Buddhists, they did not make blood sacrifices, but they made lavish presentations of wealth to the Buddhas and bodhisattvas: gold, jewelry, entertainments, foods, and even human life in self-sacrifice. According to the French sinologist Jacques Gernet:

> The Buddhist faithful competed in spending, and ruined themselves in the process. It cannot be said that this claim represents simply a literary formula, for it recurs too frequently, in official memorials, decrees, and even in stele inscriptions. It must therefore be assumed that these competitions in wastefulness reveal a trait that is peculiar to the religious phenomenon itself… Certain Buddhist festivals provided the occasion for an extraordinary display of sumptuousness. They created an atmosphere of exuberance and of collective excitement that is palpable in the descriptions of the historians. At such times, fervor reached its paroxysm and acts of self-sacrifice and the renunciation of wealth became commonplace. These great reunions, where entire fortunes were squandered gratuitously for entertainments and as offerings and where self-mutilations and self-immolations by fire took place, therefore provide an opportunity for apprehending the scope and underlying aims of the religious phenomenon. (Gernet 1995: 234-35)

When the court was overtaken by the Buddhist religious imaginary, as in the Wei, Jin, the Southern and Northern Dynasties, and the Tang Dynasty eras, the state was often the largest contributor to extravagant ritual expenditures,

as Jacques Gernet shows in these lavish court-sponsored Buddhist public rituals. Self-mutilations and self-immolations were the ultimate destruction and sacrifice. The destruction of material goods and in non-Buddhist rituals, sacrificial animals for gods and ancestors, was merely the destruction of the fruits of one's labor, thus they were only the temporary ridding of the "thingness" as an attribute of oneself. However, offering up one's own human body and life was much more, it was the religious desire to completely and permanently kill the "thingness" in oneself, and meld with the vast sacred universe beyond profane life. I will return to sacrifice at the end of this chapter. Suffice to state here that in almost every period of Chinese history, we can find examples of Bataille's rituals of non-reciprocal and wasteful destruction of wealth. Often ranged against these excesses were educated Confucian gentry or imperial state discourses calling for moderation in ritual expenditures, or condemning such excessive practices. However, pushing further back into ancient history, we find a time when the Confucians themselves were in support of excessive ritual destruction.

The Long Genealogy of Struggles Over Funerals and Burials in China

In today's Wenzhou, I also discovered the state's insistence on the value of focusing on life rather than death and the Afterlife beyond (Yang 2013). Traditionally, Chinese ritual expenditures were especially elaborated around death, so funerals were more important than weddings and birth rituals, and still often the case in rural Wenzhou today. Since the 1950's, the Communist Party has had a policy of encouraging simple secular funerals, and the cremation of corpses (Whyte 1988), although it has not always been

successful in the implementation. Elsewhere I have written about how in rural Wenzhou, there is a struggle between the local people and their insistence on elaborate funerals, earth burials, and stone tombs that dot the hillsides, and the state, which pushes them towards cremation (Yang 2004; 2013). From the state's point of view, tombs take up the space of the living, land that could be used to build houses, shopping malls, and factories, even though tombs are located on mountainsides. In the mid-1990's, the local government was still waging a campaign for more "civilized" ways of dealing with the dead. This involved turning the people away from their earth burials which supposedly take up arable land, and pursuing more modest funerals. The campaigns to impose cremation, first in urban, and then in rural Wenzhou, met with a lot of resistance among the local people. I heard some stories that, on the eve of instituting the ban on earth burials in rural areas in 2000, groups of old people committed suicide to protest the ban, and to make sure that their own bodies could enjoy an earth burial before the ban took effect. The ban meant the destruction of the coffin-making industry, and adversely affected the diviners, *fengshui* masters, and stone mason tomb-makers. Since traditional funerals are tied in with the rituals of burials, the ban on earth burials also affected the conduct of funerals. The absence of a body at the funeral took away some of the sacred atmosphere of the funeral, and removed the impetus for a grandiose and raucous funeral procession from the deceased's home through public streets to the burial site. As people become increasingly prosperous in Wenzhou, there was a strong desire for ever more extravagant mourning and burial rituals, which was now thwarted by the state. It seemed that even in death, the modern Chinese state version of the Protestant Ethic that enjoins thrift, hard work, and non-trafficking with the divine world had

to continue. Even in death, the people are not supposed to escape this earthly sovereignty for alternative divine sovereigns in the Netherworld.

