Nomads in Chinese and Central Asian History: The Max Weber Case

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"Persian, I have never yet run from any man in fear and I am not doing so from you now. There is, for me, nothing unusual in what I have been doing; it is precisely the kind of life I always lead, even in times of peace. If you want to know why I will not fight, I will tell you. In our country there are no towns and no cultivated land; fear of losing which, or seeing it ravaged, might indeed provoke us to hasty battle. If however you are determined upon bloodshed ... one thing there is for which we will fight - the tombs of our forefathers. Find those tombs and try to wreck them, and you will soon know whether or not we are willing to stand up to you."

The Scythian chieftain Idanthyrsus to Darius, king of Persia. Herodotos, The Histories. IV, 125.

Introduction

Soon after the legendary Scythian chief informed the king of kings, Darius, about basic social and anthropological elements of nomadic life, this Persian conqueror like so many of his predecessors and imitators saw his Waterloo. Herodotos learned us another thing. Most important reasons also for this failed clash of lifestyles was the substantial ignorance about the enemy and the inability to cope in a practical and peaceful way with alternative ways of life. In our century there seems to be no change in these circumstances and attitudes as will be proved in the following article. The first part is devoted to the subject of the sociological ignorance about nomadism in the highly influential work of Max Weber; the main part of the article sketches the practical difficulties Chinese and Russian states met in coping with their nomadic populations. Together they display the most important elements of theory and practice of anti-nomadism in sedentary societies which can be starting point for new studies. If one looks at the substantial clashes between Chinese and nomads in Sinkiang nowadays or at the implications of the far from secret war about Central Asian gas and oil reserves for traditional nomadic areas, one knows how the following article still concerns a topic of the day. However, in this article not the present but the past problems between sedentary and nomadic societies have to come to the fore. In Max Weber’s writings one can find a perception of the complexities of this subject in a world-historical context from which we can derive a specific part to discuss.

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1 This article is a tribute to the sharp-witted scholar and bright intellectual Wim F. Wertheim (16 November 1907 - 3 November 1998) who not only had a keen interest in my earlier work but also in this article which we discussed at length because „Weber“, „China“ and „the evolution of social conflicts“ concerned the very heart of his extensive work. I thank Kim Hershorn who assisted with the editing and translation. If not indicated otherwise, the translations are mine.
Although interest in Max Weber is decreasing,² the Weber-literature remains historically an interesting part of sociological and other discourses. Weber's own writings - sometimes *nolens volens* - still help tracing complicated historical and sociological problems. Even so, it is difficult to find articles or books about at least two important and mutually connected subjects however extensive the Weber-literature may be. First, there are the (interrelations between) market and *oikos*, which cover formally only a very few pages of "Economy and Society" (*Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*).² Second, there is the subject of the nomads or, in general, of mobile as opposed to sedentary peoples.

The relationship between the two subjects can be found rather easily. Not only the words of the Scythian chiefstain above show the connections and contradictions. Also opinions relating mobile behaviour to markets and a sedentary way of life to the agriculturally oriented *oikos* (another word for a patriarchally ruled *latifundium*, household, manor, family, an estate as well as a state) demonstrate the relationship. Superficially, it looks as if Weber dealt with both subjects only sporadically. However, one can argue that they belong to the very heart of his thinking and oeuvre and, more important, that they belong to the centre of intriguing and complex problems such as town-country contradictions.³

In this article I deal with the second subject as a consequence of some of my recent writings.⁴ Inevitably, the first subject will also be touched but analyses of *oikos* - market relations remain in the background. In the mean time, it is far from easy to discover Weber's opinions about nomads and related groups. The EC-Index does not help find traces of nomads or pastoralist people; in WG there is already one entry on Bedouins. In the essays on the sociology of religion there is a bit more⁵ and in the so-called *Wirtschaftsgeschichte* one can find also some interesting material.⁶ If the subject should be extended to all kinds of animal-breeding ("Viehbau", "Viehwirtschaft" etc.) the yield on Weberian thoughts on the subject is again a bit larger.⁷ So, all in all the result is rather meager. The same conclusion holds for the extensive Weber-literature; you will search in vain for an article on Weber and nomadism!

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⁶ Weber, Max: Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie I–III. Tübingen: Mohr (1923) [hereafter: GAR]．
⁸ In this case in WGe more text is available and one can also consult Weber, Max: Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte. Tübingen: Mohr (1924) [hereafter: GASWI] p. 1 ff., i.e. the article "Agrarverhältnisse im Altertum".
However, the following quotations will give a very different view of the priority Weber gave to the subject. We can also gain perspective of the problems that must be discussed. The following remarks are derived from the second version of his Agrarverhältnisse im Altertum (1898). In the introduction Weber states:

The settlements of the West have in common a transition from nomadic animal-husbandry to sedentary agriculture; East-Asian peoples, however, have in common a transition from shifting cultivation to sedentary agriculture. ... The consequences are ... that in oriental villages, in so far they are not from modern origin, the western concepts of mark and allmende are absent. ... Also the „individualism“ inherent in the property of herds and flocks with its sharp economic and social differentiation – in the West the primitive basis of feudalism – is absent in Asian cultures. ... The East-Asians as well as the old American cultures seem to know feudalism in principle as group- or caste-feudalism: a strongly closed and locally organised warrior-group, often living in fortified settlements, is maintained in a naturalwirtschaftlich way by a population who are considered as state-slaves or -serves. Also the Egyptian and Asian Orient is in their whole development determined by the preponderance of a colossal Pharaohic or imperial oikos, i.e. the state-economy based on Naturalwirtschaft. 9

So, here we deal with one of the broadest themes in comparative world history as well as a subject that can be tested in regional and local environments. This is also one of the most hotly debated subjects complicated by the changing opinions of participants during their lifetime. Weber, for instance, altered eleven years later the first part of this fundamental statement in the following way: 10

9 Weber, Max: „Agrarverhältnisse im Altertum“, in: Handwörterbuch der Staatswissenschaften, hrsg. Conrad, J. et al., Jena: Fischer (1898), second ed., p. 57, 58. Like the first edition Idem (1897), Zweiter Supplementband, p. 1-18 this second draft of Weber’s Agrarverhältnisse is also never consulted. This is a serious mistake. One always uses the article in the third edition of the Handwörterbuch (1909). The English translator, R.L. Frank, does not know of their existence as is shown in Weber, Max, The Agrarian Sociology of Ancient Civilizations. London: New Left Books (1976), p. 29 ff. Widow Marianne Weber, notorious for her dubious information about her Saint Max, did not mention the previous drafts either (See GASW, p.1 note). In the „Vorwort“ of GASW, a much repeated remark is made about the short time Weber needed to write the lengthy third version. No wonder, the model was finished in the previous editions. Weber only had to fill in the details. The first version consisted only of chapters on Greece and Rome; the second added a chapter on Near Eastern developments and extended the Greek chapter considerably; as a new item, the third edition also contained a short (3% of the text) analysis of the Old Israelite situation.

10 GASW, p. 1. To understand Weber’s opinions, in my view, it is necessary to „translate“ the content and not the form. I am, therefore, not fond of most of the available English translations, although they might demonstrate much better English! For example, Weber used the rather ambiguous nomadisierende Ackernutzung translated by R. Frank as „nomadic agriculture“. Perhaps Weber wanted to use a concept expressing a wandering way of collecting or growing fruits or grains by peasants. Wim Wertheim rightly proposed to substitute for this the technical term „shifting cultivation“ (ladang-cultivation) which was widely spread in Asian countries for a very long time. Western imperialists and developers wrongly opposed the burning of the (old) forest-land while looking elsewhere for new cultivation opportunities as a very primitive and damaging way of food-production. If Wertheim’s next proposition should be true that the typical western three field system is in principle a similar cultivation-technique, then already at the start Weber’s thesis has to fall apart.
The settlements of the European West have in common ... the transition ... from a dominant milk cattle-husbandry plus some agriculture to a dominant agriculture plus some cattle-husbandry in the definite sedentary constellation; the East-Asian peoples, however, have in common ... a transition from a shifting cultivation to a horticultural use of fields without any milk cattle-husbandry.

Which questions arise from these sweeping statements and what will be the „problem-definition“ of this article?

First, there is the geographical expansion of Weber’s argument. In the new edition Weber adds to the former that the given Northern European type of transition is also suitable for Southern Europe and the Near East. „East Asia“ remains what it was: similar to „old American cultures“, to Pharaonic and other colossal imperial oikoi with state-slaves and all the rest. Interesting is that here „Near East“ spearheads the North European type of development right into a vast area with only „Eastern Despotism“. In this way, the classic Greek and hellenistic cultures get their space in time, let alone the Judaist phenomenon.

