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# Goody, Polanyi and Eurasia: An Unfinished Project in Comparative Historical Economic Anthropology

Chris Hann

*Goody's essay overlaps with his recent work on the "search for metals" and, more generally, with his many books expounding the commonalities of Eurasian history. His critique of Eurocentrism remains invaluable. This review article argues that his emphasis on diffusion can be usefully supplemented with a concept of civilization, to facilitate comparative structural analysis. Goody's perspective might also be enhanced by an engagement with the literature on "Axial Age" cosmologies and with substantivist economic anthropology. It is worth revisiting Karl Polanyi's efforts to grasp the position of the economy in society, in order to recover in the neoliberal present the long-run Eurasian dialectic between redistribution and market exchange.*

*Keywords:* Goody; Polanyi; Eurasia; Civilization; Economic Anthropology

## Introduction

Forty years ago, after completing a one-year course called Certificate in Social Anthropology, I was admitted by Jack Goody to begin Ph.D. research in that discipline in the Cambridge department that he headed. Having taken the Melanesia ethnographic option in my course, I initially wanted to work in New Guinea. But Jack thought that anthropologists were getting a bit thick on the ground in Melanesia and encouraged me instead to stick with the area specialization which I already had in Eurasia. As an undergraduate at Oxford I had chosen an economics option called "Economic development of communist countries", which had led me to participate in a Summer University in Economics at the Karl Marx University in Budapest in 1974.

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Hungary had been following an original path of “market socialism” for some six years already. Politically too it was increasingly “liberal” (it would hardly have been possible to undertake field research in neighbouring Czechoslovakia at this time, let alone East Germany). And so off I went to Central Europe to investigate the social and economic consequences of rural collectivization in a region south of the capital that exemplified Hungary’s distinctively flexible socialist institutions. Jack Goody had no knowledge of this part of Europe, or of debates in other disciplines about central planning and totalitarianism. Nor was he very interested in economic anthropology. But that is the way graduate supervision worked in those days in Cambridge. My debt to him is enormous, not only for drawing me in to anthropology in the first place but also for continuing to offer good advice and support ever since.

What do I mean when I say that Goody paid little attention to economic anthropology? After all, it will be objected, he has devoted most of his career to demonstrating the significance of the material environment, of production systems and technologies, of property holding and transmission, and of consumption. It would be hard to think of a scholar who has contributed more to these classical topics of economic anthropology. Yet it was clear to me as a graduate student that Jack Goody did not think it worth bothering to engage in the theoretical debates which animated the sub-discipline of economic anthropology. For me in the mid-1970s the main action seemed to be in France, where authors such as Maurice Godelier, Emmanuel Terray and Pierre-Philippe Rey were at the height of their influence. Jack was obviously unimpressed. A little later he curtly dismissed some of the English analysts of “pre-capitalist modes of production” for their “vulgar idealism” (Goody 1979, 16). I do not recall Goody ever teaching or writing about the foundational debates of the 1960s, the “formalist versus substantivist” controversies (Firth 1967). Perhaps there was an unspoken division of labour here: Raymond Firth, Malinowski’s successor at the London School of Economics, was trained in economics and maintained that specialization throughout his career. By contrast, Jack Goody had studied English literature, and his lecture courses in the heyday of the Cambridge department concentrated on the impact of literacy and on kinship, not the economy.

When I first encountered him in the 1970s, Goody was busy developing new angles from which to contrast sub-Saharan Africa to Eurasia, the contrast that had emerged from his earliest field research in Ghana focusing on the intergenerational transmission of property (Goody 1962). He continued to address this binary in many later publications. But in the decades after his retirement in 1984 a different binary became increasingly salient: that between East and West *within* Eurasia. The article featured in this issue provides a synthesis of this body of work. The theme of property transmission, originally central, has dropped out. This was essential when his purpose was to demonstrate a contrast between the “horizontal” arrangements typical of Africa and the “vertical” transmission which came to dominate in the more differentiated societies of Eurasia, but it is dispensable when the goal is to demonstrate structural equivalence and “alternating leadership” between the eastern and western ends of the Eurasian landmass (Goody 2010). Instead, Goody draws on rich sources in archaeology and history to illustrate inner-Eurasian connectivity and thereby to refute the

deep Eurocentric bias which he thinks has infused anthropology and Western social theory in general.

