

**Cosmology, Gender, Structure and Rhythm:  
Marcel Granet and Chinese Religion in the History of Social Theory**

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Abstract:

This article interrogates the near complete absence of China as a source of materials and inspiration for constructing theoretical concepts and models in mainstream sociology and anthropology. I outline the story of the largely forgotten mutual engagements, influences and missed connections between the work of the French Sociologist and Sinologist Marcel Granet (1884-1940), whose work revolved around Chinese religion, and key figures in the history of sociological and anthropological theory, exemplified by Durkheim, Mauss, and Levi-Strauss. My purpose is to restore Granet – and, through Granet, China – into the genealogy of classical anthropological and social theory. This involves showing how Granet’s work was informed by the theoretical debates that animated his mentors and colleagues in the French sociological school, and how he, in turn, directly or indirectly influenced subsequent theoretical developments. It also involves raising questions about the implications of connections that were missed, or only briefly evoked, by theoreticians in subsequent generations. These questions open bridges for advancing a mutually productive dialogue between the study of Chinese cosmology, religion and society, and theoretical construction in sociology and anthropology.

Keywords:

Granet, Marcel; Durkheim, Emile; Mauss, Marcel; Levi-Strauss, Claude ; China.

宇宙观，性别，结构与节奏：  
葛兰言的中国宗教研究在社会人类学理论史中的影响

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摘要

本文探讨中国为何在主流社会学和人类学理论的建构当中，处于边缘位置，甚至几乎无人问津。笔者于此梳理一段为世人所忽略的学术史，当中显示法国社会学家兼汉学家马塞尔·葛兰言（Marcel Granet, 1884-1940）如何与各种重要的社会学与人类学理论展开交流、互动，并探讨葛兰言的见解跟这些理论的关连之处（尤以涂尔干、莫斯、列维·斯特劳斯为例）。笔者希望能够恢复葛兰言理论的地位，并且透过葛兰言的研究，重置中国文明于人类学和社会学的经典理论谱系。本文将论述葛兰言的研究，如何得到他在法国社会学派的导师和合作者的启发，他的研究也受到各种理论争辩所影响，而他的著述也直接或间接地影响后来的理论发展。葛兰言与各种理论的关系正是为人所忽略，这些理论之间的关系有什么重要的意义？这些问题能够推进各学科的研究，能够为促进各学科的对话，也能够为中国宇宙观之研究、宗教与社会之研究、人类学理论建构和人类学理论建构搭建学术交流的重要桥梁。

关键词

马塞尔·葛兰言、艾弥尔·涂尔干、马塞尔·莫斯、列维·斯特劳斯、中国

I have always been puzzled by the thoroughly marginal position of China as a source of materials for constructing theoretical concepts and models in the social sciences. Mainstream sociological theory continues to grow primarily out of Western social realities, albeit with an increasing interest in applying, testing and refining theories in different cultural contexts. In anthropology the most innovative and lively theoretical debates typically continue to focus on materials from regions such as the Amazon, New Guinea and Melanesia. Meanwhile, it is commonplace to affirm, in China studies, that “Western theories don’t fit” the Chinese reality. Much of the discussion and debate in the field of studies of religion in China, for example, has focused on a critique of Western-derived conceptions of religion, modernity and secularization (Goossaert and Palmer 2011).

Recently, in his seminal *Beyond Nature and Culture*, Philippe Descola (1949-), a key figure in the recent “ontological turn” in anthropology, drew heavily on Chinese cosmology to conceptualize and illustrate one of four basic types of ontology that, he claims, can be found in the ethnographic corpus on cultures around the world (Descola 2005). This was perhaps the first time since Max Weber and Claude Levi-Strauss that Chinese material had figured prominently in the construction of social scientific theory. Descola’s exclusive source on China was the work of Marcel Granet (1884-1940). In fact, half a century earlier, Levi-Strauss (1908-2009) had also relied heavily on Granet. And before him, so did Marcel Mauss (1872-1950). Who, then, was Marcel Granet?

Granet was both a sociologist -- a leading disciple of Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) -- and one of the foremost scholars in the French tradition of Sinology. More than any other scholar, he bridged the gaps between sociology, anthropology and the study of China. Any exploration of the past and potential for the mutual engagement between social theory and Chinese religion and society must consider Granet’s seminal contributions. In this article, I outline the story of the largely forgotten mutual engagements and missed connections between the work of Granet and key figures in the history of sociological and anthropological theory, exemplified by Durkheim, Mauss, and Levi-Strauss. I show how, through Granet, insights from China have informed debates in classical social theory. And yet, many of the theoretical implications of his work were not pursued, and they remain unexplored and relevant until today. They show the potential for advancing a mutually productive dialogue between the study of Chinese cosmology, religion and society, and theoretical construction in sociology and anthropology.

## *Approaching Granet*

Marcel Granet was a student of Durkheim's during his undergraduate years at the Ecole Normale at the Sorbonne from 1904-1907 ; he became part of a small circle of close disciples who included the anthropologist and Sanskritist Marcel Mauss (1872-1950), the historian Marc Bloch (1886-1944, founder of the *Annales* school), the Hellenist Louis Gernet, and the sociologist of collective memory Maurice Halbwachs (1877-1945). He also enjoyed the patronage of Lucien Lévi-Bruhl, a leading figure in the birth of French anthropology. He later studied Chinese under Edouard Chavannes (1865-1918), Professor of Chinese at the Collège de France, the leading sinologist in France at the time. It was under Chavannes' guidance that Granet was sent to China for two years, from 1911 to 1913. On his return, he succeeded his teacher as Director of Studies on the Religions of the Far East at the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes; he also taught at the School of Oriental Languages, helped establish the Institut des Hautes Etudes Chinoises, and was President of the Institut Français de Sociologie (Freedman 1975; Brown 2006).

Granet's method could be called "textual sociology", using ancient textual sources to investigate questions such as the origins of collective representations, systems of classification, rituals and festivals, kinship systems, political systems and ideological structures. A disciple and close collaborator of both Durkheim and Mauss, his work is a demonstration and expansion of their theories on social structure, classification, religion, and exchange. It also prefigured by several decades, and was a powerful inspiration for Lévi-Strauss's structuralist theories of kinship, exchange, knowledge and myth. Granet's "archaeological" method of textual analysis was the main inspiration for his student George Dumézil's (1898-1986) monumental work on the Indo-European tripartite ideology (Dumézil 1948), a method which was adopted by the latter's student Michel Foucault (1926-1984) in his documentation of epistemic shifts in the history of Western civilization (Foucault 1969). And, more recently, in the work of Philippe Descola (1949-), the disciple of Lévi-Strauss and a leading proponent of the post-naturalist or "ontological" turn in contemporary anthropology, Granet's characterisation of Chinese cosmology is a key source for his theorization of different types of ontologies or "integrative schemas" (Descola 2005). The mutual influences between Granet and Mauss have been completely forgotten, even though, through the latter's seminal articles on 'techniques of the body' (1934) and on the 'category of the self' (1938), they have had an indirect influence on Foucault's conceptualizations of technologies of the self (1976, 1984) and on Bourdieu's theories of distinction (1979) and habitus (1980). A study of Granet's work and its impact shows the

profound, but largely forgotten, mutual influences between French Sociology, Anthropology and Sinology in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and beyond.