Next, it follows from both citations that Weber sees all histories ending in sedentary agriculture. Is this wishful thinking, already a reality or, for my part, a desirable perspective? These questions have to be posed against the background of the near impossibility to settle nomads. Only recently, after about 1870, nomads of the world’s „Nomads Belt“ were „settled“ by force. Too often this kind of settlement meant nothing more than an attempted genocide. In other cases world market prices in wool and other „nomadic“ products were too low during a long period. Together with the usual hazzards of nomadic life such as droughts and animal-pests, this depression meant starvation of North African nomads at a large scale. Governments and development agencies experienced that their energetic efforts to „peasantize“ nomads largely failed.\(^{11}\) So, what is meant by Weber with „a transition from nomadic animal-husbandry to sedentary agriculture“?

Furthermore, the „milk-question“ as well as the „cattle-husbandry“ phenomenon received pivotal importance. This problem is partly related to the farreaching differences between a population’s dominant milk-consumption and a dominant meat-consumption. Partly it is related to the antagonism between the use of the animal’s milk/meat and the use of animal-energy („horse-power“, oxen, donkeys, etc.). At present, in industrial urban society „milk“ seems to be one of the million consumer-products in a super-market. Sometimes, at the moment the so-called „milk-oceans“ float the EEC again, people awake but only for as long as headlines in the papers reach. Sometimes we are surprised by interesting anthropological studies about strange tribes, their bonds of blood and milk, their symbolic and medical use of milk, etc.\(^{12}\) Weber, however, even used the milk-item in a comparative world-historical perspective. But did he rightly understood that as nearly no other product milk is a

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metaphor for specific kinds of societies? Why gave he, for instance, East-Asian peoples no access to milk cattle-husbandry? Isn’t it remarkable as well that, in fact, „nomadism“ remains only a feature in „Western“ history, whereas the Asian history seems wholly occupied by peasants who became later horticulturalists?

The last element of this problem-definition concerns ideology. In all respects, one can say: Dealing with nomads is never value-free. „Nomad-ideological problems“ concern, first, well-known discrimination-patterns which could lead us to question their origin and to compare relevant histories. Brent Shaw, for instance, began an important Herodotos-article, „Eaters of Flesh, Drinkers of Milk“, by offending the reader’s „civilized sensibilities“ to illustrate that nomads, whether ancient or modern, have never had a „good press“. He quotes Hunter Thompson as follows:

... The Menace is loose again, the Hell’s Angels, the hundred carat headline, running fast and loud on the early morning freeway, low in the saddle, nobody smiles, jaming crazy through traffic and ninety miles an hour down the centre stripe, missing by inches ... like Genghis Khan on an iron horse, a monster steed with fiery anus, flat out through the eye of a beer can and up your daughter’s leg with no quarter asked and none given ...

Here Shaw appeals to a string of prejudices commonly associated with mobile people. Immediately, he directs the reader’s attention to the general effects of the „nomadic challenge“. Shaw rightly complains about the „complete shortfall in recorded history of an entire sector of human community“. In Classical antiquity it is due to the little sympathy with the (pastoral) nomad in written accounts of historians, military men or administrators. Their perception of the world, their sedentarist outlook, determined to a large extent existing prejudices.

The ideological problems concerning nomadic peoples and societies can be also studied in all the three parts of Weber’s sociology of religion. Indeed, it seems almost self-evident to develop the general argumentation of this article on the basis of these wirtschaftsetthische texts. Within his very incomplete oeuvre, they not only form a rather complete corpus but they also deal in a comparative way with regions most suitable for the study of nomadism i.e. the Chinese, Hindustic or Palestinian societies/histories. It is well known that these analyses were of paramount importance for Weber to answer questions raised with the rise of modern capitalism in the West and the role of religion in that process. I cannot deal with that part of the problem here but by implication my analysis of Weber’s view on nomadism etc. will affirm or criticize his capitalism-theory.

It is clear, then, that the given problem-definition displays a vast and complex field of research which must be kept in mind when looking into a specific corner of that field: Max Weber’s views on the East-Asian, in particular Chinese, sedentarism-nomadism contradictions. I put to the test, first, the Chinese and other Asian „milk and meat evidence“ as a direct consequence of Weber’s writings. It not only gives the opportunity to dive into Weber’s thought but also to highlight some specific nomadic

features. The second part of the article concerns the general characteristics of the sedentarism/ agriculture versus nomadism/ animal-husbandry relationships. Much misunderstandings concerning nomadism in history can be discussed by means of a broad historical analysis so that a relevant insight is reached into a highly complex phenomenon as „the (chance of) a transition from nomadic animal-husbandry to sedentary agriculture“. In advance I confess that this aim cannot be reached, but I hope to show the main elements of this transition-problem in a Chinese and Central Asian context. In the end I can come back on characteristics of Weber’s „nomadism-theory“ eventually to be used as a steppingstone for a new investigation into his general theory.

1 A milk and meat ideology

When Weber talked about the social basis of Chinese development in the 18th century, he pointed to the extraordinary intensity of the Chinese „acquisitive drive“: Commercial organizations were very powerful as well as autonomous and the Chinese were very eager to work and perform well. In this respect nearly no one could compete with them. Weber supposed that the fast population-growth of the 18th century combined with an ever increasing stock of strategic metals should have given China the best opportunity to become a capitalist country. But this did not happen. Why? Weber summed up the following reasons: The large increase of the peasant population instead of a strong decrease as in England; the small-scale peasant-holdings instead of the agricultural large enterprises as in Prussia; cattle-breeding was largely undeveloped and, subsequently, milk-drinking was absent and meat-consumption „something for the rich“. This last item is even seen as a Hauptgegensatz between Europe and Asia. This can be expected given what was cited in the introduction.¹⁶

¹⁴ See GAR, I, p. 349 ff. Weber used here „Erwerbsstrich“ which is translated according WG, p. 371 and EG, p. 617 although „acquisitive drive“, at least, does not remind to „Haushalten“ as the unavoidable counter-concept to Weber’s Erwerbsstrich.

¹⁵ Elvin, Mark: The Pattern of the Chinese Past. Stanford, Cal.: Stanford Univ. Pr. (1973) p. 268 gives the modern view. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries there was a fast increase of market towns: „...they grew up around temples, around the manors of great landlords and the country residences of important merchants, and even around industrial undertakings such as pottery works ...“ One development which can certainly be compared to the Prussian situation (this occurred at the same time but on a much larger scale!), was the penetration of the large monasteries into the plains of Mongolia. In around 1825 „some 30% of the male population had taken vows. Monasteries increased in size and towns grew round them.“ Gray, Jack: Revolutions and Revolutions. China from the 1800s to the 1980s. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Pr. (1990), p.94. Later, one got as much trouble with these monks as with the Junkers! But it is true, the small peasant economy prevailed, although their political-economy is hardly comparable to the European peasant economy which was Weber’s frame of reference (see, for instance, Gray, p.8 ff.).

¹⁶ WGe, p. 39 note 1. In relation to his capitalism-thesis, he later (GAR, I, 373 ff.) made the differentiation between the „political capitalism“ of money-lenders and suppliers of patronimical courts and „modern capitalism“. The first kind earned high profit-rates in their money-business and one knew how to exploit mines and commerce to accumulate wealth. „The development of the capitalism oriented to the market proper and free exchange remained, however, in statu nascendi.“ What developed in Western
In trying to answer the question „Why all this?“ anew, Weber apologised for not dealing with the case of the nomadic past of the Chinese. In a long note 17, however, he compensated this with a fundamental statement. He argued that nomadic invaders from Inner Asia who suppressed the population of the main Chinese valley's showed up repeatedly. Weber went on to say that

From time to time only the nomadic Mongols did serious efforts of sustaining their positions against the higher farm-culture (by means of a prohibition to grow crops in a certain distance of the capital). However, the Chinese never drink milk and this fact is clearly more important than all histories about the continuity of the centuries old field- and horticulture. Besides this the rituals of the Emperor prescribed the ceremonial use of the plow. Compared with these facts the nomadic descent of (part of) the old ruler-elite seems insignificant. The existence of „Man-houses“ ... has nothing to do with „nomadism“, but it shows that war and game is cared for by these communities, but the agriculture by the women. The absence of milk-consumption in China is clearly very old and it contradicts the „Nomad“-Hypothesis. Large animals were used for work or sacrifice and small animals were used to satisfy the normal need for meat.

This view rests first and foremost on the typical European (sedentary!) prejudices about the always war-making and „barbaric“ nomads; they not only kill and enslave poor peasants and threaten peaceful, godfearing rulers, but they never accept any control or the authority of the State. As will be shown, the Weberian prejudices fit perfectly well with views within the Chinese oikoidal (court)elite.