This general argument is utterly convincing. But since the editors of this Special Issue have asked me to come up with critical reflections, I shall try to oblige by suggesting that his modernist emphasis on the rise of commerce and capitalism downplays not only the role of political power holders in the regulation of exchange and commoditization, but also the normative impact of new cosmologies and their associated economic ideologies. Goody's historical narrative emphasizing the diffusion of ideas and technologies across Eurasia deals well with the *horizontal* dimension, but I shall argue that it overlooks the *vertical* dimensions of societal change in the various civilizations of the landmass. In developing these points I shall draw in particular on the substantialist economic anthropology of Karl Polanyi, a major figure neglected by Goody. Although Polanyi lacks Goody's Eurasian breadth and balance, I shall suggest that his conceptual tools offer a complementary perspective on the originality of the "Eurasian miracle" in world history.

### **A Bias in Goody's Oeuvre?**

No reader of the substantial essay which opens this Special Issue can fail to appreciate the efforts its author has made to break free of the biases with which he, like virtually all British citizens of his generation, was brought up. As he has explained in more detail elsewhere, his discovery of the Mediterranean and in particular wartime captivity in Southern Italy provided early eye-openers. But it was from the perspective of a highly egalitarian and still almost entirely oral society in northern Ghana that Jack Goody came to perceive the commonalities of the Eurasian landmass, at any rate when comparing those parts of it which had passed through the revolutions of the Bronze Age with those parts of Africa which had not. The critique of Eurocentrism was there from the beginning, but it did not take the extreme relativizing form more typical among twentieth-century anthropologists. Goody was teased by Leach (1961) for paying excessive attention to the minutiae of local differences between the LoWiili and the LoDagaa. Yet from very early in his career, unlike Leach, Goody was questioning familiar categories in order to develop what he calls in the present essay "a more 'objective' archaeological (and cultural) method" for grasping human social evolution as an historical process. A good example is the early article in which he questions the existence of feudalism in Africa (Goody 1963).

At this point, Goody explains in the present essay, he was still unable to discard the engrained presuppositions of his Cambridge education, which shaped his early arguments for the impact of literacy (Goody and Watt 1963). Later he qualified this stance, recognizing that fundamental cognitive capacities could also be highly developed in oral societies, and that logographic systems had certain advantages compared to the alphabetical, notably in uniting large multi-lingual populations. In the course of the present essay he takes readers through a long list of characteristics conventionally cited in the West as evidence of the uniqueness of Europe and shows that, in each and every case, equivalents can be found in Asia, notably in China. The list includes the

bourgeoisie, capitalism, individualism, rule of law, Renaissance, rationality and science, all hallowed topics of interdisciplinary debate. Goody also addresses the arts, revising his earlier conviction that the novel was invented by Protestant Englishmen, and suggesting that only our own inability to prepare adequate translations impedes us from identifying the Chinese Shakespeare. Finally, he adds his distinctive anthropological themes, from dowry inheritance to “aesthetic agriculture” (flowers) and haute cuisine. In all of these diverse domains we need to recognize Eurasian commonalities that derive from the urban revolution of the Bronze Age and, more specifically, from the invention of literacy and the “search for metals”, the subject of his most recent major work (Goody 2012).

In that book, as in the present essay, Goody restates the primacy of material resource endowments in shaping human history. He acknowledges that many of the phenomena we wish to explain cannot be reduced to simple causalities. Economic dynamism may under certain circumstances be associated with nuclear families, but it can also be fostered by larger families in which some are able to exploit the labour of others. However, just as the difference between the African digging stick and the Eurasian plough followed from an inter-continental contrast between ecologies and human–land ratios, so the patterns within Eurasia can be derived ultimately from the availability of metals (and, later, of hydrocarbon and other sources of energy). This is how Goody accounts for the gradual shift of production, commerce and creativity away from the fertile river valleys of the Ancient Near East towards the “barbarian” territories which we have come to call Europe. The greater availability of copper and iron, not superior cognitive skills or democracy, are the key causal factors. Goody is similarly dismissive of those influential models which view religion as a cause. According to his account in this essay, religious ideas are diffused in all directions (or at any rate both eastwards and westwards) according to no particular logic, and monotheistic cosmologies have no special status. For him, ideas and practices concerning the Gods seem to be no more important than ideas and techniques pertaining to sexuality, another domain in which comparable literary artefacts were produced for the delectation of elites in many parts of Eurasia.