Oddly enough, it turns out that these restrictions on lavish funerals and burials have a venerable history in China, and are not exclusive to modern times. Way back in ancient China, in the 5th or 4th century BCE, the philosopher Mozi (墨子) had already adopted the position of advocating "frugal burials" (薄葬) in debates with the Confucians, and opposed the Confucian support of "generous burials" (厚葬). The Confucians favored elaborate funerals and burials, in keeping with their emphasis on ritual propriety, filial piety, and reverence for ancestors. Mozi, however, attacked the Confucian position, with arguments that today sound strangely modern:

> If we follow the rules of those who advocated elaborate funerals… then the funeral of a king or high minister will require several inner and outer coffins, a deep grave, numerous grave clothes, a large amount of embroidery for decorating the coffins, and a large grave mound. If the family of the deceased happen to be humble commoners the wealth of the family will be exhausted, and if they are feudal lords their treasuries will be emptied.
>
> Now if the rulers and high officials are to adopt [these lavish funerary practices], they cannot appear at court early and retire late, attend to the five ministries and six bureaus, encourage farming and forestry, and fill the granaries.
>
> *Mozi: Basic Writings* (Watson, trans. 1963: 67-68)

Mozi here pits the needs of the living against those of the dead, and clearly favors the former. He feared that excessive mourning and lavish funerals and burials would exhaust the living family members, distract state officials from their official duties, and impoverish the state. This kind of rhetoric sounds almost like a modern secularist argument to stop wasting money on the divine world and instead to focus on "this world." Given that at that time, the human world as conceived was still extremely porous with divine other worlds and their divine beings, Mozi's arguments must have represented a rather extreme position for his times. Certainly, archaeological evidence of the lavish tombs and luxury grave goods offered during the Warring States period shows that Mozi's arguments had no impact on the burial practices of many wealthy and powerful families.

Perhaps this Mohist position was too radical for its time, when life after death was too important, and people feared retribution from the discontented souls of the dead. Nor did Mozi's populism and antipathy to the wealthy and aristocratic powers help his cause, for his writings were banned by the Legalists in the subsequent Qin Dynasty and by the state Confucianists in the Han Dynasty and beyond. It may be that what the growing power of Legalist discourse in the Warring States era sought was a more persuasive strategy of argument for moderation in burials. About two centuries later, a new text also addressed the issue of lavishness or moderation in burials, in the *Spring and Autumn of the Lu Clan* (《呂氏春秋》). The writing of this argument on burials was organized by the Legalist merchant and official Lu Buwei (呂不韋) around 239 BCE. By this time, Confucianism had already started to come under Legalist influence, and perhaps more Confucians were open to more utilitarian modes of thinking. In this text, we find an attempt to

reconcile and combine Mohist and Confucian arguments together into a new synthesis (Riegel 1995: 328). While decrying lavish burials, the text also used arguments that appealed to Confucian sentiments, in a seeming effort to persuade Confucian interlocutors.

The selected passages below from two chapters of the *Spring and Autumn of the Lu Clan* mount an extended argument in favor of more moderate funerals and burials, decrying the lavish expenditures that were the rule of the day among aristocratic families.