If Granet's influence has been obscured, it is because most of his work is too technical and too "Sinological" to be accessible to scholars who do not specialise in China; while the focus is too "ancient" and textual for social scientists who prefer field studies of contemporary societies. Meanwhile, his sociological approach to the analysis of ancient texts, as well as his often highly speculative interpretations, have been rejected by mainstream sinologists who uphold traditional philological and historical methods (Li 2010, Wang 2010). Owing to the progress of archaeological and historical knowledge on the earliest periods of Chinese society, many of Granet's empirical assumptions are now outdated.

On the other hand, his book *La pensée chinoise* (*The Chinese Mind*, 1934) remains to this day one of the best and most comprehensive treatments available of the basic categories of classical Chinese cosmology. It is one of the few books on China to have been widely read by French intellectuals and anthropologists; and although it has never been translated into English or Chinese, it has had a profound influence on English-language studies of Chinese philosophy, discussed in detail by authors such as Joseph Needham (1956), David Hall and Roger Ames (1995), etc. But this legacy, largely based on a single book, has led to Granet being associated by some critics with an Orientalist strain of Chinese studies that posits a holistic "Chinese mind" that is radically distinct from that of the West (Puett 2002: 8-10). This perception of Orientalist essentialism makes Granet's work questionable to the post-colonial and post-structuralist proclivities of much of contemporary anthropology and sociology. However, as noted by the anthropologist Michael Puett -- perhaps the only Anglophone scholar to have seriously engaged with Granet's work in recent years -- a close reading of his work reveals just the opposite: "The value of Granet's work, then, is that it points toward an approach focused less on contrasting the assumptions of different cultures and more on discovering the conflicts underlying those cultures" (Puett 2001: 20).

My purpose in this article is not to engage in debates on the validity of Granet's empirical analyses of ancient Chinese history, the accuracy of his interpretations of canonical texts, or whether his work outlines the distinctive features of classical Chinese thought. Today, we know that, in constructing their respective sociological theories of religion, Durkheim and Weber often used wrong or now outdated ethnographic and historical data. In spite of this, their theories remain relevant and, applied to new empirical cases, continue to generate endlessly fruitful theoretical insights, questions and debates. It is in the same

spirit that I propose to read Granet: not as a Sinologist, but as a source of theoretical insights of general anthropological and sociological significance. His most important works have never been translated; for lack of space, I will here focus primarily on those works that are more obscure or untranslated, rather than on the two translated books best known to anglophone audiences, *The Religion of the Chinese* (1922) and *Chinese Civilization* (1929), themselves works of synthesis.

My purpose is to restore Granet – and, through Granet, China – into the genealogy of classical anthropological and social theory. This involves showing how Granet’s work was informed by the theoretical debates that animated his mentors and colleagues in the French sociological school, and how he, in turn, directly or indirectly influenced subsequent theoretical developments. It also involves raising questions about the implications of connections that were missed, or only briefly evoked, by theoreticians in subsequent generations. These questions open bridges for further mutual engagement between mainstream anthropological theory and Chinese cosmology and religion.

### **China in *Primitive Classifications* and the *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life***

When Granet joined the Durkheimian school, his teacher, together with Mauss, had just published *On Some Primitive Forms of Classification : Contribution to the Study of Collective Representations* (1903), in which Chinese cosmology figured prominently, and which was the precursor to the *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1912) . It is in *Primitive Classification* that Durkheim and Mauss first advance the argument that the human capacity to categorise is not innate but is a product of society, and that the classificatory schemes that exist in different cultures and religions are not derived from the observation of nature, but are modelled on social divisions and categories. “The first logical categories were social categories ; the first classes of things were the classes of men, into which these things were integrated” (1903[1963]: 48-49). In the conclusion, Durkheim and Mauss argue that the root of classification is social, and not *a-priori*, abstract logical categories. The nature of social classifications, at the origin, is emotional: things are pure or impure, favourable or unfavourable, friends or enemies, sacred or profane. “The differences and resemblances which determine the fashion in which they are grouped are more affective than intellectual” (p. 50) – affective differentiations vary from one group and place to another, and their boundaries can be blurred and shifting, and even blend into each other. It is only

through a long historical process that social affectivity is replaced by abstract logic and reason; but the affective and social foundations of classification have never disappeared.

In the demonstration of their argument, Durkheim and Mauss draw on ethnographic materials on the cosmologies and classificatory systems from the indigenous societies of three regions: Australia, America (Zuni and Sioux), and China. The chapter on China summarises the basic elements of Chinese cosmology as they appear on the geomantic compass of the *fengshui* master, as described and explained in the monumental ethnography of Chinese folk religion authored by J. J. de Groot, *The Religious System of China* (1892-1910). They describe linkage between the Four cardinal points and the Eight Trigrams, and the powers associated with each; as well as the Five Phases (water, wood, fire, earth and metal). The correspondences between these schemes and land formations, animal symbols, the four seasons, the calendar, and the sexagesimal cycles ; as well as with the organic systems of the human body, are then presented. "... not only is everything heterogeneous in time, as in space, but the heterogeneous parts of which these two settings are composed correspond, or are opposed, and are arranged, in one system. And all these infinitely numerous elements are combined to determine the genus and the species of things in nature, the direction of movement of forces, and acts which must be performed, thus giving the impression of a philosophy which is at once subtle and naïve, rudimentary and refined. Here we have then, a highly typical case in which collective thought has worked in a reflective and learned way on themes which are clearly primitive" (p. 43). Durkheim and Mauss go on to note the analogies between the Chinese, Australian and Zuni schemes, which also make systematic associations between specific regions, periods of time, natural elements and so on. But while their discussions of the Australian and American cases claim to demonstrate how their cosmologies are products of ritual organization, social structure and affect, the Chinese case is an outlier. On the one hand, it is the most fully developed case of a totalizing system of integrated categories, with evidence, they claim, of scholastic rationalizations layered over and weaving systematic coherence into more concrete and less intellectualized classificatory schemes comparable to the Australian and American cases, and even Greek and Indian examples. But they offer next to no evidence of how the Chinese system is derived from social categories, nor how it derives from any form of social affectivity.