In spite of the uneven distribution of natural resources, the Orient was able to keep pace with the West for millennia. Even the “great divergence” (Pomeranz 2000) of the nineteenth century now appears as just another phase of this pattern of alternation, as East Asia assumes the mantle of domination in the twenty-first century. For Goody, and this is the note on which he concludes this essay, it is blatantly obvious that, were it not for the fact of a common Eurasian history dating back to the Bronze Age, Japan and China would not have been able to come to terms as successfully with the West as they have.

So where is the bias or the blind spot, the loose link in the impressive chain of argumentation that sees Goody one by one testing and rejecting the standard diagnoses before reaching the conclusion that Europeans have never been as unique as they imagine themselves to be? I shall suggest that Goody, partly as a consequence of his narrative devices, is biased towards the movement of ideas and goods and pays insufficient attention to the nature of the units which shaped those flows, even though they could

seldom control them completely. These units can be investigated not only materially in terms of their political economy, but also culturally and ideologically. In the latter realms, both religious and economic ideas deserve close attention. Whereas Goody ostensibly decries the influence of ideas, I suggest that at times, at least implicitly, he is himself in thrall to an economic ideology associated (not entirely fairly, but that is another story) with an illustrious Scottish ancestor. Adam Smith's ideology of the market, of "sweet commerce", is diametrically opposed to the economic ideology of Aristotle, which emphasizes self-sufficiency as the basis for human flourishing. Both market and state, economy and polity, are necessary to the dialectic of Eurasia. Economic disembedding (Polanyi 1944), like its political equivalent (Hann 2009), can only wreak havoc. This point has significance beyond the works of Goody, beyond all academic polemicizing, because the model of historic Eurasia for which I shall argue in this review essay is the only viable alternative to a world dominated by market fundamentalism.

### **Structural Unity and Civilizational Diversity**

The word intertextuality had not yet been coined when Jack Goody studied English literature in the Department of F.R. Leavis. His own corpus is a splendid example of what literacy makes possible. Connoisseurs will appreciate the interweaving in this essay of references to many earlier works, not all of them listed in the bibliography. This narrative device may be unavoidable for a scholar who continues to compose variations on themes first advanced as a coherent programme many decades ago. It blends with another characteristic of his recent books, namely the recourse to particular places and persons as illustrations of the larger picture. In this essay, the references to the Fugger family and the Hallstatt culture are typical examples. These are taken from his most recent book (Goody 2012), but locations such as Gandhara, Malacca and Venice are longstanding favourites. How could it be otherwise? These are undoubtedly significant places, which other scholars have subjected to rigorous study. Yet there is a sense in which, no matter that his macro-historical arguments are entirely different, Goody's style of presentation has come to resemble the "magpie" style of James Frazer, with whom he can quite reasonably be compared.

More important for my argument in this essay is the way in which the style affects the substance. Goody's early work was distinguished by structural clarity. It was important to get the definitions right (not only with regard to feudalism but also with such fundamental concepts as incest and ritual, to which he devoted substantial articles). His contrasting of sub-Saharan Africa with Eurasia was based on structural features which he represented graphically in some of his most important publications (Goody and Tambiah 1973; Goody 1976). He continued in this rigorous vein when he switched his attention to Asia and initially aspired to be as comprehensive as possible. Thus his massive study of kinship and the family in Asia makes use of an astonishing range of ethnographic and historical studies to examine in depth the same issues of marriage patterns and property transmission in the major civilizations of that continent: China, India, the "Near East" (Ancient Egyptians, Jews and Arabs), Greeks and

Romans (Goody 1990). The coverage is inevitably uneven but the structural comparisons (and the contrast to Africa) come across as clearly as ever.