But let me first give a short and rather unsystematic answer to the question of meat- and milk-consumption in Chinese history, which presupposes animal-breeding, pastures and so on. It is told that the idea of the Chinese non-consumption of milk comes from Alexander von Humboldt (1769–1859) 18. If he has stated this, his words must be hidden beyond his Gesammelte Werke. It should be interesting to know which sources, except his learned thumb, Humboldt used. In any case, the milk-statement must have been part of his general social evolution-theory in which everywhere sedentary agriculture had to come before nomadism and „hunterism“. Most scholars in the 19th century, however, adhered to the opposite theory, the so-called Dreistufentheorie in which hunters are followed first by nomads and later by „agriculturalists“ (Ackerbauer). Some even dared to expand this theory with „industrialism“.

At the moment one can easily find supporters of both opinions but, in my view, they are both wrong starting-points. Apart from the fallacy of every „prime mover“

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thinking, at least, one has to consider all kinds of ecological, climatrical or economical circumstances before posing relevant transitions. If this is done, one conclusion seems unavoidable: there have to be several developments for different regions thanks to combinations of possibilities. Second, the knowledge about the „mutual relations“ or dependencies of agriculture, nomadism and the other forms has to be taken in serious consideration. So far, so good.

In Weber’s Heidelberg the economic-geographer Eduard Hahn published numerous influential studies about this social evolution. ¹⁹ He is a rather agressive conservative defender of „our agriculture“ in science as well as in politics. Hahn renewed not only Humboldt’s agricultural evolution-thesis but also his opinion about the Chinese milk-consumption. According to him, Humboldt told „that the consumption of milk – for us a self-evident matter – is detested by the Chinese as a people and that they do this already for thousands of years.“ Hahn adds to this that Chinese at present never eat cheese: „From this food we received our bad smell, they think.“ ²⁰ Milk is a beloved subject of Hahn’s book. Strange enough, he does not mention any reason why „the Chinese as a people“ (!) should abhor this healthy white drink. Also in other respects Hahn used an equal development model as Weber: Exactly the milk consumption and animal husbandry in our culture is strictly embedded within the agriculture [Ackerbau or Pflügkultur for Hahn] and by this fact we received major elements of our identity. It is not difficult to prove whether Weber is directly influenced by Hahn who does not discuss an anti- „Chinese meat-case“ or a pro- „Chinese vegetarianism“. ²¹ Although


²⁰ Hahn, Die Entstehung, p. 24 (as a source he mentions E. Parker’s China, history., London, 1901), see also p. 28.

²¹ In GASW, p. 508-556 within a very principal discussion about some hot issues of the German historiography in his days (Der Streit um den Charakter der altgermanischen Sozialverfassung ...) Weber very positively referred to Hahn (p. 524). Weber’s affirmation is given although he strongly doubts Hahn’s scholarship (note 1); in his perception Hahn has the „überliefernten Vorstellungen über die Wirtschaftsformen zuerst einen eingehender begründeten Widerspruch entgegengesetzt ...“ (H. criticized old-fashioned ideas about economic development in a highly appropriate way). It is very informative how
early in the century Chinese restaurants were not widespread, it remains strange how unfamiliar Weber was with Chinese food. At least, he would have known that pork always was (and is happily) a normal part of the common Chinese family-diet. By 5000 BC, the Neolithic villagers' main meat animals were pigs and chickens. They also raised and ate sheep and dogs. Soon afterwards the cow, waterbuffalo and duck were added and the Chinese meat roster was essentially complete. \(^\text{22}\) Since Weber thinks that the absence of milk-consumption in China is very old, then in the third century AD it was not necessary to come up with proposals for large-scale changes of pastures into arable lands. That occurred in specific parts of China, whereas elsewhere the extraordinary richness of many large estates could be reported where, for instance, „their horses, cattle, sheep and swine“ were so numerous that „the upland valleys cannot hold them.\(^\text{23}\) In around 644, the emperor T'ai-tsung of the T'ang complained about the difficult food-situation and ordered:

The situation is especially bad in the San-Wei, and yet grazing lands for pigs, sheep and horses are spread throughout this region. All if these should be done away with ... All the pasturages should be removed, so that the horses, cattle, pigs and sheep feed on the grass of the empty plains.\(^\text{24}\)

Weber here took the reverse position as in the Chinese case: here the old West-Germans as alleged nomads are not seen as consumers of milk, cheese and meat but first as Ackerbauer, whereas the more eastern German tribes were (still) milk etc. consumers (p. 524 ff.). It is not possible to discuss this position which must be seen in relation to Weber's „East Asian“ view.

22 Anderson, Edward: The Food of China. New Haven/London: Yale Univ. Pr. (1988) p. 143, 144. See also op. cit. p. 164 ff., 177. He also reports: „In Sung China, as the 'golden age' of Chinese sushi making, ... pork was the main meat eaten, but sheep, goat and even donkey were common...“ (p.68). For the earliest milk and meat consumption in Central Asia now see the excellent Dani, A; Masson, V. (Ed.): History of civilizations of Central Asia. Paris: Unesco (1992), vol.1 for example p. 39 ff., 225 ff., 272 ff. (pre-Indus cultures); 432 ff. It was impossible for me to exploit Christian, David: A History of Russia, Central Asia and Mongolia. Oxford: Blackwell (1998), Vol. I with numerous data on milk and meat consumption. Anderson tells about the traveller Robert Fortune who wrote in 1847: „The food of the people is of the simplest kind ... rice, vegetables, and a small portion of animal food, such as fish and pork.“ (Op. cit. p. 96). Fei, Hsiao-Tung: Peasant Life in China. A Field Study of Country Life in the Yangze Valley. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul (1980) p. 126–128 tells about the relative poor peasants diet in the thirties of our century: „The only kind of meat eaten is pork...“ and „During the period of agricultural work, the dinner is comparatively rich. They have meat and fish. But in ordinary times meat is not very often served. Pure vegetarianism is rare except for a few widows.“ In Kwantung there was even a tax on slaughtered animals in 1908. Such a tax is only appropriate if there is a large amount of meat-eaters. Yeh-chien, Wang: Land Taxation in Imperial China, 1750–1911. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Pr. (1973) p. 79.

23 Elvin, p. 33. In about 1100 when the Southern Sung introduced paper money a source reported that the bills were paid half in paper and half in cash: „A similar practice was followed among the common people for the mortgaging or sale of fields, houses, horses, cattle ...“ (op. cit., p.160).

24 See also op. cit., p. 39 about the same time: „The importance of livestock in the farm economy of north-eastern China at this time is in marked contrast with the predominance of cereal crop cultivation, ... in the late traditional period and at the present.“ Other aspects of milk-drinking are given in Wolfgang Bauer's brilliant book China und die Hoffnung auf Glück. München: dtv (1989). It is an analysis and description of most of the utopian visions and ideas about the best possible world in Chinese history from the beginning up to Mao Zedong's political-economic experiments. Bauer often reported about a most beautiful world „of milk and honey", a subterranean world with milk-resources (ca. AD 825; op. OE 41 (1998/99) 1/2
One of Mark Elvin’s relevant answers to the question also addressed by Weber as to why (Western) industrial capitalism did not develop in China from the 18th century onwards was: “There was a shortage of draught-animals, and possibly therefore of animal manures, as northern grazing-lands were turned into fields.” Elvin’s remark could mean that the government still failed to take announced measures, but also that over a very long period well into modern times there were large areas with animal-husbandry and, subsequently, milk-consumption. Elvin shows as well that, apart from milk, the manure-problem is of the utmost importance for the peasants and, in general, for the interdependence of agriculture and animal-breeding. The large agricultural potential could only be exploited given an abundance of water and animal manure (see below).

In 1847 the traveller Robert Fortune “was surprised to find that in Foochow beef and milk were widely eaten.” At the end of the nineteenth century, Arthur H. Smith writes: “In the northern parts of China the horse, the mule, the ox, and the donkey are in universal use, and in large districts the camel is made to do full duty. ... it is the general practice to eat all of these animals as soon as they expire, no matter whether the cause of death be an accident, old age, or disease. ... and this truth is recognized in the lower scale of prices asked for it, but it is all sold, and is all eaten.” It is no surprise to read nowadays: “The consumption of dairy products has increased markedly since World War II, but only in the northwestern pastoral regions are cattle widely used for meat or milk products.” A comment to this very quick overview over the “milk-centuries” seems unnecessary.