> 今世俗大亂，主愈侈，其葬則心非為乎死者慮也，生者以相矜尚也。侈靡者以為榮，儉節者以為陋，不以便死為故，而徒以生者之誹譽為務，此非慈親孝子之心也。
>
> 《呂氏春秋．卷十．節喪》

> In the gross disorder of our vulgar age rulers are ever more extravagant. Thus in their burials their thoughts are not directed at taking precautions for the dead but instead have to do with how the living can outdo each other. Extravagance is considered glorious, frugality demeaning. They are not motivated by what is of convenience to the dead but simply devote themselves to what the living might blame or praise."
>
> *Spring and Autumn of the Lu Clan*
> (Riegel, trans. 1995: 307-08)

> 國彌大，家彌富，葬彌厚。含珠鱗施，夫玩好貨寶，鍾鼎壺濫，犧馬衣被戈劍，不可勝其數。諸養生之具，無不從者。題湊之室，

棺槨數襲，積石積炭，以環其外。

《呂氏春秋・卷十・節喪》

As states grow larger and families richer, burials become more elaborate. Such a burial includes a pearl put in the mouth of the corpse, a jade shroud that covers the body like fish scales, silk cords and bamboo documents, trinkets and treasures, bronze goblets, tripods, pots, and basins, horse-drawn carriages, clothes and coverlets, as well as halberds and swords—all too numerous to count. Every utensil required to nurture the living is included. The chamber is constructed of stacked wood, the coffin and vault are in several layers, and these are surrounded on the outside by a pile of stones and a heap of charcoal."

Spring and Autumn of the Lu Clan

(Riegel, trans. 1995: 308-09)

世俗之行喪，載之以大輴，羽旄旌旗、如雲僂翣以督之，珠玉以佩之，黼黻文章以飭之，引紼者左右萬人以行之，以軍制立之然後可。以此觀世，則美矣侈矣；以此為死，則不可也。

《呂氏春秋・卷十・節喪》

In the funeral processions of our vulgar age, a huge carriage transports the coffin: there are plumes, flags, pennants and banners, as well as the sides and top of the carriage painted in a cloud design, all of which screen the coffin from view; pearls and jade adorn it, embroideries and insignia embellish it; and it is

moved by two ropes, each one pulled by myriad men, who are arranged in military formation. Only when all is like this is the funeral procession thought appropriate. This makes a beautiful and extravagant spectacle for the world to see but it is inappropriate treatment of the dead."

Spring and Autumn of the Lu Clan
(Riegel, trans. 1995: 309-10)

世之為丘壟也，其高大若山，其樹之若林，其設闕庭、為宮室、造賓阼也若都邑，以此觀世示富則可矣，以此為死則不可也。

《呂氏春秋．卷十．安死》

A burial mound of the present day is made as tall as a mountain and the trees planted on it are like a forest. The towers and courtyards that are erected, the chambers and halls that are constructed, and the guest stairway that is fashioned, make the burial resemble a city. These features make a spectacle for the world to see and are a means by which to display one's wealth, but to employ such features as a way to treat the dead is improper."

Spring and Autumn of the Lu Clan
(Riegel, trans. 1995: 310)

In the above passages, written before the Qin Dynasty got under way, we see that the wealthy tried to outdo each other in the amount of luxury goods, jewels, and precious weapons with which they buried their dead, in the lavish funeral processions that carried the corpse to the burial place, and the elabo-

rate burial chamber and huge burial mound and funeral parks they constructed with great expenditures of labor. Unlike Mozi who favored the needs of the living against the dead, the main objection here is that, instead of expressing true and sincere concerns for the comfort and peace of the dead, these extravagant expenditures only benefit the social standing and prestige of the living. This text also pointed out that lavish burials were inconsiderate towards the dead, because such riches attracted tomb robbers, and sooner or later, the tomb would be plundered, disturbing the peaceful abode and rest of the dead. Thus, it suggested that people who insisted on lavish burials were selfish and only thinking of their own rivalries with other families and their own social prestige. It implied that sincere and filial Confucians would want to give priority to the needs of the dead, and ensure that their ancestors would enjoy an eternity of peace and rest in undisturbed graves.