The attention to structure is less evident in the more recent books. Perhaps because the paradigm had been set out so clearly before 1990, Goody rather takes it for granted thereafter. During these decades, sustained engagement with distinctive regional or civilizational traditions across the Eurasian landmass gives way to a relentless focus on East versus West. China is singled out for privileged attention, since only the Middle Kingdom can qualify as Europe's "alternating" equivalent in recent millennia. However, Goody does not dig as deep into the political and economic institutions of dynastic China as he had previously into the institutions of the domestic realm. Instead of a detailed examination of the structures of power, economy and religion within civilizations, and comparisons between them, all the emphasis is placed on the Europe–China opposition and on the diffusion of particular ideas and technologies by means of "merchant activity" (this volume).

The focus is thus on exchanges in the broadest possible sense. It is noteworthy in this essay that Goody for the first time pays as much attention to the land routes through "Central Eurasia" as to the maritime routes across the Indian Ocean. He stresses that, in both cases, the movement of ideas, goods and technologies was multi-directional. But it is also instructive to look closely at the institutions regulating those flows, and here I think there is more work to be done. We might begin with the term civilization. Goody does not use it very often. When he does so, in this essay as in his most recent book (Goody 2012), he tends to place it in quotation marks to warn against the dangers of reifying the opposition to "barbarism". The boundaries of particular urban civilizations were always dynamic, partly as a direct consequence of "the search for metals". In other places he writes of "our civilization" in the singular, but the referent is not entirely clear. Western civilization has its origins in the Bronze Age; but so do others, and not only that of China.

Confusion of this sort has long vitiated the use of the concept of civilization in anthropology and related disciplines. However, in the last ten years it has experienced something of a revival, thanks in part to the efforts of archaeologist Nathan Schlanger in re-publishing translations of the key works of Émile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss (Schlanger 2006). When civilization is understood in the Maussian sense as a "family of societies", it can be applied just as well to Aboriginal Australia as to the literate *Hochkulturen* of Eurasia. It cannot therefore be objected that the term is too value laden to serve anthropological comparisons. Even if the term is defined in such a way as to restrict it to stratified societies of the kind which developed in Eurasia in the Bronze Age, with significant urban populations and at least partial literacy, to refer to such constellations as civilizations does not imply that they are morally superior to neighbouring sets of societies lacking these features (Arnason 2003). By emphasizing open-ended encounters with other units, rather than closed entities, Arnason and other historical sociologists have sustained a tradition of comparative civilizational analysis from which social anthropologists have much to learn.

So this is my first criticism of Goody's late writings. Since 1990 he has written many books and articles to prove that "we are dealing with one interconnected landmass,

whose culture and economy derives [*sic*] from the common Bronze Age”. This is consistent with the structural arguments he developed earlier. But when it comes to documenting significant variations across this landmass and to understanding how these constellations cohered internally (or how they did not cohere), the lack of a concept such as civilization in the sense of Mauss and Arnason is a handicap. Between the meticulous study of local communities, which has dominated socio-cultural anthropology for the last century, and the kind of very large-scale vision which animates Goody and very few others, the magpie method is insufficient. There is a need for a term which would open up possibilities for comparative analysis at intermediate levels.

### **Ideas: Cosmology and Economic Ideology**

But how exactly is one to define the units we call civilizations, when their boundaries are always porous and shifting? The Maussian approach drew on the meticulous identification of cultural traits in German diffusionist anthropology and is related to the concept of the *Kulturkreis*. However, these usages have been continuously supplanted by popular appropriations which connect civilization primarily to religion, notably Max Weber’s classifications of the “world religions”. Goody has been a longstanding critic of Weber, who in his view epitomises the Eurocentric bias of his age. In the present essay he repeats a point made elsewhere concerning Weber’s failure to recognize the “rationality” of Chinese accounting (Goody 1996). He is equally scathing concerning the continued influence of Weber’s analysis of the links between Protestantism and capitalism. The celebrated thesis is deeply flawed, argues Goody in this essay, because the Romans were already lending and investing money as good capitalists, while the Indian Chettiars are typical of countless communities who fulfil the main criteria for Protestantism (cf. Goody 2004).