This brings us to the following related “practical” points. If Weber looked into the matter of milk- and meat-consumption, he must have considered the densely populated eastern parts of China, the coastal-areas or the river-valleys (together about 50% of China’s surface and 75% of the population). The real Chinese pasture-provinces in the North, interior and (South)West are neglected. This must have seriously influ-

cit., p. 275-277); a vision of a new world, Uttarakuru, still used in about 1650 in which there grew lotus-flowers with juice “which looks like milk, tastes sweet and delicious, smells like honey ... large, heavy clouds as big as the whole country ... wonderful rain ... like cow milk. ... There is no egoism (wu wo), nor a ruler (wu chu) or police ...” (op. cit., p. 235), etc. Another comment about Weber’s meat-verdict can be seen in a Confucian story from the 13th century which shows the opposite: members of the sect of “Satans-friends and Vegetable-eaters” are forbidden to eat meat and to drink wine. Some of them became rich. This inspired the story-teller to complain about the naivety of the people “because it is self-evident that one becomes rich if one does not eat meat and drink wine ...” (op. cit., p.312).

25 Elvin, p.301.

26 Op. cit. Anderson, p. 96. Foochow or F(o)uchou is located at the coast opposite Taiwan; a very remote place in relation to the pasture heartlands!


28 Hsieh, Chiao-min: Atlas of China. New York: McGraw Hill (1973) p. 87, 88. This atlas is very helpful in discovering the many pitfalls and possibilities of the present Chinese climate, hydrology etc. and the resulting land use, crops, etc. I don’t know if this atlas may be accurate about the historical record. In that case Mongolia (and many parts of Central Asia as Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan etc.), an area nearly as great as Western Europe with 80% pastures, must also be considered.
enced his perception and from many other scholars. For all these people, the facts must come as a surprise: "Not only the Mongols, nomadic Turkic groups ... and Tibetans, but also the western Chinese eat yogurt, cheese, kumys ... and other fermented products." But also elsewhere in China there were and are many opportunities for several kinds of pastoralism and animal breeding. A few statistics are sufficient to explain this point further.

In the thirties a remarkable inquiry appeared from J. Lossing Buck. This gave the first reliable possibility to compare "Western" and "Eastern" agricultural practices. Although Lossing Buck mainly studied the hard core agricultural areas, he could estimate that approximately one-fourth of all land is cultivated which is an average in the world (between 12 to 45 per cent). One-half is in some kind of productive use consisting of trees, grass and reeds for fuel. One-fifth is occupied by forest and twelve per cent is real pasture. At the moment thirty-one per cent of the Chinese surface is qualified as "pasture"; it is an area as large as eighty per cent of Europe (excl. Russia) with a population of, at least, 200 million people! If Lossing Buck only looks into the twenty-five per cent of cultivated land, he estimates that nearly ninety per cent is used for crops and about two per cent for pasture. In the United States this relation is forty-two per cent against forty-seven (and at the time in Europe - excl. Russia - it had to be about sixty-five and thirty per cent). Therefore, Lossing Buck concludes that there is a small animal industry in China and a consequent low food consumption of animal products, as compared with a large animal industry and a high consumption of animal products in many of the Western countries. In an optimistic mood, this could be seen as a first substantiation of Weber's thesis.

However, the conclusion is drawn at the basis of only a quarter of the total Chinese surface. Notwithstanding this fact, Lossing Buck concludes next: "The density of animal population is, however, surprisingly high in China: 0.34 animal units per crop acre, as compared with 0.70 in Great Britain ... (it) means that over a large part of the country the farms are moderately to well-stocked. This is true in spite of the fact that 10 per cent of the farms have no animals. This degree of animal density is a large factor in the maintenance of the fertility of the land." 

30 Lossing Buck, John: Land Utilization in China. Shanghai (1937/38). In the three volumes of this study the report is given from an eight years' field investigation of 17,000 farms involving 46,601 farm families in twenty-two out of China's twenty-eight provinces by over 3000 experts.
31 This is not as remarkable as it seems because in scrutinizing Buck's data the gap can be diminished. Furthermore, one must always control the vital data used by the scholars at stake. Buck used, for instance, a total Chinese surface of about 1,400,000 square miles; the Times Atlas of the World gives a surface of 3,900,000 square miles (1959); the Third World Guide (89/90) uses 9,596,961 square kilometres, and so on.
32 The American agriculturalist Lossing Buck did a great job. It is, however, undeniable that he made only a typical agricultural investigation in the northern wheat- and southern rice-regions. Animal husbandry and its products in the broadest sense of the word got too less attention. Other sources like eye-witness accounts must be consulted awaiting new and relevant studies. See, for instance, Buck's colleague the important King, Frederick: Farmers of Forty Centuries or permanent agriculture in China, Korea and Japan. London: Cape (1949, orig. 1911). I thank Wim Wertheim for pointing to this study. This American agriculturalist made the following comparison about the animal density in Shantung (p. 206): Well
The myths of „a vegetarian China“ or of „China, the country of only small peasants“ should come to an end. The same must happen with the related myth of „the Chinese or East Asian abstinence from dairy products“. The classic Chinese explanation for this last myth is clear enough: „... prejudice against Central Asians and desire to avoid economic dependence on them.‖ Here we arrive at the hard core of the „Nomadic Challenge“. The given prejudice enlightens a most typical okioidal argument inspired by autarkic state-policies. „The Chinese State“ (whatever this may be in Chinese history) had already become dependent on horse-imports from Central Asia; another dependence would have been „too costly and too humiliating‖! After discussing the more practical problems, we can look into the Chinese Weber-case in more detail.

2 The mutual relationships

For a period of at least two thousand years (200 BC-AD 1700), „trade was the chief determinant of peace and war between the nomadic and Chinese peoples along China’s northern borders‖. The Turkic and Mongolian nomads needed and got par-

to-do farmers in this city are able to provide for eight people, two cows, two donkeys and about eight pigs. If taking the same density „an area of farm land equal to the state of Wisconsin would have 86,000,000 people; 21,500,000 cows; 21,500,000 donkeys and 86,000,000 swine... It is clear, therefore, that either very effective agricultural methods are practiced or else extreme economy is exercised. Both are true‖ Elsewhere (p. 132) he tells about a cattle farm in Shanghai (!) with 40 cows, fed with a.o. cotton seed cakes, which produced milk „far better than the Danish and New Zealand products served at the hotels.‖ Still, even King cannot fully free himself from the vegetar—myth in quoting an American colleague instead of looking around (p. 121 ff.).

33 Anderson, p.145, 146. Of course, it is true that at the moment the majority of East Asians are poor milk- or dairy consumers. Certainly Buddhism, as another okioidal power, is effective by declaring cows as holy animals. It is also a typical okioidal argument to come up with a biological explanation for the alleged milk-abstinence in East Asia. Also in the case of milk-consumption one must be exact as possible because most nomads of Central Asia never drink fresh milk. It is first boiled and then fermented; butter and various kinds of cheese are made from fermented milk. Furthermore one has to understand the peculiarities of the various kinds of milk and their popularity for different reasons. Sheep and cow milk is consumed the most but for special occasions the beestings (the first milk of cows, sheep and goats) or the fermented mare's milk (koumiss or kumys) are more popular. Camels do have a large milk production; it is said, however, that pregnant women do not drink this milk. See Leeuwen, Nomads in Central Asia, p. 65.

particularly large quantities of rice, cloth, silk and lacquer wares for themselves and for trade with other (Near)Asian peoples. The grain was partly used as a supplement to their daily diet of milk and meat. The Chinese agriculturists needed and sometimes got slaves, but always got horses, cattle, sheep, wool, furs (sable and fox in particular), hides, tendons and horns, the famous jade or strategic metals as copper and iron in large quantities. From the Sung Chinese, nomads bought rice etc. for large quantities of silver money, whereas already in the Han-period the Chinese gave substantial amounts of money and gold as gifts.

In the 19th century, from a Central Asian perspective, the picture looks as follows. In all nomadic societies along the Western Chinese borders there existed many bazaars. Here livestock (sheep, camels, horses, etc.) and handicrafts (skins, leather, footwear, wool, carpets, etc.) are sold by nomads but nearly no food. Dairy products normally were not used for trade or barter. The nomads bought agricultural products and products of city craftsmen like cotton, silk and pottery. But now also copperware, iron pots and so on are bought from city-merchants. Fundamental changes, however, did not occur before the collectivisation-programmes from the thirties of the twentieth century onwards. Below I shall deal with that subject.

It would be an error to suppose that only pure nomadic products came to the Chinese farmers or that agricultural products went to the nomads. The Uighur people (about AD 1000), for instance, also traded white wheat, Tibetan wheat, yellow hemp, green onions and other vegetables to T'ang and later courts. In AD 48 the Han court offered the Southern Hsiung-nu even 36,000 cattle, because they had to flee for the Northern Hsiung-nu without being able to save their herds. In the following years the court continued with these deliveries. Also in later sources, cattle and other animals appeared to be sold to nomads.