It is puzzling that the Chinese example figures so prominently in *Primitive Classification*, since it doesn't seem to offer much support to their argument. It is perhaps for this reason that the Chinese case was dropped from the *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, which is essentially an elaboration of the argument only briefly outlined in *Primitive Classification*, this

time relying primarily on a detailed study of the Central Australian ethnography that was available at the time. The *Elementary Forms* stresses that the basic categories of space, time, and force are not universal abstractions but differentiated experiences based on the lived sensibility of people situated in sequences of actions in temporal and special succession; and that participation in collective ritual (i.e. religion) is the mechanism by which the spacio-temporal consciousness of individuals is coordinated into a single collective experience that differentiates time according to a cycle of festivals, differentiates space according to a topography centred around sacred locations, differentiates social groups based on the distribution of roles in the ritual, and differentiates between forces based on their positive or negative effect on community survival, unity and prosperity. In this anthropocentric or “socio-centric” (Durkheim & Mauss 2009[1903]: 51) context of the generation of consciousness and knowledge, it is ritual, which brings all classes together at a sacred centre of space and time, that is the origin of conceptions of totality, and of the affective intimations of transcendence.

### **The Durkheimian thesis in Granet’s *Ancient Festivals and Songs of China***

The *Elementary Forms* relied exclusively on Australian totemism for its ethnographic evidence. But, at the same time as Durkheim was writing the *Elementary Forms*, his disciple Marcel Granet was composing his dissertation on the “elementary forms” of Chinese society, using the Durkheimian framework to construct a sociological interpretation of Chinese religion, cosmology and politics. *Fêtes et chansons anciennes de la Chine (Festivals and Songs of Ancient China)* was published in 1919, but, according to a review by his fellow Sinologist Henri Maspéro, the work had been completed several years earlier ; its publication had been delayed on account of World War I (Maspero 1919). *Festivals and Songs* is a book-length development of an argument outlined in Granet’s first publication, “Coutumes matrimoniales de la Chine antique” (“Matrimonial Customs of Ancient China”), published in the Sinological journal *T’oung Pao* in 1912, the same year as the *Elementary Forms*.

In *Festivals and Songs*, Granet tried to reconstruct the original forms of Chinese religion through a study of the *Book of Songs (Shijing)*, the oldest existing compilation of Chinese poetry, largely dating from the 11<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> centuries BC, which has been revered as one of China’s canonical “Five Classics” since the Han dynasty (206 BC-220 AD). The work has been the subject of a highly elaborate Confucian exegetical tradition – which claimed that the songs had been collected and edited by Confucius -- over the past two thousand

years, interpreting the verses as allegories containing moral guidance for rulers. Granet broke with this tradition by trying to reconstruct the social conditions under which the original songs were composed. Through his analysis of the content, structure and style of the verses, Granet concluded that the songs had been composed during seasonal peasant festivals, when alternating groups of boys and girls improvised verses in flirtatious jousts, similar to customs that have been described in the ethnography of several ethnic minorities in Southwest China.

*Festivals and Songs* echoes Mauss' 1905 "Essay on the seasonal variations of Eskimo societies: a study of social morphology," which emphasizes how seasonal rituals amplify the oscillation between periods of intense and dispersed sociality in winter and summer, with profound religious and social implications – a notion that underpins the argument in the *Elementary Forms*. Although Durkheim is never referenced in *Festivals and Songs*, the passage below, from the concluding chapter, can be seen as a summation of the *Elementary Forms*, replacing Australian aboriginals with Chinese peasants : the dispersed local groups with little social life, come together for seasonal festivals at which the collective effervescence of the orgiastic rites creates a collective consciousness and a faith in the efficacious power of the ritual, which is attributed to a transcendental, cosmic force.

"The festivals of ancient China are great assemblies which mark the times of the seasonal rhythm of social life. They correspond to brief periods of congregation during which the life of society is intense and which alternate with long periods of dispersal during which there is virtually no social life. At each of these assemblies, a pact of alliance, uniting small local groups into a single local community, receives a new consecration in an orgy regulated by tradition. [...] The festivals thus appear as festivals of youth: the most salient rite is the joust of dances and songs, rhythmic tournaments in which is born the love between those whom the traditional rules of the community predestine to be spouses.

These festivals... mark, indeed, a unique moment in social life: that moment when, suddenly brought up to the highest tension, it can, by its marvelous increase, inspire to those from whom it emanates, an irresistible faith in their collective practices. The members of small local groups, when, from a sudden collective effort, they renew this community that will be their supreme force, are astounded by the feeling that they suddenly touch this ideal of durable harmony and peace which, at the moment, appears in a rejuvenated splendour; each of them, taken of enthusiasm, imagines that

the power of the acts in which he takes part is unlimited, passing beyond the circle of human affairs and extending to the whole universe; he feels as if the perennity and harmony of the world are but a consequence of the stability and social cohesion that he feels is its work. Henceforth... its astounding intensity, the splendour of its solemn manifestation, its notable success and its powerful efficacy, distinguish this singular activity from the activities of everyday life: it appears as being of a sublime and special order, as being of a religious nature. The practices of the ancient festivals, simple gestures of a community full of hope, are sacred practices; they form the elements of a cult (Granet 1919: 239-240).

Further, Granet discusses the division of society into the two classes of men and women, by which the division of labour produces a distinct spacio-temporal distribution: the men are more active in the summer as they work in the fields, while the women are more active in winter as they busy themselves with spinning and weaving in the household. Seasonal festivals, marking the alternation between the periods of male and female ascendancy, bring the youth of the two sexes together in exuberant jousts of flirtatious song and dance – leading to trysts in the fields, as alluded to in the couplets of the *Book of Songs*. The ‘orgiastic’ energies are channelled through the ritual conventions of formalistic singing and dancing, as well into marital engagements following the rules of exchange between exogamous local groups. The exstatic (and sexual) effervescence creates an experience of transcendent power, but, simultaneously, unifies the social structure through the “social pact” of exogamous exchange – prefiguring Levi-Strauss’ theory of the formation of society through the exchange of brides between exogamous kin groups (1949), as discussed below. Also prefiguring Victor Turner’s theory of ritual structure and anti-structure (1969), Granet here argues that the emotions and energies awakened by the festival are potentially disruptive, a “terrible moment” for the social body which “imposes on the new members of the community [the boys and girls] feelings of love that are obligatory and in conformity with the structure of social organization” (p. 243).

