The Nature of Culture

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THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS
CHICAGO AND LONDON

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1947

IN VOLUME II of the *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*, Elizabeth Bacon has made a valiant and valuable first effort to classify the cultures of Asia in areal terms. Wherever "culture areas" have been developed as useful conceptual tools, it has been essentially by gradual concord of opinion, even though there was also a definitive formulation, as by Wissler. It is in this spirit that I submit herewith a series of comments on Miss Bacon's findings, hoping that these may stimulate the reactions of others as she has stimulated me.

The comments are ordered in the sequence of her areas....

AREAL CONSIDERATIONS

2. *Southwest Asian Sedentary.*—This area is characterized about as expectable, with considerable continuity (mud-brick, barley) from 4000 B.C. to the present. Islam fits in as regards origin; but many more Mohammedans are now in Africa, India, and Indonesia than in the Near East. That is one trouble with ideas and religions in these areal classifications: they wander; while subsistence mechanisms mostly have difficulty traveling out of their environment. In "The Ancient Oikumené" [No. 47], I have tried to interpret Mohammedanism as a phenomenon of the class which Toynbee calls "etherealization," but for which a term like "reduction by segregation" would be more appropriate—at any rate less spiritually poetic. (The extrication of the alphabet out of the earlier system of mixed writing by segregation and reduction is an example.) Such a simplified ideology and set of values was perhaps the only effective reformulation that could be evolved in the area of the original hearth of higher civilization after four thousand years. At any rate, the Mohammedan reduction-formulation was successful not only in the hearth but on three continents wherever it entered feeble, arid, or undeveloped cultures. Therewith, to a certain degree, it carried Near Eastern culture as far as to Malaysia and to West African Negroes. All this is not a criticism of Miss Bacon, but an illustration of the difficulties inherent in areal classifications dealing with cultures that possess a known history and are on markedly different levels. My "reduction" explanation tries to salvage something for the "culture-area" approach when this floats onto the biggest rocks, as in the Near East.

3. *Pastoral Nomadic.*—In a mapped classification of Asiatic cultures, there is no recourse but to recognize the pastoral belt. Yet the farming and part-farming communities within the belt render the pastoral designation highly inexact. It is even doubtful whether the nomads outnumber the farmers. Evidently their specialized and unstable life impresses our mind as so distinctive that we fail to consider the settled people in the same area. What we really have is a dichotomized culture, one pole of which is much like that dominant in adjacent areas; the other, pastoral. The purely pastoral part of the society does make the total culture distinctive as compared with more usual cultures which contain no such nomadic-pastoral element. Nevertheless, a mere nomadic segment of a society is not the same as a wholly nomadic society. The difference is of import both conceptually and in historic actuality. For instance, there

is Lattimore's view that eastern nomadism is a secondary extension from mixed farming when this got into territory so near the environmental limit that it became more secure or profitable to abandon the double-barreled approach, move out into the steppe, and plump on animal-breeding with mobility. Whether this was actually "the" origin of East Asiatic pastoral nomadism, or of all pastoral nomadism, I do not know; and I suspect it cannot be either proved or disproved, at least not at present. But the mere fact that the view can be reasonably entertained shows that nomadism can theoretically be construed as a special derivative form of other cultures, and is not necessarily a basic form of culture in its own right. Seen in this way, pastoralism would be a part-culture. It would be a well-marked profession within cultures, something like smithing or doctoring, say, except for being raised to include a higher fraction of the total population and being more nearly self-sufficient. As a matter of fact, I doubt whether any pastoral nomad group is wholly pastoral even as regards its subsistence. No doubt some of them might be, if necessary; but it is certainly not usual, and the exclusively herding life would certainly be narrow and meager, except so far as it might be enriched by plunder.

In short, I submit that there is considerable reason for regarding pastoral nomadism not as a complete culture but as a culture facies; much like the river-boat-dwelling sector of the southern Chinese population or like the Orang Laut among the Malay, to whom no one has yet given a separate color on a culture-area map. Incidentally, if one proceeded to actual, accurate mapping of the area of pastoral nomadism, difficulties of representation would at once appear. These difficulties ought to suggest that this culture is not conceptually coordinate or equivalent with others. The Arab Ruwala in Arabia would be "Pastoral Nomadic," but Arab Mecca and Yemen in Arabia would be "Near Eastern Sedentary." And the Nomadic area would have to be stretched beyond Asia to Morocco, if the concept were valid....