Goody is surely right to depict Christianity as a religion of the Near East, rather than as a faith which somehow only acquired its essence in a much later era among the barbarians of North-West Europe. He is right to emphasize the role of the Nestorians in preserving much of the scholarly accomplishments of the Ancient world. Is he right to downplay the role of ideas so completely, and to hold that monotheism was much less distinctive than most Western commentators have made it out to be? I would again answer in the affirmative. The long shadow of Weber over the anthropology of religion, including the burgeoning field known as the “anthropology of Christianity”, has become unproductive, at any rate when addressing questions of long-term change (Hann 2014). But to affirm this is not to concede that religion is irrelevant to evolutionary processes. Goody himself points out in the present essay that religious knowledge was extremely important in the spread of literacy and the establishment of the first “universities”. More important for my argument here, he notes “the political and social advantages of having a single written religion”. Yet neither here nor (as far as I have been able to detect) in any other published work has Goody addressed the body of scholarship which argues that radical changes in cosmology took place across Eurasia during the Iron Age, along lines consistent with the changes which

Goody dates to the earlier revolutions of the Bronze Age, and which arguably contributed significantly to their consolidation.

I am referring, of course, to Jaspers' concept of the Axial Age, which continues to attract much attention from historians, sociologists of religion and many others (Bellah and Joas 2012). The claim here is that a cognitive or ontological breakthrough was accomplished in several locations of Eurasia around the middle of the first millennium BCE. It was not confined to the Abrahamic variant of monotheism. Rather, a swathe of post-Bronze Age civilizations, including non-monotheistic Greece and China, forged ways to place human conduct and social organization on a new footing. The teachings of Aristotle and Plato (with those of Confucius and Mencius in China establishing a secular symmetry between East and West) were just as important as the invention of transcendental Gods for the purpose of regulating moral behaviour in societies increasingly too large and complex to get by on the basis of the old institutions of *Gemeinschaft*, kinship, and even divine kingship (though the older institutions did not entirely disappear). To recognize the force of these diverse innovations across Eurasia is compatible with Goody's insistence that the precise *content* of the new religious dogmas and ethical codes hardly mattered. What mattered was the dissemination of new, non-immanent cosmologies, elaborated and enforced by specialists, who, it goes without saying, preached loyalty to the temporal power, the possessor of the "mandate of heaven".

One further aspect of the Axial Age ideas was consistent between East and West and again it is surprising that Goody pays it no attention. Both Aristotle and Confucius propounded economic and societal doctrines which flew in the face of the expanding commercial activities of which they must have been aware in their everyday lives. The former's advocacy of the self-sufficient *oikos* and the latter's derogation of the merchant were the obverse of their upholding of the primacy of the political and the social. The state power sought to control trade and, wherever possible, to cream off its profits. Of course, the classical texts are to be understood as evaluative, ideological interventions rather than as "objective" accounts of how Greek cities were provisioned, or of the "first sprouts" of capitalism in China. They nonetheless indicate the lower social prestige of those who devoted themselves to the maximization of profit through trade. They mark a significant moment in the on-going dialectic between state and market in an age when price-forming markets were supplanting the administered long-distance trade characteristic of earlier epochs. But market exchange was not yet the dominant transactional mode. Economy in the modern sense barely existed in the age of Aristotle, because egoistic behaviour for utilitarian gain was still thoroughly "embedded" in political, religious and other social structures (Polanyi 1957).

### Reconciling Goody and Polanyi

At first inspection, Karl Polanyi is another in the long line of Eurocentric thinkers who fail to appreciate the commonalities of Eurasia. It is certainly true that he wrote rather little about Asia east of Babylon. He wrote quite a lot about the Ancient Greeks, but it is generally recognized, even by his admirers, that his reformulations of the *oikos* debate

were flawed by his obsession with the “obsolete market mentality” (see Cook 1966; Dale 2010). This anti-market stance was explicable in the light of his biography and the calamitous decades through which he lived. As a Central European whose (mostly involuntary) migrations took him steadily westwards, first to Vienna, then to London, and finally to New York and Ontario, Polanyi’s principal optic was necessarily a Western one. Yet he offers a global vision that transcends the limitations of his more specialized scholarship in historical anthropology and economic history (Dale, forthcoming).

Although, as I said at the beginning, Goody did not engage in the sectarian debates of economic anthropology, he was certainly aware of the work of Karl Polanyi through his historian friends in Cambridge Moses Finley and C.R. Whittaker. Before moving to England for political reasons, Finley had worked as Polanyi’s Research Assistant in New York during the years in which the substantivist alternative tool kit to formalist economics was given its final honing (Polanyi, Arensberg, and Pearson 1957). Already a mature scholar in his own right, Finley did not hesitate to tell Polanyi when, in his view, the empirical evidence did not support the claims made by the master; he nonetheless did much to propagate the substantivist way of thinking about the economy among ancient historians and archaeologists.