The intense activity, to which all members of the society participate, makes the ritual co-extensive with the full extent of social life and organization, revolving around the time and place of the festivals, which become marked as sacred. And here, Granet offers the demonstration that had been lacking in Durkheim and Mauss’ *Primitive Classification* – that these festivals are the social origin of the Chinese cosmological system of classification: the efficacy of the rituals is seen by the participants as extending to the entire cosmos, including

both the world of humans and non-humans. Thus, “the origin of the principles which, in Chinese thought in all eras, dominate the functioning of the world, is to be found in the social structure of ancient times or, more precisely, in the representation of this structure that is given by the practices of ancient festivals.” (p. 244).

*Yin* and *yang* thus describe the entire universe as following the antithetical alternation of male and female classes, modelled on the relationships between the groups of men and women in the traditional division of labour. And since this division was also spatial and temporal, with some spaces and times associated with women and others associated with men, the yin-yang categories also become the principles for generated differentiated categories of place and time, as well as the patterns of their mutual separation, union, alternation and distribution. Thus, argues Granet in full Durkheimian mode, the basic categories of Chinese thought are products and expressions of China’s ancient social order as constituted through its seasonal rituals.

In the final pages of *Festivals and Songs*, Granet attempts to explain how the advent of urban society and its political structures led to changes in the religious system. The lord’s palace became the new sacred centre out of which emanated the power of sovereignty, replacing the sacred spots by the rivers and mountains, which had been made sacred by the old peasant festivals – but the sacred power of the latter places remained, and the feudal lords and kings periodically conducted sacrifices to the Mountain and River spirits at those spots, in order to establish their connection with the sacred source. The sacred power, which had originally been generated by the ancient festivals, was now transferred to the person, the lineage, and the palace of the rulers. Meanwhile, in the new political hierarchy, women lost the relatively equal status they had enjoyed in the peasant festivals. They no longer had a significant role in public ceremonies; and the sexual rites disappeared as women came to be categorised as polluting, dangers to the authority of the ruling class of males. Religion became a specialized branch of knowledge; its professionals systematised the yin-yang cosmology as the intellectual system underlying ceremonial and of functionally differentiated ritual techniques (p. 249-257).

Although Granet aimed to build his analysis within a fully Durkheimian framework, his studies enrich, complexify and surpass the original Durkheimian paradigm. While the *Elementary Forms* focused on the relatively “flat” case of Australian aborigines lacking a centralized state, the Chinese materials studied by Granet open the question of the vertical dynamics between local communities and a central state.

*Festivals and Songs* focuses on small-scale, local communities, but Granet's next book, *Dances et légendes de la Chine ancienne* (*Dances and Legends of Ancient China*, 1926), which has never been translated into English or Chinese, focuses on the emergence of state power. Here he develops his analysis of the tension between locality and the state as the site of analysis of ritual, sacred power and classificatory schemes. Both books attempt to establish the link between ritual and systems of classification. Peasant communities and urban feudal polities are distinct modes and scale of social organization, leading to different schemes of classification. Paradigmatically, the former generates the egalitarian yin-yang dyad, while the latter generates the hierarchical dyad of Heaven and Earth, with the Sovereign located as the mediating centre. And yet, there is a vital relationship between the two dyads, as the Sovereign must establish his authority through the cult of the Sacred Places associated with local communities. Heaven and Earth is folded into, but also restructures, the yin-yang dyad, turning it into a hierarchical pair in which yang, associated with patriarchal sovereignty, is always above yin, associated with confined women and the subjects of the dominion. Granet's work opened the way to examining the complex ritual and sacred relationships between local power and centralizing political systems, and the dynamics of ritual conquests and alliances.

### **The Maussian paradigm in *Dances and Legends of Ancient China***

In *Dances and Legends*, Granet applies the method he styles as "archaeological," using a wide range of texts, such as the *Zuo zhuan*, from the Warring States era (475-221 BC), a period that witnessed the emergence and competition between Chinese states prior to their unification under a single empire, to understand the source of the ruler's charisma, or, in Granet's terms, the "Prestige that confers upon chiefs their power" (p. 49). Departing from classical philological and historical methodologies that focus on determining the authorship and genealogy of ancient texts as well as the veracity and chronological relationship between events described in the texts, Granet uses sources to identify recurring themes and structuring patterns of thought.

While *Festivals and Songs* was paradigmatically Durkheimian, the subject matter of *Dances and Legends* is far more complex. The accounts of the Warring States are replete with mentions of rituals, ceremonies, and sacrifices – but these are not communities worshipping their own power through the collective effervescence of their rituals. Rather, they are accounts of lords and hegemony who manipulate ceremonial practices, symbols and rhetoric

in the course of diplomatic negotiations and conquest, as they strive to enhance their legitimacy and power in a perpetually shifting political field. *Dances and Legends* opens significant new terrain and takes explicit inspiration from Mauss' theory of the gift – which had not yet been published (Mauss 1925), but which was being elaborated in Mauss' seminar at the Ecole Pratique, which Granet was assiduously attending. Granet took inspiration from the antagonistic and competitive nature of certain forms of exchange such as the *potlatch*, to build a theory of the construction of political authority through gifting and ceremonies. Granet elaborates on the Chinese notion of *rang* – to yield, or to cede -- as it appears in the texts, as a central element of noble virtue, referring to, as he describes it, “having enough to cede, and ceding in order to have” (*avoir de quoi céder et céder pour avoir*), similar to what we might call *noblesse oblige*. *Rang*, as a disposition and ability enacted within a network of reciprocal gifting, allows the chief to enhance his prestige and power by receiving in order to give, and giving in order to receive. The skillful practice of *rang* allows him to situate himself as a node in a circulation of riches, and to create value: the gifts that pass through him, whether offered to him or distributed by him, increase in value by virtue of their association with his Prestige. “It is in relation to Him that the hierarchy of values is established, and that value is created” (p. 91-92).

Based on this theory, Granet analyses how rituals of negotiation, alliance, victory or surrender, as described in the text, can be staged and manipulated to orient the direction of yielding and the circulation, value and significance of offerings. Thus, the virtuous prince is able to establish and expand his sovereignty through the skillful enactment of ritual tactics. This also involves conducting cults to the spirits of sacred places, and thereby establishing a connection with, and sovereignty over, the sacred power located in the spots associated with the life-generating seasonal festivals described in *Festivals and Songs*.