In the 19th century nomadic people in the West exchanged flour and other food products with Afghan and Arab wool. Also carpets and bags went from Arab countries into all the nomadic carpet-producing countries. In spring the Afghans and Arabs even drove their rams through the southern regions of Tajikistan as far as Kokand near the Chinese border. No wonder that Emeljanenko could conclude: “The existence of these economic connections testified that the peoples and ethnic groups of Central Asia did not live an isolated life, limited within the framework of their natural economy.” In this century agriculture got also a somewhat larger share in the total economic and production activities of Central Asian countries. Several forms of sedentary life became more popular as urbanization increased. This kind of mutual relations grew more intense as well. For some regions it seemed a reproduction of what happened in the past.

From the earliest records of the Ch'in and Han periods until the seventeenth century mostly both “parties” accepted all the benefits of their mutual dependency. As such, this is a later development from the oldest records, the most famous Anyang


36 Op. cit., p. 68. This implies a critique on Weber's ideas about Naturalwirtschaft (see quotations in the introduction).
oracle texts from the Shang society (14th–12th century BC). Here in the middle and lower reaches of the Huang Ho emerged from 2000 BC onwards proto-urban, rather democratic and women-friendly communities. They had well-developed agriculture as well as a prominent "animal-economy" (cattle, sheep, horses); the interdependence between the two economies, therefore, was an internal matter. Conflicts with equally organized neighbours, however, were often caused by quarrels about grazing grounds. In the Ch'in and Han periods, their peaceful relations with nomads was ensured through certain ritualistic customs like intermarriages, bestowals etc. A market-urbanisation along the frontiers and a market-infrastructure came into existence. There were nuclei of all sorts of economic or cultural interferences with effects felt deep into the hinterlands. During the sixteenth century there seems to have been a large-scale employment of Chinese peasants on Mongolian land, demanded by Mongolian leaders to supplement their normal diet. Still they needed grain shipped from the south of China, which demonstrates the extensiveness of their communication lines.

Even this superficial profile shows the large degree of interdependence of nomads (pastoralists and other animal breeders) and agriculturalists. The very fact of this interdependence counteracts thoughts and policies exploiting in some way or other animosities and antagonisms between peoples. What then can be said about the strongest form of animosity, war, between nomads and Chinese?

The peacefulness of the relations between the areas was the norm and war the deviation or exception. For historians etc. familiar with the very bloody 19th and 20th century Chinese history, this might be a rather utopian exclamation. But the very existence of the Chinese or Great Wall, the main logo of the older Chinese society for all foreigners, also seems to be the main proof of the heavy antagonism between "barbarians" and "highly cultured" Chinese. (Contrary to popular belief, the Great Wall was not there in Mongol times). The first question is, therefore, why the peace was often violated, because the consequences were always rather far-reaching: no trade for years, poverty, devastation, cruelties and, nearly always, the nomads gained the victories. For the Chinese "party", therefore, there was the near certainty that they had to lose everything with conflicts. They often knew this perfectly well. Why then was war made against "the other"?

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38 That is a bit different from Weber's opinion that Mongolians prohibited the grows of crops. Cf. n. 17.
39 Jagchid, p. 191 note 37 in which Lattimore is quoted saying that the exchange of goods was important, but that "the steppe nomad can withdraw into the steppe, if he needs to, and remain completely out of contact with other societies." Jagchid also remarks that Lattimore did not study "the completely self-sufficient nomad, isolated in the remote vastness of the Central Eurasian steppe..." very well. Here the same complex problem arises as in the case of the autarkic peasant who has haunted ideological discussions in history, economy, sociology and philosophy for so long. See my: "Autarkeia in Greek theory and practice", in: The European Legacy, 1,6 (1996), p. 1915–1933.
40 See the discussion at the court of the Chin dynasty, Jagchid, p. 53, 54.
2.1 The rulers and their wars

First, we have to remember what the Scythian nomadic chieftain Idanthyrus told to the ideal-typical Chinese emperor, the Persian king Darius. From this speech one could derive the following thesis: The aggressive way "Western" ruling elites (who nearly always act on their own behalf) think about war is fundamentally different from the defensive attitudes of "indigenous" leaders. To support this thesis, it is not necessary to rely on the good savage ideology but only (1) on the practices of democratic or non-oikoidal leadership. It is not possible here to elaborate on this thesis but it is necessary to keep it in mind. Below some support for this view will be given. 41

In the end Jagchid and Symons answer the question, why rulers made war in East Asia, as follows:

(1) the prejudice and mistrust felt by nomad and also sedentist toward the other; (2) the ineffectiveness of Chinese dynasties in implementing frontier trading policies and regulating unscrupulous frontier officials; and (3) the chaotic nature of the frontier, rife with unsavory characters and illicit trading activities. 42

There could be more reasons to invade the land of "the other": famines, floods and other natural disasters made whole populations move in the "wrong" direction; render- and other animal-pests were for nomads the worst dangers in life and certainly much worse than Chinese armies; adventorous warlords or court-officials who wanted to gamble when in "the other" land impelled internal conflicts or waged civil war. 43

What about the three points Jagchid and Symons raised? The last is clear enough. Smugglers, bandits, illicit trade in iron weapons etc. made the frontier-regions unsafe areas, apart from the fact, that the whole corridor was a melting-pot of non-conformists from both sides. It seems to me, however, exceptional that such groups should provoke "parties" to make war (probably the case of the Hsien-pe" in the Han-period). More important are the first two points.


42 Jagchid, p. 165.

43 A typical example is also given in Jagchid, p.63 were court officials advised: "... the barbarians, both humans and animals, suffer disease and death. Drought and locusts have made their land turn red, and with their strength sapped by drought and disease they cannot even match a commandery ... How can we hang onto literary virtue and neglect military affairs?"

44 Under one of their tribal leaders, P'ien-ho, the Hsien-pe" could be bribed to attack the other arch-enemy of the Han, the Wu-huan (ca. 50 AD). The initiative to render this service to the Han came from P'ien-ho c.s. in exchange for the vast sum of money of no less then 270 million coins each year. In the same period the Han also paid about 100 million coins to the Southern Hsiung-nu for the same kind of services. To "divide-and-rule" costed a lot of money those days. See Jagchid, p. 32 ff.
The Chinese disdain for their northern and western neighbours in the first place originates from the court-located part of the Chinese elite. From here spread the stereotypical qualities assigned to all “barbarians” regardless where they came from. One Chinese source qualifies the Hsiung-nu (about 50 BC) as follows:

The barbarians (i-si) are covetous for grain, they have long hair, they button their [clothes] on the left side, and are human faced [but] bestial hearted.45

This racism too frequently led Chinese rulers to see relations with nomads as deleterious to “the Chinese state”. Friendship or affection must be unknown to nomads, they supposed, and nomads know only greed; it is, therefore, wise to take aggressive measures against them. Also in this case, imperialism and racism were part and parcel of an (Super)oidoidal constellation (see below). This is a consequence of or legitimated by the ideological and abstract doctrine of the universal Chinese right of empire which is only comparable to the same doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church.

The nomadic rulers in their turn never accepted any kind of Chinese assertion of (cultural) superiority, which could be interpreted as an acceptance of a subordinate position. As the reason for this behaviour Jagchid/ Symons mention the preponderance of military power most frequently held by the nomadic peoples. More important to me is that nomadic people do have a totally different way of treating rulers (including their own) as sedentary people.46 This is seldom understood by sedentaries. They too easily believe in and accept hierarchies which are by definition based on (strong), often hereditary, forms of top-down discriminations.

The nomadic treatment of rulers and the general decision-making process rested, however, on a firm and basic kind of „practical democracy“. To put it bluntly: this was not a „top-down hierarchy“ but a „bottom-up“ constellation based on a strong mistrust against authority. For squinting outsiders it seems difficult to discover the differences. In many cases that decision-making process consisted out of (and often still has) following elements. Those who are powerful rulers in the eyes of outsiders do have internally (very) weak, non-hereditary more or less ceremonial positions. For instance, the initiation-rituals for shamans often equalize the „enthronement ceremonies“ of the qayan (first Türk “State”, 552–630) or whatever other leader. A Turkish ancestral legend also points to the blacksmith as head, while in Shamanism there is a close relation between the shaman and the blacksmith. If the qayan comes from clan A., a consort is chosen from clan B as countervailing power (compare the two so-called „kings“ in old Sparta, etc.). These figures have to display for the outer world the might and glory of the confederation of clans or of the tribe, consisting of many clans. Clan elders (always plural) are, in fact, the first institutionalized rulers with real

power. However, they too have to share this power with (extended) family-heads, who have to listen first and foremost to the meeting of experienced adult men and women of the families.