5. *Southeast Asia and Indonesia.*—The definition of this area is hazier than need be. Southern China is more or less included by implication, and then there seems to be a theory of origin in central China. The latter theory seems highly speculative. No evidence is outlined. The view is perhaps a reflection of Heine-Geldern's.

Actually there is enough solid and clear-cut basis for a Farther Indian–East Indian culture area to render complicating speculations unnecessary. From Assam to the Philippines and Lesser Sundas the surviving pagan cultures have long been recognized as presenting many marked resemblances. There is plenty of local diversity, but it seems not so much intrinsic variation as due to the survival of the old general culture only in spots between the invasion and spread of literate cultures, which took up all the larger and fertile plains and coasts. Considering the scattered localization of the pagan, prehistoric culture today, and the length of time since disruption of its continuity, the variability is not at all excessive.

The overlays and intrusions are as follows. In southern China (central China does not belong and probably never did), in Tongking, and, since some centuries, in Annam and Cochin China: Chinese culture. In the remainder of Farther India and Indonesia: Indian culture; followed later, in Indonesia and Malaya, by Islam. In Farther India, the limits of prevalent Chinese and Indian influence are quite sharp. So far as Annamese is today the dominant language, we have Mahayana, ideographs, mandarins, chopsticks, etc. Laos, Cambodia, ancient Champa go with Siam and Burma in being overwhelm-

ingly determined from India, primarily by overseas influences. This is one of the few Asiatic frontiers of the oil-and-water type.

All three of the languages of the politically dominant nationalities of Farther India have gained territory southward within the historic period, as Miss Bacon observes, and may have done so previously. An early, wide, and perhaps continuous distribution of Mon-Khmer dialects over the southern half or more of the Farther Indian peninsula is thus indicated. This would be analogous to the persisting continuity of Indonesian dialects in the archipelago.

The remnant populations different in culture and physical type appear to be the "Primitive Nomadic" peoples of Miss Bacon's "6." These were certainly of much less import toward later cultures than the far more numerous early Mon-Khmer and early Indonesians that were established in most of the area—almost certainly with agriculture—when the only slightly more civilized Burmese, Thai, and Tongkinese infiltrated or conquered southward on the mainland, and when the Hindus arrived on both the mainland and island coasts. I would construe the large and relatively uniform Mon-Khmer and Indonesian bodies, with their indubitably similar cultures, as the effective social substratum on which the immigrant populations with their more efficient political organization deployed to constitute what we call the "history" of the area.

6. *Primitive Nomadic.*—It seems of doubtful value to reckon the Australoid Sakai, Negrito Semang, and similar fragments as having a type of culture taxonomically co-ordinate with, say, the Chinese. Least of all can this be done in terms of *areas* of culture: these scraps of tribes occupy only spots which are so small as to be difficult to enter on a map of the continent.

I should like to propose the view that the culture-historical significance of these primitives, as influences or ingredients, has always, in the past as in the present, been negligible. Their significance to us resides in an attitude to which they hold, namely, to get along with all possible *minimum* of culture. This is a most interesting experiment for them to have performed for the benefit of those of us who are concerned with the processes and nature of culture. But it virtually eliminates them from having been of any real influence on the development of the culture of a continent or the world.

Blend 1. Korean.—I agree entirely with Miss Bacon that it is remarkable how little we know about Korea. There can be no doubt that when the heavy Chinese influences are subtracted there is a solid native remainder. This presumably shares many features with adjacent Tungusic culture. But it would seem most profitable to determine first the "native," i.e., non-Chinese, constituents of Korean culture, and subsequently to compare them with Tungusic for their degree of commonalty. There seems to be much that is distinctive of Korea: position of women, their "seclusion," curfew for men, men's topknot and adulthood only by marriage, near-outlawing of Buddhism, the general irreligiousness, the strange political "parties," the alphabet, the female *mutang* exorcists who both are possessed by spirits and evict spirits that cause illness in others, the blind male *pansu* shamans or diviners who are *taught* to control spirits, the special kinds and uses of Broussetonia paper, the shapes of the horsehair hats, the packing on bulls.

The Chinese constituent in Korea can be appraised in two ways. First, by an enumeration of Chinese items and patterns found in Korea. Any return flow would presumably be negligible. Second, by a comparison of the histories of the two countries. The total profiles of these histories run parallel at so many points as to indicate common currents of causation; which presumably amounts to consistent Chinese influence on events in Korea. Strong coincidence of pulse could hardly exist without an enormous amount of the plasma of culture being common. The parallelism is most evident in the segmentation of Korean history into natural or accepted periods; of which I therefore subjoin an outline.