Polanyi’s efforts to prove the existence of “marketless trade” in Hammurabi’s Babylon, and to deny that markets were the prime “form of integration” in Aristotle’s Greece, are rejected by Goody as the false diagnoses of a Eurocentric evolutionist, determined to bracket off Eurasian commonalities in order to be able to restrict the breakthrough to modernity to a much later period in European history (2012, 280–281). But this is too harsh. It is true that Polanyi posits a revolution with the emergence of “market society” in the wake of industrialization in nineteenth century Britain. That is the central argument of *The Great Transformation* (Polanyi 1944). But he was careful to steer clear of “primitivist” and evolutionist straightjackets when writing about the “archaic” societies. Dale (2010) concludes that much of Polanyi’s 1950s writing about Greece and the Ancient Near East has stood the test of time rather well.

An example will bring out the kind of structural analysis which a Polanyian approach makes possible. In their assessment of Bronze Age commerce in the eastern Mediterranean and Aegean, archaeologists Andrew Sherratt and Susan Sherratt (1991) document a long-term expansion in space as well as commercial intensity. In addition to high-value “luxuries” for the elite, including precious metals, bulk organic products were eventually drawn into exchange circuits. The analysis of the Sherratts leans more to the interpretations of Adam Smith, Werner Sombart and Goody than to those of Polanyi or Weber. However, contrary to the Smithian economics model, which is also the general Western folk model, other scholars continue to hold that Polanyi was right to contest the assumption that markets, money and trade must have originated through individual strategizing to overcome the inefficiencies of primeval barter. This “catallactic triad” must be decomposed and connected to central power holders in the palaces (though these may well be theorized in terms of bloated private households, in a context in which a modern public versus private dichotomy is simply inapplicable—see Hudson and Levine, 1996). Private commercial entrepreneurship

emerged from within the palace, which was the centre of religious as well as economic and political life. It flourished at the edges of an economy best characterized with the Polanyian concept of redistribution (Marxists would speak of exploitation), though other forms of integration were also important. Bronze Age trade in the Aegean, building on earlier patterns throughout the Levant, certainly extended the possibilities for social emulation among elites. After the collapse of the palace economies in the twelfth and eleventh centuries BCE, the forces of supply and demand and the role of “private” merchants attained greater prominence, at least in some locations. However, the great majority of the population did not consume traded goods, even after many were drawn into their production.

Several centuries later, when Aristotle railed against the market from the vantage point of the well-ordered, self-sufficient *oikos*, commercial markets had clearly made further inroads. Was this evidence of a disembedded economy in the sense of Polanyi (1944, 1957)? That would mean a realm of egoistic, utilitarian maximizing behaviour, separated from other institutionalized spheres of society and culture. Polanyi is adamant that this does not occur before the onset of industrialization. Before the nineteenth century, market exchange could not dominate over the other forms of integration, redistribution and reciprocity, and so the condition for disembeddedness was not met. In effect, all economies are mixed economies, and the task of the economic anthropologist is to analyse and compare the combinations. My argument is that Eurasian history can be grasped in terms of a long-term dialectic between the forms redistribution and market exchange. (The form reciprocity, initially developed with reference to moiety systems in Oceania, was later expanded and refined by Polanyi, who grafted it on to Aristotle’s *philia* to refer to practices of sharing and mutuality. This latter term might be the better name for this form of integration, which is grounded in kinship and what Stephen Gudeman terms the “house economy”. Whereas Gudeman (2008) investigates a universal dialectic between mutuality and market, I emphasize a historical process of interaction between redistribution and market exchange specific to Eurasia; a fuller account would also have to deal with how the form reciprocity/mutuality changes in each successive phase of this Eurasian dialectic.)