The establishment of the chief's sovereignty (such as a new dynasty) entails the construction of a new ritual order, in which a ceremonial system organizes the world according to classificatory schemes revolving around the Four Cardinal Points with the Ruler as the Centre, and numerological and spacio-temporal categorizations derived from it. Establishing a new ritual Order also entails the destruction of the conquered Order, whose components must either be incorporated into the new system, or broken apart and expelled to the edges of the Four Directions. Here, Granet focuses on the dances mentioned in the texts, which later scholars might have called exorcistic or shamanic. The dances embody and channel the sacred power of the new Order, while destroying, expelling and keeping at bay

the forces of the conquered order. In *Dances and Legends*, Granet thus shows how basic categories of Chinese cosmology are derived from the ritualization of political conquest.

### **Granet, China and the *Elementary Structures of Kinship*.**

*Dances and Legends* complicates the Durkheimian theory of ritual as the foundation of social solidarity, as it does the Confucian theory of ritual as social harmony. What Granet finds in the texts is accounts of the instrumental deployment of ritual as strategies and tactics of self-aggrandizement and political negotiation. How to account for the relationship between ritual both embodying ideal norms of harmony and order, and providing techniques for the struggle between competing groups? This question runs through Granet's most difficult but perhaps most consequential work, *Catégories matrimoniales dans la Chine ancienne* (*Matrimonial Categories in Ancient China*), published in 1939.

*Matrimonial Categories* is a study of the kinship structures of ancient China, in which Granet uses allusions in ancient texts to reconstruct several models of kinship relations. The work is highly technical and complex, bringing the Chinese materials into dialogue with cases ranging from the Aranda of Australia to the Kachin of Burma, situating itself within the esoteric debates of the anthropology of kinship. As noted by Goudineau (2004: 167), there was perhaps only one man alive who could read and fully engage with the work: the young Claude Levi-Strauss, who, a decade later, published his seminal *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (1949) which set in motion the structuralist revolution that would transform anthropology and the social sciences more generally.

Levi-Strauss devotes several chapters of *The Elementary Structures* to a detailed critique of *Matrimonial Categories*. He praises the work as “bringing a decisive contribution to the general theory of kinship,” containing “theoretical truths of a more general and higher import” than other works in the field. But he then proceeds to pick apart Granet's models as an “ideological construction without an objective basis,” “excessively complicated” and “often obscure.” (Levi-Strauss [1949] 1967: 358-9). It would take him four decades to admit that “*Matrimonial Categories* awoke me to questions of kinship (...) All of my thinking on kinship comes from there.” (Levi-Strauss and Eribon 1988: 139-140, quoted in Héran 1998a : 1). In the last year of his life, he further exclaimed, “for me, Granet is the most brilliant!” (Goudineau 2004: 182). As argued by the sociologist François Héran in his painstaking review of Levi-Strauss' critique of Granet, the *Matrimonial Categories* are “the first masterpiece of structuralist anthropology” (Héran 1998b : 169).

Indeed, a close comparison of both works shows that almost the *entirety* of Levi-Strauss' structural theory of kinship is already contained in Granet's *Matrimonial categories*, starting with the

key point that the incest taboo does not derive from a natural revulsion for close kin: the objects of the taboo vary in different kinship systems, which are systems of classification that define who can and cannot be a marriage partner. As summarised by Goudineau, the core elements of both Granet's and Levi-Strauss' kinship theory are "firstly, a positive theory of exogamy based on the idea of reciprocity; secondly, a typology of two elementary systems of matrimonial exchanges and their variants, the *chassé-croisé* and the deferred, later converted into restricted and generalized exchanges in the terminology of Levi-Strauss; finally, a discussion on the "circulation" linked to the deferred (generalized) exchange as opening a new mode of social cohesion, governed by a new consciousness of temporality and play within historical dynamics" (Goudineau 2004: 165).

However, while Levi-Strauss uses materials from a wide range of societies to derive a universal theory that could rely solely on synchronic, structural logic and isolates kinship from other social institutions, Granet attempts to reconstruct the historical evolution of kinship systems in their relationship with broader socio-political processes. Notably, he tries to trace the transitional forms between his reconstruction of the "direct reciprocity" of matrimonial exchanges in small-scale peasant societies and the "indirect reciprocity" or "deferred return" of the circulation of wives within an open network of clans in the urban feudal polities. This diachronic strategy is condemned by Levi-Strauss as a matter of methodological principle, while Sinologists would question the lack of empirical proof for his highly speculative historical reconstructions.

Notwithstanding this rejection from both sides, *Matrimonial Categories* raises the question of the fundamental role of gendered structures in the relationship and tensions between local communities and larger polities, and in the tensions between ritual as harmonic ideal and agonistic practice. Indeed, while Levi-Strauss takes for granted that the circulation of *wives* between *men* is an inherent and universal property of the elementary structures of kinship, Granet postulates that there is nothing in the formal properties of the system to prevent husbands from being the circulating spouses. "The contest between the sexes turned into a sentiment of feminine inferiority" (Granet 1939: 250). Thus, the lower status of women is not an assumption but an anomaly that needs explanation – which he seeks to find in the appearance of centralized urban polities. At the same time, he notes the power held by women as counterparts of men in negotiated reciprocal exchange within the marital chamber, in the household, and in the marketplace, where women handled the buying and selling of goods: "everything that circulates, circulates with women, on the pretext of women, and thanks to women" (Granet 1939: 183). With this analysis, Granet hinted at a whole set of questions on the relationships between cosmology, gender relations, and power,

which would be a core concern of feminist anthropology in later decades (Ortner 1974, Sanday 1981, Strathern 1990)

Thus, while Granet is attentive to the logic inherent to formal structures, he also attends to their relationship with actual social practice, the tension between an ethic of balanced reciprocity and an ethic of prestige accumulation. And here, just as in the political rituals described in *Dances and Legends*, kinship rules and the rites of marriage are games that can be manipulated. In the transition to urban feudal polities, “instead of reciprocating right away, one learns to compensate, to guarantee and to wait. An element of trust, an element of calculation, an element of gamesmanship have entered into the system of cohesion” (Granet 1939: 249). Wives are treated as “loans” and “debts”, matrimonial alliances are “investments” that involve “risks” and “gains”, they are “rounds” of play with different conventions, rules and strategies; they are also regulated means of carrying out vendettas with rival clans (Héran 1998a : 15). This vocabulary of agonistic contest within the rules of the game, and the accumulation of what Granet calls “prestige capital” (Granet 1936), prefigures Bourdieu’s theories on the accumulation of social and symbolic capital within social fields.