I*a.* (Legendary) 1122 B.C., or Chou accession, Shang refugees establish a kingdom at Phyong An.

I*b.* In 193 B.C., about a generation after the conquest of the northeasterly Chinese kingdom of Yen by Ts'in, following the end of Chou, refugees from Yen seize Phyong An.

II. In 108 B.C. the great Han warrior emperor Wu-ti temporarily annexed what is now northern Korea. The reaction to this, beginning in about a half-century, was the formation of three native Korean states (there had been only tribes before), whose interrelations constitute the political history of the peninsula for the next seven centuries. This is the "Period of the Three Kingdoms," Silla, Korai, Pakche. Silla, the most remote from China, was organized first, in 57 B.C.; Pakche last, in 16 B.C. About halfway through the period, writing, Buddhism, sculpture, etc., were introduced from China and soon transmitted to Japan (generally within one to two centuries more). Silla seems gradually to have become the most advanced culturally as well as the strongest of the three Korean states, and finally took the Japanese "colony" or outpost of Nimana in southern Korea. The three-kingdom period corresponds closely in time to the Chinese later Han, Three Kingdoms, and Six Dynasties periods; in both countries it was an era of political though fairly stable division.

III. In 589 China was reunited under the Sui dynasty, soon succeeded in 618 by the T'ang. At this time Silla had encroached on and was threatening its two neighbors. Soon after the T'angs were well established, around 650, there was an alliance between them and Silla, and another between Pakche and Korai, who soon called in Japan after Pakche had been conquered. In 663 the Japanese invaded Silla but were beaten by the Chinese; and by 668 Korai and Pakche had been "annexed" to China and Silla was a vassal. Actually, before long, the peninsula was ruled by Silla under nominal suzerainty to T'ang China. This condition continued until 935.

IV. In China, this date of 935 comes twenty-eight years after the final end of T'ang, and about halfway through the succeeding time of national political breakdown and rival states preceding Sung. In Korea, 935 stands for the overthrow of Silla by Wang Kien of Korai, who founded his own dynasty, independent of China, which was to last for all of 457 years, until 1392. The later rulers became vassals to the Mongols, but kept the dynasty going, which endured longer than any post-Chou dynasty in China. Wang Kien's line corresponds closely in time to Sung, Southern Sung, and Yuan, which covered 960–1368.

V*a.* In 1368 the Mings expelled the Mongols in a burst of Chinese nationalistic patriotism. Twenty-four years later, the Koreans founded a new dynasty, to rule Korea as Cho-sen from Seoul. On the one hand, there was now strong Chinese imitation: literary examinations and Confucianism were introduced or reestablished. On the other, Koreanism was emphasized. A state printing office was set up, with the famous great font of bronze types, rumors of which may have served to stimulate Gutenberg: the types were of Chinese characters, but were movable. A few decades later a true alphabet was devised which rendered the sounds of Korean efficiently. These were early developments; but in the sixteenth century manifestations of independence continued: Buddhism was heavily repressed; Fusan was taken and relations with Japan broken for sixty years; and, about 1575, the peculiar and unfortunate system of Korean political parties or factions took shape. This dynasty also had an extraordinarily long life, namely, of 518 years, until 1910. But this lapse was broken a bit before its middle by the Japanese invasion and conquest of 1592–98.

V*b.* By 1598, the Mings were running

out; the Manchus were soon to replace them. Korea was "loyal" to the Mings, who had come to its rescue against Japan, though only with failure. As the Manchus rose in power, they had to conquer the Koreans twice, in 1627 and 1636. After the second time, Korea went into seclusion, becoming the famous "hermit nation." Even with China its relations were now cut to a minimum, on account of the hated Manchu rulers: the embassy to Peking was limited to a month, trade took place only under it. It is interesting that the seclusion was broken by the Japanese, who in 1876 forced a Perry-like treaty on the reluctant Koreans; also that the dynasty ended in 1910 by annexation, a year before the Manchus in China ended by revolution.

This analysis evidences the degree to which the national and cultural history of Korea is a reflex of that of China in its major profiles, in spite of quite conscious and considerable ethnic and cultural particularism. No such parallelism of events can be designated for Japan; nor, for that matter, does it hold for Tongking-Annam in spite of the contiguity of the latter to China.