It would seem that for much of Chinese imperial history, this sort of argument predominated over the radical utilitarianism of Mohism. However lonely and isolated was the Mohist voice throughout much of Chinese history, it was an ancient indigenous Chinese force that had already prepared the ground against overindulgence in trafficking with the divine world, and focusing people's energies on the temporal life of production. The merging of Confucian and Legalist voices that are expressed in the *Spring and Autumn of the Lu Clan* can be seen as paving the way for late imperial Confucian gentry condemnations of overindulgence in ritual wastefulness. It took the powerful modern secularizing forces of the 20th century, to render Mozi's ancient argument no longer radical, but widely shared and systematically adopted and implemented.

At the beginning of the 21st century, what can we learn from this an-

cient debate over funerals and burials? While some of the common people back in ancient times might have sided with Mozi against the profligacy of the rich, at the same time, most of them probably would not have wished to shortchange their dead by skimping on their ritual honors. After so much modern destruction of traditional Chinese religious culture, our understanding of this ancient quarrel would be different from the ancients. From a Bataillean modern perspective, we might say, "What better way to waste and destroy wealth than burying precious goods deep into the ground in graves where they will never be used or enjoyed by the living?" Following Bataille, we can say that such "waste" of resources on death instead of life is an expression of otherworldly religiosity and a direct challenge to the modern focus on temporal and profane life. We now live a life that has condemned us to an incessant grindstone of production, and a way of thinking that is about rational-utilitarian maximization. This endless expansion of productivism is ultimately unsustainable, as environmental degradation, labor exploitation, and global climate change are all warning us. The modern world enjoins us to thrift, productivity, and maximization, but offers very little in the way of destructive release through ritual and festival to transcend this temporal world. Although Mozi's populism can still speak powerfully to our modern world, the fact remains that today in China, it is usually rural, peasant, and small-town people, such as my fieldwork subjects in Wenzhou, who most insist on reviving traditional ritual expenditures, wasteful religious festivals, and lavish funerals and burials. Indeed, the desire for ritual expenditures in China is in direct relationship to the lack of exposure to modern formal education provided by the state. Urban Chinese have for the most part been absorbed into the consumerist expenditures that feed back into the productivism

of the capitalist economy.

Bataille's experience of the horrors of war as a soldier in the trenches of World War I informs his theory of the modern decline of ritual expenditures and the modern obsession with industrial productivism and military expenditures in his *The Accursed Share*, vol. 1. For Bataille, the law of physics in the "general economy" of the universe decrees that surpluses must be destroyed in order to rebalance the life and death, wealth and subsistence. With secularization and the decline of religiosity, modernity closes off the *joie de vivre* of ritual profligacy and religious destruction. Thus, modernity condemns us to the other single outlet for our destructive desires: the catastrophic destruction of modern warfare. Thus, the more we diminish ritual destruction, the more our destructive impulses turn to warfare. From the Reformation to the mid-20th century, it was Europe that was constantly at war, having closed off the paths to ritualized destruction of wealth. Since the early 20th century, as more of the Third World is brought into the embrace of our common modern productivism, we have also seen a concomitant increase in war throughout the rest of the world. We can see what happens with our surplus production of weapons of war: the stockpiled weapons get used sooner or later.

Today, in the modern period, we have a quite different system of state-sponsored destructiveness in ritual sacrifice, for the modern state has almost entirely captured the archaic religious practice of sacrifice. Modern states, or would-be states, send off their young men to death in wars and lavish rewards and monuments to the collective memory of state or revolutionary martyrs. As the modern etymological dictionary *Ci Hai* shows, the modern notion of "sacrifice" (犧牲) retains the same connotations that were there