### **The “*Chinese Mind*” and the “*Savage Mind*”**

The systems of classifications and collective representations studied by Durkheim within Australian totemism were embedded within the idioms and practices of local culture. Chinese cosmology, on the other hand, is a systematized intellectual system, which took shape during the Warring States period (475-221 BC) and the Han dynasty (206 BC-220 AD). This is the subject of Granet’s most influential work, *La pensée chinoise* (*The Chinese Mind*, 1934), in which he uses the ancient texts to outline the Durkheimian “collective representations” at the heart of Chinese civilization – not through the philosophical works of individual authors, but through identifying recurring themes and schemas that are found in rituals and texts, prefiguring the method used by Foucault (1966) to reconstruct the *episteme* of an epoch.

The classificatory themes and schemas analysed in *The Chinese Mind* are those of what is often referred to as China’s “cosmology of systematic correspondences” or “correlative cosmology,” based not on abstract concepts governed by logical rules and the principle of non-contradiction, but intellectual images or “emblems” of the Totality, of yin-yang, the Five Elements, the Cardinal Points, the Celestial Trunks and Earthly Branches, all of which were distilled out of ritual and mythology, and can be connected by homology and analogy

and used to construct models of totality, as the mutually resonant governing principles and recipes of ritual, the body, the state and the cosmos. Far from a claim that this cosmology represents some essential and unchanging Chinese mode of thinking, Granet, refining the argument he made in *Dances and Legends*, argues that the very notions of Totality and Oneness that undergird Chinese classical cosmology, are inseparable from China's unification into a single Empire:

The notions to which the Chinese attribute the function of categories essentially depend on the principles upon which rests the organization of society: they represent a kind of institutional foundation of Chinese thought, and its analysis is inseparable from a study of social morphology. But these core ideas did not all become explicit at the same moment in history: within them can be identified some traits that allow us to situate and date them. If Ying and Yang form a *couple* and seem to preside jointly over the rhythm that establishes the universal Order, it is because their conception derives from an age in history during which a principle of rotation sufficed to regulate social activity divided between two complementary groupings. The concept of the Tao can be traced back to a less archaic period; it could only become explicit when the structure of society was more complicated and in settings where people revered the authority of Chiefs who could legitimately present themselves as the sole authors of order in the world: only then could be imagined the idea of a *single* and *central* animating power.” (Granet 1988 [1934] : 27).

*The Chinese Mind* is, one could say, a book-long elaboration and demonstration of the section on China in Durkheim and Mauss's *Primitive Classification* – indeed, in an endnote, he admits that his inspiration came from the latter work, which he calls “a milestone in the history of sinological studies” (endnote 22, p. 29). As a seminal book-length study of classificatory thinking, *The Chinese Mind* did not escape the attention of Claude Lévi-Strauss. In his *Totemism* (1963[1962]), Lévi-Strauss set out to demolish the category of totemism, through which, over a century, anthropologists had attempted to make sense of the puzzling practice, found in many parts of the world, of social groups such as clans positing a sacred relationship, descent or consubstantiality between a specific social group and a specific species of animal, plant or object – its ‘totem’. Durkheim, in his consideration of the problem, had already pointed out that totems primarily serve as symbolic emblems of social groups. But, in his theory of religion, he postulated that the choice of a certain totem to represent a specific group is arbitrary, merely the result of the group attributing the energy of the

collective effervescence to the divine power of the sacred object. Levi-Strauss criticizes Durkheim's "affective theory of the sacred," pointing out that it is not emotions that cause rituals, but rituals that engender emotions (Levi-Strauss 1963: 71). Instead, he proposed that the set of totemic emblems representing the set of clans or sub-groups of a given society, should be taken as a single series. What matters is not the content of individual emblems but the structural relationships between the set, which parallels the structural relationships between the groups they represent. Levi-Strauss then finds that a basic structure of logical relations governs such structures; it is, at root, neither emotional nor social but intellectual and cognitive: being universal to human cultures, this mental structure dissolves the uniqueness of such academic constructions as 'totemism' or 'religion' (Levi-Strauss 1963: 103-104).

China only receives one mention in Levi-Strauss' argument -- and yet, this one mention, unreferenced but which reads as a sentence-long summary of Granet's synthesis in the *Chinese Mind*, appears at the climactic finale of his exposition of the universal structural principle:

"Consequently, the division eaglehawk/crow [totemic clans] among the [Australian] Darling River tribes, with which we began, is seen at the end of the analysis to be no more than 'one particular example of a widespread type of the application of a certain structural principle,' a principle consisting of the union of opposites. The alleged totemism is no more than a particular expression, by means of a special nomenclature formed of animal and plant names (in a certain code, as we should say today), which is its sole distinctive characteristic, of correlations and oppositions which may be formalized in other ways, e.g. among certain tribes of North and South America, by oppositions of the type sky/earth, war/peace, upstream/downstream, red/white, et. *The most general model of this, and the most systematic application, is to be found perhaps in China, in the opposition of the principles of Yang and Yin, as male and female, day and night, summer and winter, the union of which results in an organized totality (tao) such as the conjugal pair, the day, or the year.* Totemism is thus reduced to a particular fashion of formulating a general problem, viz., how to make opposition, instead of being an obstacle to integration, serve rather to produce it." (Levi-Strauss 1963: 88-89, italics added).

In *The Savage Mind*, the sequel to *Totemism*, Levi-Strauss (1966[1962]) proceeded to develop the analytical tools and the implications of his structural approach to classificatory systems. He posits "two parallel modes of acquiring knowledge" (1966:13). He contrasts the

‘savage mind’ to the modern scientific mind, but not in a pejorative way, insisting that both are universal to all human minds and manifest equal degrees of intellectual sophistication. The ‘savage mind’ is a ‘science of the concrete’ that operates like a handyman or ‘bricoleur’ to use whatever objects are at hand to assemble systems of relations between differentiated elements constituting an organized whole, rather than, like the engineer, creating new, abstract concepts for the purpose of a specific intellectual project. Given that as quoted above, Levi-Strauss had noted that Chinese classificatory systems presented the “most general model” and “most systematic application” of this modality of thought, one might have expected him to give Granet a closer reading and to discuss the Chinese case in depth. But no: *The Chinese Mind* is entirely absent from *The Savage Mind* – even though many of the examples he uses, such as those drawn from the Navaho and the Hopi of North America (pp. 39-48), and the Murngin of North Australia (91-96), present gendered, spacio-temporal systems of correspondence that are strikingly similar to the structure of Chinese cosmology.