Blend 2. Japanese.—Miss Bacon is not wholly clear here between southern China coast and Indonesia as the main source of the nonclassic-Chinese constituent of Japanese culture. The southern China coast is Sansom's suggestion, and the most reasonable one, with the Japanese-speaking Ryukyus serving as the presumptive link. In fact, it is difficult to see why Indonesia should ever have been dragged into the problem, except that more speculative views are sometimes the more interesting. Scattered items like tooth-blackening will prove nothing for a large, rich culture like Japan's. I should doubt whether wet rice would have to be posited as the nucleus of the southern ingredient; for, in that case, how about Korean rice-growing—is that also derived from Indonesia? After all, there is no need to assume porous loess and a dryish continental climate as the sole environment of "north" or standard Chinese civilization. Miss Bacon's "may have reached Japan indirectly by way of Indonesia" I do not understand. Is this perhaps a slip for "ultimately from Indonesia but indirectly so" (viz., via southern China or Formosa-Ryukyu)? On the other hand, I agree with her implication that the Ainu have not seriously affected Japanese civilization.

Blend 3. Indian.—All cultures are composite in the origin of their content and multiply so. What a term like "blend" really can mean definitely is that most of the content of a given culture has entered it so recently or massively from other cultures that it can be explicitly referred to these with assurance. In short, blended cultures are essentially derivative cultures. That is something which Indian civilization is not. It has given much more than it has borrowed (except perhaps for its last thousand years of conquest-subjection to Islam). The three outstanding centers in Asia of creativeness of great systems of values and ideas are the Near East, India, and China. Miss Bacon would, I am sure, agree with this. Why then the Near East and China should stand on their own feet as originating areas, but India be a blend and derivative, is hard to see. Is it the wheat and cattle versus rice and buffalo dichotomy of subsistence in India? Or Vedic Indo-Aryan culture uniting with a hypothetical and undefinable Dravidian one? The essential event in India was the forging of the characteristic idea system (plus the influence of this on other parts of the world), not the contact or mingling of one or another subsistence or ethnic element. . . .

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

"Culture areas" are of course primarily not areas at all but kinds of culture which are areally limited. They are usually more simply and briefly labeled by their region than by their distinctive

content or qualities. That they can be mapped implies that they are either static formations or represent moments in a time flow. The concept was first developed systematically for native North America north of the Rio Grande, and has proved most convenient and usable there. This is because the total area was large enough to contain conspicuous diversities, yet the cultures were rather close together in level; and they also were all virtually historyless. They could therefore be treated as co-ordinate. Around 1910–15, the archaeology of the areas was less systematically known than the ethnology. It did not extend back very far from the period of discovery. Hence it mostly revealed no very marked differences from the historic or recent culture of the same area. So the static classification worked pretty well. The same sort of classification applied south of the Tropic of Cancer did not work out nearly so consistently or usefully—there was too complicated a history, too varied an archaeological past.

This situation can be generalized. The more history is known, the more difficult is it to evolve an acceptable "culture-area" classification. Simon-pure historians have never used the concept. They have not refuted it; often they would admit the areas; but they take them for granted, and then operate with changes within or across them. Miss Bacon's difficulties are due to proceeding basically as if one could divide Asia into static areas, while yet remaining aware of the historic changes across the areas. The result is a varying degree of inconsistency of scheme.

I have tried not only to point out the inconsistencies but to suggest an approach that may remove them. Where we possess reasonably adequate historic or archaeological knowledge, this should be given the primacy. The cultures should be viewed first as developments or growths; their areas, as secondary attributes. On this view, areas are often seen to expand, contract, or overlap—much as cultures change or blend. But in general the cultures will prove areally definable for any given moment. The ultimate outcome might be a series of culture-area mappings. But this would be a very different thing from a mapping or assignment that tried to reconcile areal differences, or ignored them, or was ambiguous in face of them.

It will be seen that mostly I have not attempted areal definitions. That means that my effort also is incomplete, and serves only as a take-off for future formulations.

Primary reliance on subsistence mechanisms has made almost as many difficulties for Miss Bacon as has primary formulation in terms of present conditions when there is a long past. I suggest it be admitted that political-religious-lettered culture can alter drastically and independently of subsistence culture. The fact complicates the total picture but must simply be accepted.

Another recognition that ultimately will have to be made is that pastoral societies normally are symbiotic complements of sedentary ones. Conceptually their cultures contrast with the sedentary ones, but functionally they are not independent. This becomes specially evident on an endeavor to map them in detail.

Finally, groups like the Semang and Vedda maintain their place in our consciousness for the same reason as Platypus and Amphioxus—they are types of evolutionary stage. Also like these biological forms, they are insignificant in an ecological consideration, whether static or historical; and ecological is what a culture-area classification essentially is. These insignificant survivals should therefore be ignored, or relegated to footnote rank, rather than allowed to blur the salient outlines of large historical and areal conclusions.