Most important is the even less known circumstance that the objects of the public decision-making processes in nomad circles are very different from those in sedentary environments. Here the complex work which is to be done through the year to breed, move and cater for animals is the main object of political deliberations. In sedentary circles, however, the political deliberations nearly never concern work (of agriculturalists or other professions) or work organization. First and foremost, one deals with orders that heads of state or high ranked persons (fail to) give to lower echelons, the norms/ laws involved or the status inside the hierarchy. Derived from these questions one probably worries about work proper and its organization.

Nomadic attitudes against foreigners were (and are) guided by the nearly unshakable rules and rituals of hospitality. Sympathetic as this may be, this hospitality was also the „weak belly“ in external relations of nomads and pastoralists. If they were confronted with foreigners or foreign institutions with hidden agendas, this hospitality was the open gate for all kinds of „Trojan Horses“. Generally speaking: People starting relationships with cheaters in an open mood of trust and friendship are, at least, one step behind. In the frontier-zones, in peace- and war-time, it became clear how frustrating mutual relations could be.

2.2 Imperial oikoidal court rules

The failure of the Chinese dynasties to implement effective frontier trading policies, „left nomads vulnerable to unscrupulous Chinese officials and merchants, who often bilked them of their possessions.“46 Because these Chinese could cheat nomads rather easily (gadgets-for-worthwhile products, etc.), they regarded them as foolish. In their turn nomads learned by bitter experience to see Chinese as mendacious and shrewd. Things went from bad to worse, when Chinese frontier-officials started all kinds of actions against nomads in the expectation to gain credits at the capital-courts.

An activist and provocative military approach - for instance by bribing Mongolian bandits - became part and parcel of a courtly career planning. In their turn, the high ranking court-militaries suffered from the typical oikoidal high rewards-heavy punishment policies. Their successes were proved „by counting the collected number of heads of enemy soldiers. This lead generals to order the slaying of non-belligerent to meet established quotas.“48 (These massacres of nomadic peoples in the market-places often lead to counter-measures of the same cruel kind). The court-rule for failure was demotion or robbing of privileges, properties etc. and sometimes execution. The inconsistencies of the rewards-punishment mechanism are seen where officials got rewards even if wars were lost, which was normally the case. A striking example of alternative behaviour is the famous nomad-leader Mao-tun (about 200 BC) who once encircled a large Han-army. Instead of starting a slaughter as Chinese usually did, he

47 Jagchid p. 176.

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opened the encirclement: „Fortunately, Mao-tun was more interested in economic than political or territorial gain.”

So, the general mental climate at the Chinese courts was, to say the least, not in favour of reasonable relations with nomads, their markets and cultures. This inevitably became one of the most important vehicles for anti-nomadic sentiments in the centre as well as in the frontier-zones. It is worthwhile to consider these relations in more (historical and theoretical) detail, because they demonstrate in an extraordinarily clear way the contents of oikos-market contradictions.

Let’s take the above mentioned complaint about the greed of nomads as a kind of excuse to take action against them. „Greed“ for the Chinese must be an effect of the ineradicable attitude of nomads to make deals about everything and nothing and to get what they want for – what they consider – the lowest possible price. They are experts in selling and buying animals and related products. This market depends, to a large degree, on individual action and on the principle of „honesty is the best quality“. Every participant learns this rather quickly through the given price-mechanisms („best quality, highest price“) for which the norms are rather fixed.

Why exists this rule? Because the price standard consists of animals from which already a nomad child knows the many (dis)qualities. During a long period also in European history it is well known that cows were widely valued as „legal means of payment“ and as „walking wealth“. The source for the nomadic incessant drive to trade, in fact, is the (ecological) necessity to look constantly for opportunities to get rid of more or less large parts of their flocks and flock-products. Furthermore, within nomad and pastoral ways of life stress is laid on individual achievement in their work and on the individual performance of work-skills. The permanent struggle to strike a balance between the drive for wealth and the crude „laws of animal-health“ belongs to the very basis of nomadic or pastoralist life. All factors discussed so far (in a schematic way) are favorable for open external relations.

One of the consequences of these characteristics is, that nomads did not treat the Chinese in a racist and/or disdainful way. They did not rush to accept Chinese culture either and viewed the Chinese as impolite and improperly raised. A typical nomadic advice from the eighth century after warning of the seduction of the bitter-sweet voices of the Chinese says:

Thus, O Turk, when you go into that country you come to the edge of death, but when, on the other hand, you stay in your Otukan fastnesses, and only send caravans (for trade or tribute] you have no woes at all.

It is not by accident that the Mongolian word for „merchant“ was synonymous for a Chinese verb „to lie“.

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50 Derks, Hans: De Koe van Troje, p. 62 ff.
51 cited in Jagchid, p. 175.
2.3 Market-behaviour

The resulting market-behaviour, however, could become or be interpreted as naïve if it is confronted with an alternative market-behaviour from quite different origin. The frontier-zones gave this opportunity. The first is the confrontation with „smugglers and illicit traders”. Who receives these qualifications is decided by both nomadic and sedentary norms which can seriously differ in this matter. Other alternatives that become apparent result from trade relations of common men/wives in both cultures. As usual, sources are almost silent about the grassroot-levels. The third kind of alternative comes here from sources which try to dominate fully, namely from the Chinese courts and related circles.

Their sedentary attitudes are first and foremost functional to a fixed hierarchical order based on giving orders by a few, fulfilling them by the (large) majority of a given population and neglecting them by a (small) minority. (The hierarchy falls apart if the last two categories mutually alter their position.) Market behaviour of (high ranked) sedentarists compared to the normal sedentary way of life is nonconformist. Compared to the normal nomadic way of market behaviour it is also non-conformist. The „gray area“ in a socio-economic sense which arises corresponds to the frontier-area between two cultures. It goes without saying that both nonconformist positions have to be valued by the norms in their respective cultures or lifestyles.

The nomads were (and still are!) very proud of their mobility and freedom and „their land was not denuded by the plow ... They disdained those who worked on their knees in mud and dirt ..."[52]. The Chinese autocratic leadership and government, however, derived their wealth mostly from immobile agricultural sources and showed little interest in mercantile activities. Also the agro-ideology it developed, thanks to many Confucian philosophers, stressed the high esteem of agriculture and, subsequently, the low esteem of merchants. They warned the governments, when they became involved in marketing activities that „entered into financial competition with the people, dissipating primordial candor and simplicity and sanctioning propensities to selfishness and greed. As a result, few among our people take up the fundamental pursuits of life, while many flock to the non-essential ..."[53].

This Confucian anti-marketing prejudice often led emperors to ignore or evade their responsibilities to regulate frontier markets. Those who took the initiative to open markets to all nomadic people were the exception to the rule;[54] too many even viewed trade with nomads as economically disadvantageous and in this way nurtured

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[54] In around 1577, a large debate started about the need to continue the long peace and favorable market relations between Ming China and the Mongols (Jagchid, p.106 ff). In defence of the markets, Fang Feng-shih also gave a political argument: „When there are markets and tribute there is no war..." The relationship between war and agriculture, however, was set for the next centuries (or even millennia?) by Shih Huang-ti (r. 247–210 BC). He was a radical anti-market ruler and even hated „merchants who did not have any binding to the land and moved from town to town". Duyvensdijk, J.: Wegen en geslachten der Chineesche geschiedenis. Amsterdam: Elsevier (1948), p.64. This author also wrote: „Sje Hwang-ti strongly favoured agriculture. In imposing heavy demands on manpower and services on the people, he tried to intensify agriculture in order to establish sufficient corn-supplies in wartime ... he gave peasants property rights on land and levied a tax related to the size of the plot." (Op. cit., p.64).
isolationism. Therefore, military action or the threat of attack was often the only vehicle open to nomads to force Chinese rulers to open markets. Normalization in an economic sense, however, never meant a substantial abolishment of ideological barriers on the side of the Chinese.

The nature of the Chinese bureaucracy also disfavored market-normalizations. The hierarchy at the top was small and too disciplined by the courtly and imperial ritualistic rules. Active debate about market-frontier policies was restricted to a limited number of members of key ministries and a few individuals having direct access to the emperor. It is striking that court-officials who were in favour of peace and good commercial relations had to discuss their stand in terms of "peace" to gain time to prepare the next military confrontation with the "barbarians". It is also striking that high Chinese court-officials thought to impress nomad leaders with the same kind of corruption as was usual at the court itself.