Why did Levi-Strauss erase the ‘most general model’ from this account? After all, Granet had in many ways prefigured the structuralist theory of the *Savage Mind*: In his discussion of Chinese categories, Granet often insists on the insight, dear to Levi-Strauss, that they have no intrinsic, substantive content but only take meaning based on their relative position within a series – with the lines in the hexagrams of the *Book of Changes* presenting a paradigmatic example (269-270). As Levi-Strauss would later state in his discussion of Pueblo myths, “It is not the elements themselves but only the relations between them which are constant” (Levi-Strauss 1966: 53).

Perhaps the Chinese case undermines the neat dichotomy between “European” and “Savage” minds that Levi-Strauss aimed to construct, with the Anthropologist as the privileged mediator who places the two on an intellectually and morally equal plane. Perhaps, through the elaboration of their cosmology, the Chinese had already refined and systematized ‘savage’ thought into a highly elaborate structuralist theory, over two thousand years before the anthropologist, and in a culture more often associated with ‘civilization’ than ‘savagery’? It was, perhaps, convenient to leave China to the Sinologists, as some exceptional case. Sinology and Chinese Studies have only been too happy to keep China for themselves, as their *chasse gardée*. For Sinology, too, it is convenient to leave the savages to the anthropologists.

But doesn’t Levi-Strauss’s all-too hesitant and, here, unacknowledged engagement with Granet suggest that there is nothing exceptional about Chinese cosmology – that there is no essential difference between it and those of tribal societies, only one of degree of

systematisation, elaboration and application? The academic study of Chinese culture and religion is almost entirely focused on comparative contrasts between China and the “West,” or sometimes ancient Greece, usually highlighting China’s uniqueness in the comparison (see Puett 2002 for a critique). But what if, as suggested by Levi-Strauss, Chinese cosmology is an expression, even a “general model” of something universal? And what if the Pueblo, the Hopi or the Murngin are as relevant to comparison with China as ancient Greece or the modern West? What is it about our discourses and conceptualizations of China, the West and the Rest that make such connections seem incongruous? What epistemological boundaries and disciplinary territories would they threaten? What would be the theoretical implications?

More immediately, Levi-Strauss’ avoidance of *The Chinese Mind* is more likely to be attributable to the fact that, in spite of its offering excellent material for a structuralist account of culture, Granet’s argument complicates Levi-Strauss’s project of constructing an alternative to Durkheimian social constructivism through uncovering the innate cognitive structures of the mind. While the more “primitive” cases of Amerindian and Australian tribes might seem to offer more direct evidence, through mythology, of synchronic mental structures unmediated by history and politics, the Chinese case as presented by Granet, offers textual and historical materials allowing to reconstruct the changing configuration of cosmological structures in parallel with changes in the socio-political and ritual systems. While Levi-Strauss did emphasize the importance of history and its essential complementarity with anthropology (Levi-Strauss 1963[1958]:1-30), his work rarely touched on literate, historical civilizations, avoiding the challenge presented by Granet’s work: what is, in the diverse expressions of cultural forms, the relationship between the innate cognitive structures of the human mind and socio-historically constructed categories?

The other difficulty presented by Granet’s account is that his structuralism, if it could be so called, is far from the purely logical and cognitive form theorized by Levi-Strauss. The cultural structures and cosmologies depicted by Granet are embodied, ritualized and rhythmic. They emerge out of dances, sexual tensions, the cyclical movement of bodies through times and seasons, and the ritualized confrontations and circulations of rulers and vassals through sovereign domains. Levi-Strauss examines myths, reducing their symbols to structuring binary oppositions, which, with a rationalist, Cartesian mindset, he treats as “logical contradictions” that mythology endlessly tries to resolve. Granet, on the other hand, examines the differentiated groups of actors whose interactions are orchestrated in rituals. The dualities that come into play – boys and girls, lords and vassals, day and night, summer

and winter – are not “logical contradictions” but “contrasting pairs.” The “resolution” of their relations is worked out not through a discursive game in the garb of mythology, but through *rhythmic* responses, alternations, resonances, correlations, mutual transformations and “hierogamic exchanges of attributes” in the mode of ritual and music (p. 123, 274, 299). Here binary pairs are not abstract principles manifested in the material world, they are real-life groups abstracted into emblems: yin-yang does not signify the union of male and female “principles,” but abstracted symbols derived from the lived experience of sexual relations and spatio-temporal division of labour between men and women (123-124). The Dao is not a First Cause, but a regulating centre, abstracted from the ritual function of the Ruler. The Totality of the Cosmos is ordered in the manner of a Ceremony (274-278). And Granet quotes from the *Book of Rites (Liji)*, “Music is what unites (*tong*), Rites are what differentiates (*yi*). Union generates mutual affection; differences generate mutual respect.” (p. 336).

Throughout the *Chinese Mind*, Granet emphasizes the rhythmic and musical nature of Chinese cosmology. Even down to the individual body, in the Daoist regimens of *yangsheng*, Granet stresses the role of adjusting the body to rhythms of breathing and temporal cycles: “To increase or merely to conserve one’s vitality, any being must adopt a *regime conforming to the rhythm of universal life*” (417). Granet’s analysis follows the coordination of rhythms within the body through breathing and life-nurturing practices, between bodies through rituals, and between humans and the rhythms of natural cycles. This embodied, experiential and ecological perspective corrects the Durkheimian insistence on society as an autonomous, self-generating domain arbitrarily affixing its categories onto individual bodies and onto a natural world taken as ‘blank slates’ (see Palmer 2014). It also corrects the overly rationalist approach of Levi-Straussian structuralism. The implications are far reaching: if Chinese cosmology is the “most general model” of the dual structures found in societies around the world, then perhaps the embodied, spatio-temporal, ritual and rhythmic perspective suggested by the Chinese materials, would offer a more fruitful angle of approach to interpreting the contrasting categories found in the cosmologies, myths and rituals of so many cultures than the disembodied, Cartesian binary modelling preferred by Levi-Strauss.

This possibility is intimated at in the Overture to *The Raw and the Cooked*, the first volume of Levi-Strauss’ monumental *Mythologiques*, where he suggests that music, like mythology, points to a middle way between “logical thought and esthetic perception” or, in other words, between abstract logic and embodied experience. Music and myth operate through the “two grids” of “visceral” and “cultural” time: on the one hand, the psycho-

physiological temporality of cerebral waves and organic rhythms, on the other hand, the languages of narrative and the scale of musical sounds, which vary between cultures. Through the rhythms of music and myth, “the times of the physiological grid which are theoretically constant are overlooked or accelerated, anticipated or overtaken by retardation.” (60-62). What Levi-Strauss identifies here is how music is the point of tension and resonance between natural, embodied rhythms and the rhythms inherent to the expression of the logic of a system of signs. Levi-Strauss credits an adolescent infatuation with the music of Richard Wagner as the source of inspiration for his structural analysis of mythology – but, in a footnote, he adds: “While acknowledging this paternity, we would be guilty of ingratitude if we did not acknowledge other debts: first of all to the work of Marcel Granet which glitters with brilliant intuitions” (p. 23).