Polanyi did not take the ideology of economic liberalism at face value but devoted much of *The Great Transformation* to demonstrating the crucial role of the state in making the new market institutions possible. He did not expend equivalent energy in deconstructing Aristotle’s texts, though he did note the philosopher’s normative goals. We might wish to argue that the modern ideology is somewhat nearer to conveying the economic realities of the industrial era than Aristotle’s Axial Age ideology of the *oikos* was to conveying the economic realities of Hellenic Greece. In any case, the very existence of a societal ethic which scorned the market and egoistic gain through trade is a factor which needs to be taken into account. So, too, is the development of new moral codes alongside the accounting practices through which market exchange and “capitalism” were consolidated. Perhaps these ethical codes emerged when they did, in China as in Greece, precisely to ensure that their agrarian economies would remain embedded and mixed during the centuries in which the collapse of the command economies of the

Bronze Age was threatening societal disintegration. In other words, ideas of this kind, from which later Christian doctrines of business ethics derive, can play a significant role in maintaining the viability of an institutionally embedded mixed economy. As emphasized by Jack Goody, markets and “capitalism” have been essential to its dynamism since the Neolithic. But it is also necessary to consider the other forms of integration which have historically constrained market exchange, and the ideas underpinning these in different civilizations.

The approaches of Goody and Polanyi can be reconciled. The former has the breadth of an anthropologist who combines his early exposure to archaeology with an ethnographic perspective from Africa to develop a powerful vision of the structural unity of Eurasia. But Goody did not explore how this Eurasian history played out in the political economy of particular civilizational constellations, or how these civilizations depended on their cosmologies and economic ideologies to keep the forces of trade, markets and commodities in their proper place. In this respect, for in-depth comparative analysis to consolidate a non-Eurocentric historical economic anthropology, the ideas and concepts of Karl Polanyi are still the best available to us. As we apply them, it is important to distinguish two senses of his key notion of embeddedness. There is a sense in which the economy can never be disembedded: even Victorian laissez-faire depended on specific interventions of the state to impose the new regimes. But this contextualization, vital though it is, does not capture the deeper sense intended by Polanyi when he explains how “Aristotle discovers the economy” (Polanyi 1957). Here, the embedded economy refers to an economy not yet named as such, because the substantive tasks pertaining to livelihood are still thoroughly integrated into other dimensions of existence. Goody is right to insist that the market, and even “capitalism”, have a long history in Eurasia; but Polanyi is right to insist that these preindustrial civilizations found ways to regulate and embed these forces, through practices and through ideas such as Aristotle’s *philia*, so that market exchange could not become the dominant form of integration.

## Conclusion

In arguing for the significance of civilizations and for religious and moral ideas pertaining to the organization of the economy, it might be objected that I have adopted an idealist position akin to that so emphatically rejected by the resolutely materialist Jack Goody. But these ideas do matter, they have their consequences in the material institutions of political economy. Aristotle cannot be taken as a faithful guide to the actual mixed economy of his age, any more than the writings of Friedrich Hayek can be relied upon for understanding contemporary neoliberalism. Yet the Hayekian dogmas do form a recognizable approximation of Polanyi’s “utopian” market society (in fact a dystopia), and they indicate the direction in which global society has been moving in recent decades accurately enough. These ideas did not emerge from nowhere: they spun away from a dialectic between redistribution and market exchange that had been unfolding in Eurasia since the late Bronze Age. They became toxic and conducive to disembedding in recent times; first in Britain in the nineteenth century,

and today globally. Goody sees China's ascent in recent decades as a vindication of his arguments for long-term parity across the landmass. But he should be concerned that the present resumption of alternating leadership is being undertaken according to precepts that have nothing in common either with Confucian moral teachings or with Athenian democracy.

Goody and Polanyi together enable us to recognize that Eurasia, from the Axial Age civilizations to the mixed economies of the post-war era in Western Europe, offers an alternative to the liberal and neoliberal nightmares. It is ironic that the modern word economy, referring primarily to the sphere of market-dominated exchanges, derives from the Greek *oikos*, where it referred to the self-sufficient estate, the antithesis of the market (Hann and Hart 2011). Human populations, now as in the Axial Age, need pragmatic combinations of what Polanyi termed forms of integration. Today the pendulum has swung very far in the direction of the later Adam Smith and Hayek. It is entirely appropriate that the torch of old Eurasia is again being carried by Greece, against the amassed global forces of bankers, businessman and public bureaucrats on whom the "self-regulating market" depends.

### Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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