The case of the Mongolian leader Esen and the Ming court (about 1450) is remarkable in this respect. Some high court officials suddenly reduced prices, offered nomads for horses and that was the reason for invading China. This was not understood at the court because they gave Esen personally so much bestows (silk rolls etc.). They looked at the highest person with which they made the deals as an absolute ruler, the type they knew the best. In other words, these Chinese court-negotiators did not understand the nature of horse-prices (usually related to the income of at least all horsebreeders) nor the nature of honest trading (in this case even with a large part of a whole people), nor the true nature of the nomad decision-making process. This occurred despite the fact that Esen's bestowals were mistreated (cut, disfigured). This was (only!) a personal affront for a tribal leader but as such an insult of the whole tribe.

Jagchid and Symons did not stop after they helped so well to undermine the myth of the barbarian nomads who constantly plundered, massacred or destroyed that beautiful, "agro-peaceful" imperial culture. The basic tenets of their thesis, in their view, fits perfectly well for the 19th and 20th century as nomads eventually were replaced by "white, mainly British barbarians". Like the nomads, the British also failed to persuade the Ch'ing court to grant them political and economic concessions during the first two centuries of their relationship. The British "discovered that the Chinese, and their Manchu overlords, were chauvinistic, arrogant, self-centered, and condescending towards them ... As was the case with the Turks and Mongols, the British also found it difficult to find goods to trade which the Chinese desired." They had to pay for silk and tea with hard currency (silver and gold bullion).

In the 19th century, however, the British started illegal trade to China (opium), which enabled them to purchase tea and silk without paying in bullion. The rest of this story is well known (the British-Chinese Opium War): "...as was the case with nomadic peoples throughout Chinese history, war with China was undertaken to better secure goods the British felt were essential to the well-being of their country."
a bold futuristic forecasting, the authors could have envisaged a new trade-war between a strong market-oriented outer-world, which can use anew a typical wild-west frontier zone to do their Hongkong-like business, and still bureaucratized, old-fashioned courtlike centralized CP-headquarters. If China should lose (a) new war(s), would it not change their oikoidal structures again?

2.4 Ideological historiography

Of course, in the scholarly literature used nowadays the strong reliance on court-sources makes sure that the „barbarians“ are blamed for all anger and misery. Unfounded are the suggestions that there is a permanent state of war at the (northern) borders during these 2000 years. The most negative consideration in this case is: Most of the time the Chinese power-elites may be willing to destroy the „barbarians“, but did not have the resources to do this in such a vast area against such a powerful enemy. Their military activities, in fact, were restricted in all respects: in space, in time, in effect. Sometimes one even gets the impression of being confronted with fake-wars to sustain anti-nomadic sentiments and anti-market ideologies. It is an oikoidal syndrome par excellence which got too much attention.

The historians and sinologists seldom tried to reverse this „central perspective“ to what happened in its own right elsewhere in that very vast territory. Too often many scholars tried to establish the false impression of an unchangeable China as an „Oriental (Palace) Despotism“ which always sought to pose an „Asiatic Mode of Production“ onto the most remote corners of this territory. One of the results is a very schematic „centrally guided“ historiography, sociology, etc. One could better suppose as a rule a very differentiated development in time and in space. Chinese old and new cities as „clear Western bourgeois“ will be discovered along with purely residential/oikoidal cities and indigenous market-places; within the „real Chinese countries“.

58 For the ideological interpretation of Chinese-Mongol history see Lattimore, Owen: „Herdsman, farmers, urban culture“, in: Pastoral Production and Society/ Production pastorale et société. London/ Paris: Cambridge Univ. Pr. (1979), p. 479-491. Ten years later, David Morgan still writes about even the heyday of Asian nomadic history, Kubilai Khan’s long hegemony (1260-1294): „Historians of China had previously tended to shun this period, preferring not to concern themselves with barbarian rule, but now their views on the impact of Mongol rule are shifting, and shifting in the Mongols favour.“ From the Chinese side another aspect of the ideological historiography is important whereas Morgan quotes: „...a biography of Kubilai Khan] based merely on the Chinese records could not be written ... (because he is) portrayed ... as a typical Confucian ruler, not as a real human being,“ in: Times Literary Supplement, 5/8 (1988), p. 849.

59 In its most abstract way this happenend in Krader, Lawrence: „The origin of the state among the nomads of Asia“, in: Pastoral Production and Society, p. 221-235.

there lived not only small peasants as the image prescribes, but also nomads, pastoralists or merchants; there were extensive trade-networks almost uninterrupted by „state“-influences. Furthermore it is necessary to point to the substantial revolutionary potentials in large parts of the population in all periods of Chinese history. The target is directly or indirectly nearly without exception the imperial authority and its representatives in some capital.61 The result is a.o. that the all mighty emperor must be seen as a restricted power. In short: one could come nearer to the „Chinese truth“ by supposing „normal“ towns and countries with „normally reacting people“ instead of imperial/Confucian constructions and marionets.

From his first quoted work62 one has to conclude that in the Weberian construction a „Chinese State“ is seen as an „Oriental Despotism“. His Oikos is „colossal“, all-embracing with subjects as „state-slaves“. Wertheim rightly points to the fact that Weber in „Economy and Society“ came up with the more specific perspective of the so-called „patrimonial-bureaucratic state“63. This, however, cannot be seen as a kind of defence of Weber who rooted this kind of state in the princely domain (= oikos) managed by means of the Oibenwirtschaft. This last domain-economy is based in the manor. In this context Weber referred again to Pharaonic Egypt, the Roman imperial domain, the Inca state, the Jesuit state in Paraguay, the Carolingian villas, the Near Eastern and Hellenistic states, etc. For instance: „... the actual political power of the Oriental sultans, the medieval princes and the Far Eastern rulers centered in these great patrimonial domains. In these latter cases the political realm as a whole is approximately identical with a huge princely manor.“

It is important to understand the distinction Weber made here between the political (= juridical and military) and economic realm of the prince. It seems nearly a matter of geography: „We shall speak of a patrimonial state when the prince organizes his political power over extrapatrimonial areas and political subjects ...“64. About the economic impact of this state Weber did not talk, apart from the fundamental obligation of the subjects to maintain the ruler in a material sense „just as is the case in a patrimonial household.“ Only for Pharaonic Egypt Weber postulates the extension of both the political and economic authority over the whole country. For this case one can easily substitute the „Oriental Despotism“-concept, apart from the question whether Weber is right or wrong in the Egyptian case. In the Chinese case, however, in my view we have to do with an isolated and rather autonomous Super-Oikos which was and probably is in an economic sense of little or only negative value to the (rest of) Chinese society. In other words: here we cannot discover an „Oriental Despotism“ but there existed a marked contradiction between the (imperial) Oikos and the market (= the „extrapatrimonial economy“). Through the nomadic part of this economy one can demonstrate the antagonisms at stake almost ideal-typically. Which

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62 See note 3.
64 EC, p. 1013.
example could be more interesting than the recent collectivisations of the herding economies in Central and East Asia (Mongolia)\textsuperscript{65}

As is well known, in these unique phenomena the Soviet (inspired) Super-Oikoi ruthlessly tried to interfere into all aspects of agricultural and herding life. In my view, however, these very powerful state-bureaucracies (inclusive the armies) did not succeed very well in their objective to eradicate (or industrialize) the nomadic way of life and all immanent market and mobile elements. Without going into much detail some of the main characteristics and effects of these collectivisations are the following.\textsuperscript{66}

2.5 Nomads and oikoidal collectivisations

The imperialism of Tsarist Russia from the late 1500s to 1917 brought about an exceptionally broad contact among the peoples of Central Asia and newcomers. In the 19th century Russians introduced new agricultural techniques (iron plough) and settled peasants in „Nomad’s Land“ from many countries including Poles, Germans and Koreans. At the end of the century „Nomad’s Land“ of the cattle, camel and sheep breeders still existed. However, it was clear that in some area’s seasonal pastures, especially the winter ones, were reduced and that farmlands cut off nomadic routes and access to water reservoirs. Central Asia became gradually a grain and cotton belt for the Russians. Thirty years later it should become Kruschev’s „virgin and long-fallow lands“ which provided the first substantial increase in Soviet grain production above the pre-revolutionary level (Davies). Everywhere the urbanization was enhanced with its usual effects on the adjacent lands. These were serious but within those vast lands still regional effects of Western imperialism. It seemed that in 1914 almost a quarter of the Kyrgyz were leading some settled life.