in the archaic words for sacrificial victims: making a donation (捐), giving up something (棄), or sustaining a loss of wealth. Modern connotations that the term suggests are: making a sacrifice of one's time, one's personal benefit or career, one's family, and one's power. However, the modern term does retain the ancient meaning of the sacrifice of one's (or another's) life, although in the modern sense, sacrifice is usually understood as being for one's own country. All of these impetuses for sacrifice focus on temporal and profane life, except for the latter, when one gives up one's life for a higher and more transcendent cause. Thus, mortality becomes immortalized for the collective or the state good. I submit that in this sort of modern self-sacrifice for the state or one's country, we are back to the domain of religiosity, even for such an atheistic state as Communist China. This suggests that although the modern state has exerted tremendous efforts to stamp out extravagant and "wasteful" ritual expenditures in the domains of family and community life, at the same time, it has quietly incorporated the last vestige of archaic religious sacrifice fully and deeply into the state body. Thus, we should not be fooled by thinking in terms of the modern state being secular, and religiosity lying in the private domain of the family or even the public domain of civil society. Under cover of modern state secularization drives, the state has actually appropriated the most powerful religious force, Bataille's non-reciprocal gift for itself. Thus, with self-sacrifice for state war-making, we are back to Bataille's thesis that the decline of traditional ritual expenditures and religious destruction of surplus values, conducted by families and communities, has led to new outlets for modern state war-making.

How can we in modernity retrieve or re-appropriate some of this second logic of the gift, or this powerful religious force back from the state that

has captured it, and use it for communities, families, persons, and other non-state social formations? In *The Accursed Share*, vol. 3, Bataille (1993) introduces his notion of "sovereignty," which he defines as "life *beyond* utility" or "the use of resources for non-productive ends." Whereas Marx focused on material production and distribution by and for the proletariat, Bataille subverts Marx in conceiving of alienation as the process whereby one is made into a mere instrument for production. In Bataille's notion of alienation, one loses one's "sovereignty" or the basic freedom of attaining moments of transcendence from the chains of earthly profane life. Rituals and religious consumption allow ordinary people to attain "sovereign moments" that used to be reserved for monarchs and aristocracies leading lives of luxury. These "sovereign moments" attained in trance, prayer, meditation, spirit possession, or in states of eroticism, sobbing, laughter, poetry, artistic inspiration, and after drinking wine, are all moments when we experience a fundamental state of freedom. Thus, in modernity, we can strive to hang onto and expand these "sovereign moments" that have not been appropriated and deployed by the state. And we can continue to engage in ritual expenditures that enhance local community solidarity and identity. These include donations to charities, NGO's, social movements, and religious and kinship organizations and ritual activities; constructing temples and monasteries, and so forth.

Conclusion

Whether we are addressing Mauss' reciprocity of the gift or Bataille's non-reciprocity of ritual waste and sacrifice, both logics have venerable ge-

nealogies in ancient Chinese culture. Indeed, there is some evidence to suggest that potlatch culture, or the excessive ritual destruction of wealth that came with it, can be found not only among Northwest Coast natives in the New World, but also in archaic China and northeast Asia, where it may have originated. In Chinese modernity, these logics of the gift have been weakened, and the second logic has become imperiled, due to the ravages of radical state secularization, the decline of religiosity and religious festivals, and the more recent inroads of profit-driven capitalist rationalization and radical consumerist materialism. These two logics of the gift can counter the two powerful forces of the modern state and modern capitalism, which today have become a single combined force in China, that of state capitalism. Thus, we must work to retrieve both these gift logics which have been so central to ancient Chinese culture, and reintegrate them back into modern life. They may enable us to strengthen *social* solidarity rather than relying on *state* integration, nationalism, or state power to generate social solidarity. Sacrifice (犧牲), in the original Chinese sense of transferring wealth from the profane world to a higher divine world, must be recuperated from its modern sense of sacrificing one's life for the state. It's Bataillean sense of killing the "thingness" in ourselves that robs us of our "intimacy" and immanence in divinity, must be recuperated and grasped for modernity.

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