Turning back to Granet’s musical analysis of the rhythmic dimension of Chinese cosmology, however, the primary object of his studies are not music or mythology *per se*, but *ritual* – which combines music and myth, and which, in fact, is the performative matrix of both. Ritual presents, in a more complete fashion than musical scores or written myths taken in isolation, the ground for the interplay between ecological, biological, cultural and social rhythms. Granet’s focus on ritual as the source of rhythmic patterns of culture, suggests an alternative to Levi-Strauss’ intellectualist and primarily literary analysis of myth in the final decades of his life. These implications of Granet’s work were ignored by Levi-Strauss, who, in spite of his friendship with Maurice Merleau-Ponty, was also immune to the latter’s phenomenology of embodied experience (1945), which offers profound potentials for engagement with Chinese ontologies (see Miller 2017: 112-118).

Granet, in this vein, was faithful to Mauss’ emphasis on humans as rhythmic animals, and is relevant to a new wave of interest in rhythmic perspectives on society in recent decades (Lefèbvre 1992, You 1994a,b, Michon 2015). Granet’s focus on songs, dances and flirting between boys and girls in ancient communal festivals, and as the foundational division in ritual and its derived cosmology, opens the question of gender, sexuality, the body and emotions in the construction of sacrality. His studies temper the strong Durkheimian claim of the arbitrariness of the sacred and of the purely social construction of cultural categories: Chinese cosmology, if anthropo- and socio-centric, also describes and engages with the lived experience of the body, emotions and habitat: temporal changes, spatial variations, embodied sensations. We find here a pragmatic dialectic between socially mediated categories and the phenomenological experience of living in the world.

## **Conclusion: China in the Anthropology of Humanity**

Marcel Granet remains completely unknown to most English-speaking sociologists and anthropologists. His legacy has been honoured in the French tradition of Daoist studies (see Schipper 1986) and in the British anthropology of Chinese religion (see Freedman 1975), but even in these fields, few have directly engaged with his work. In China, his student Yang Kun (1901-1998) was one of the leading founders of the disciplines of sociology and ethnology (Yang 1939, 1942); for half a century, however, Granet's contributions were largely forgotten (Li 2010). It is only recently, under the impulsion of anthropologists such as Wang Mingming, that Granet has been the subject of a re-appraisal as offering fresh insights for the historical sociology and anthropology of Chinese civilization (Wang 2010, 2014, Xu & Ji 2018).

To be sure, Granet can still be a source of inspiration for studies of Chinese religion, society and civilization, and I hope that this article will serve as an introduction to his work for scholars in those fields. But, beyond that, my argument is that Granet's sinological work can be used most productively when we treat it as contributing to theoretical debates in Sociology and Anthropology, rather than as a synthesis of Chinese history and civilization that may be questionable on empirical grounds. In this article, I have placed Granet in dialogue with three generations of social theory, represented by Durkheim, Mauss, and Levi-Strauss. I have shown how Granet, though always a loyal Durkheimian, corrected his master's insistence on a view of human society ontologically independent from the body and the environment, and contributed, following Mauss, to the theorisation of rhythm, the body, and agonistic exchange. Although he was, in the words of one critic, "simply put, the principal source of French structuralism" (Héran 1998a: 4), his work can correct the overly cognitive and a-historical emphasis of Levi-Strauss.

For lack of space, I have been unable in these pages to discuss other dimensions. Brown (2006) has shown how Granet, while drawing on the work of Lucien Lévy-Bruhl (1857-1939), was able to conceptualise profound cultural difference without falling into the pitfalls of either cultural essentialism or unilineal evolutionism. Granet was also an important inspiration for Mauss' articles on techniques of the body (1934) and on the construction of the self (1938). Further developing these themes, in engagement with authors such as Bourdieu and Foucault, might help to correct the almost exclusive emphasis on alienating and oppressive power in post-structuralist, post-Marxist theories. As mentioned earlier,

Granet is an important source in the more recent work of Philippe Descola, but a fuller engagement would help to draw out the historical and political dynamics at play in the emergence of the types of ontology outlined by Descola (see Palmer, forthcoming). In sum, Granet's work drew on, engaged with, deeply influenced, or resonates with many of the most influential strands of modern social theory; and yet, it avoided the excesses of any of them. Altogether, the story of Marcel Granet and his work can be linked to five generations of social theory, spanning over a century, from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century until today. Granet deserves nothing less than to be recognized, beyond the field of Chinese studies, as one of the towering figures in the history of Sociology and Anthropology.

Seen from this light, what does Granet teach us about the relationship between China and social theory? In my mind, it is not to create a "Chinese theory about China" or an "anthropological theory of China" -- although Granet's work can be read that way, with all the risks of essentialism that such an approach entails. Rather, it is to see Chinese data as a major and deeply productive source of insights for theoretical construction on the human condition -- insights that can be applied, tested and refined through applications and comparisons with any region in the world (for discussion on these themes, see Bruckermann and Feuchtwang 2016, Ji & Liang 2018). Such is how sociological and anthropological theory have evolved, building on insights drawn from data on German puritans, Amazonian tribespeople, English laborers or Samoan adolescents. Granet shows that China need not be marginal to such work -- indeed, his influence shows that, in the French tradition described here, Chinese materials are part of the "DNA" of various strands and issues in social theory.

Granet once wrote, "By its extent, its duration, its mass, Chinese civilization is one of the most powerful creations of mankind; none other is richer in human experience... Man will know himself only if he knows all the ways of being human. To achieve that, he must leave home in order to find himself" (Granet 1936: 28). And he is reported to have once said to his students, "I don't give a damn about China. What interests me is Man." (Freedman 1975: 29) Unfortunately, Granet's influence was diminished and obscured by his own reluctance to directly engage, in his academic writing, with non-Sinological scholars and theoreticians -- with others who were also interested in Man. In an endnote in *The Chinese Mind*, Granet resists any suggestion that he is illuminating Chinese facts with sociological theories or vice-versa, and denies knowing anything of theory, only facts (1934: 485, note 22). Can newer generations of scholars of Chinese culture, society and religion overcome this timidity?

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