According to Lattimore, the Russian militaries and traders received relatively much sympathy among the Siberian and Central Asian peoples during the 19th century. Usually Russian traders learned the indigenous languages. This good relationship is generally reproduced with Mongols who traditionally disliked Chinese with their economic monopolies. At Urga, the later Mongolian capital Ulan Bator („Red Hero“),


a substantial Russian and foreign population settled. From here the ideas of the October Revolution spread over the yurts (nomadic tent-houses) and auls (nomadic villages). New Russian military technology (machine guns and artillery) and discipline was introduced. The preconditions for an own proletarian revolution à la russe from Mongolian and Central Asian herdsmen against real class-enemies seemed fulfilled. The enemies were the Chinese bourgeoisie, the high priests, monasteries and some hereditary Mongolian "feudal nobles". In the tsarist Central Asian countries the class enemies were different: the oikoidal Tsarist bureaucracy inclusive its Greek-Orthodox offshoot and the Russian backed Central Asian elite.

Peasants from all classes suffered the most from the atrocities accompanying the Russian collectivisations. There was never a comparable movement against the urban laborers or population although they suffered as well by the side-effects of the collectivisations. Only one thing seemed clear for all levels of Soviet decision making: from 1929 onwards the Country, as opposed to the City, definitely has to be re-modelled from the ground in order to adjust to a rather unclear idea about a centralized, industrial urban society. In all corners of social and economic life a deep crisis undermined every possibility to have even a minimum existence in town and country. The chaos, panic, wild massacres and deportations and the sharp contradictions between all levels of decision makers which reigned for years made the start of the collectivisations a nightmare. In my view, the most serious failure was that the power-interests of the Super-Oikos always had to prevail over the technical, economical, agronomical etc. rationalities of country-life. In particular, the reproduction of the political idea of centralized decision making into the technical, economical, etc. realities created unsolvable disparities in the whole Soviet Union.

In the Central Asian republics, the peasants settled in the 19th century by the Tsarist administration had to pay the highest prize. But a large amount of nomads used an effective weapon unknown to their immobile "colleagues". In hindsight one can say that they demonstrated the irrationalities of the centralisation-policies the first and made these abandoned the quickest. Many administrators in the new Soviet republics practiced centralization and concentration even in a much more vulgar and primitive way as in the West. Central Asia still had the image of a colony. Their first ideal objective was cristal-clear: peasantisation and settlement of these wild, uncivilized and uncontrollable peoples. But in the same time these peoples had to cater for the enormous meat and wool needs of the fast growing Western urban population. Sometimes hundreds of nomadic communities scattered in an enormous area were forcefully concentrated in only one place. Others interpreted the objective in the sense that all yurts had to be arranged within the grid of an ideal square. Orders were given from behind the bureaucratic desks to shear millions of sheep in winter cold. The animals could not stand the weather and died.

Indeed, the breeders were faced with unprecedented casualties on the animal population while many lost their own lives in bitter fights. After the collectivisation campaigns and the terrible famine in 1931-33 in Kazakhstan only 1.3 out of 18.5 million sheep were left; the number of horses was reduced from 3.5 million to 855,000 in 1941; only 63,000 camels stayed alive of 1.04 million in 1935 (Popova). Also the population was decimated but not in the first place by the harsh repression and its by-
effects. The nomads were not immune for certain diseases which came with the famine (typhoid). The nomads had a weapon which they used effectively: they knew how to flee with their animals and where to go. At least a million people from Kazakhstan (with 6.5 million people in 1920) and countless animals went to China, Mongolia, Afghanistan, Iran and Turkey. Later half of them came back.

After 1945 a certain modus vivendi between nomads and regime was found and between the indigenous livestock-breeding and the centralized kolkhoz- or sovkhоз-breeding which was often too large to handle. That was the sign the Soviets could not gain control over the Central Asian area’s and had to stick to the approved methods of the Tsars to create and influence a dependent elite. As usual, in practice this “colonial elite” had only a restricted and relative influence in the country. In the seventies and eighties the restrictions on establishing private farms etc. were weakened and they recently disappeared. A typical result of this process was the following: in 1989 a Kyrgyzstan sovkhоз state flock numbered 4,500 sheep, whereas 20,000 were privately owned. The same accounts for horned cattle. Another peculiarity is that the nomads, contrary to the peasants, still do not pay taxes which is the metaphor for their position vis à vis the state, the Super-Oikos. Unchanged remained the hard herding life as well.

So, generally speaking, one has to affirm the question whether the collectivisations in the Soviet nomadic countries were in vain. The effects of these collectivisations are, again metaphorically, that nowadays nomads even use helicopters for herding camels, cattle and sheep as well as the latest medical techniques for breeding and selection purposes. But still they favour living in the yurtas and auls although their kids show the limits of these houses by buying getto-blasters and house-music during their city-trips. Town-country contradictions take all kinds of forms!

The Mongolian collectivisations followed the Soviet model. After the Mongols gained their independence from China (1921), the state bureaucracy could come “closer” to the nomads as in the Soviet example. This resulted in some not insignificant differences from the Soviet kolkhoz-model. Still the most important economic activity in Mongolia remains the animal-breeding. The total amount of animals is about 24 million (with 21 animals per head of the population the highest animal concentration in the world); 70% of the land surface is occupied by pasture and only 0.2% for agriculture (Veit). The camels, cattle, goats, horses and sheep still are herded all year long in a nomadic manner. The organizational framework, however, became after 1948 gradually the “cooperative” of herding-families (for 77% of all animals). In principle, this is a hierarchical way of organizing work which is alien to the nomadic ways of work organizations. The latter are based on the needs of the work to be done and not on status and power of decision makers.

Probably, the practice corresponds still to the traditional and more democratic mode of organization but, at the moment, I do not have any information about this possibility. In any case, what was left from an oilkoidal state-organization (outside the cities never more than 15%) is privatized in 1992. In short, also in the animal country par excellence the (Soviet) collectivisations did not work out as in peasant regions. Many Mongolians today – whether living within China’s neighbourhood or in the former Soviet Union – look to Ghenghis Khan as their national hero ... Buddhist
monasteries are being restored and reoccupied, the traditional Mongol script is replacing Cyrillic ... and statues of Lenin and Stalin are being torn down and replaced by those of Ghenghis Khan.67 Old oikoidal forces of Mongolia are trying again to occupy the rooms at the top and showed that they did not forget the most classical oikoidal tricks: To start a separation-movement in neighbouring China's Inner Mongolia (with more Mongols than in the own country!) in order to gather "the whole Mongolian people" behind their ticket.

An evaluation

In this article many data about the nomadic way of life in Central and East Asia are shown. Till this moment in large parts of the Asian countries this way of life prevails. Usually, the history of this corner of the world is told in terms of the "Yellow Menace" of great nomadic conquerors or of barbarian nomadic Manchu's who even became emperors of China. In my view, compared to the economic or cultural contradictions, continuities and interdependencies of nomads and sedentaries, these are mere political incidents which did not affect very much all peoples living below a small elite. It is noteworthy that in the Mongolian history books the "worldconquering" activities of some nomadic chieftains did not get much attention. This apart from the fact that even a "real political history" of these regions is still in its infancy.68

It is, therefore, a bit difficult to blame even famous scholars for a lack of knowledge. It might be that Max Weber was right in delineating the pivotal importance in history of the contradictions between sedentaries and nomads of different kinds and between agriculture and animal-husbandry. It is, however, crystal clear that he failed to understand even the basic characteristics of the nomadic way of life and, consequently, failed to make the proper comparisons with his own sedentary way of life. He could have known from available sources that milk and meat in Central and East Asia were common consumer products and in many regions even the main ingredients of the daily diet. Also within his own Ackerbaustand Weber could not differentiate between rice and wheat cultivations. By neglecting the large differences, some clues to a capitalism-discussion within a Chinese context (if relevant!) remained hidden for him. In his time much of that knowledge was available. Weber, however, was highly biased by a complicated set of thoughts and norms which avoided the necessary change of paradigm. The question, therefore, whether there is any empirical basis for Weber's Asian nomadic (pastoralist, non-sedentary, etc.) ideal type must be denied. Next, one can seriously question his broader approach to the theory of civilizations as stipulated in the introduction.

The highly complex problem of the transition from nomadic animal-husbandry to sedentary agriculture is a very basic feature in world history. It cannot be reduced to a

68 See the preface of the excellent Sinor, Dennis (Ed.): The Cambridge History of Early Inner Asia. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Pr. (1990).
practical affair, i.e. the eradication of tribal and other resources hoping nomads (a collective concept for many kinds of mobile people and groups) shall disappear „automatically“. First it is necessary to start a fresh series of studies into the history of these social, economical or cultural transitions. The above discussion can be extended in an interesting way by studying, for example, Weber’s perception of the Near Eastern nomads\(^69\) relative to the practicalities of the highly important role Bedouins, etc. have played in this part of the world and its dramatic history. With them we meet the most western nomads in Central Asia, trading partners along the oldest and longest trading and cultural communication line, the Silk Route.
