The 'Standard of Civilisation' in World Politics [1] [#N1]

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Abstract: *The 'standard of civilisation' was used by international lawyers in the nineteenth century to defend the Europeans' right to colonise and control non-European societies. The concept is one illustration of how the European civilising process influenced world politics, and process sociology helps to explain its development. The analysis of the 'standard of civilisation' draws attention to the need to broaden process-sociological analysis to explain how state formation and conceptions of civilisation, the rise of overseas empires and the emergence of the international society of states shaped long-term patterns of social and political change that have affected humanity as a whole.*

Keywords: *Civilising offensives, colonialism, established-outsider relations, global interconnectedness, international society*

The following discussion draws on an important summation of the method of process sociology to offer a new interpretation of the 'standard of civilisation' in world politics. International lawyers invented the 'standard' in the nineteenth century to defend the Europeans' right to colonise and in other ways control non-European societies. Its core principles stated that the imperial powers had an unconditional entitlement as part of their self-appointed 'civilising mission' to stand in judgement of other forms of life and to determine their future trajectory of development (Gong 1984; Suzuki 2009).The discourse is one illustration of how the European 'civilising process' influenced attitudes to imperial rule and international society. Elias's explanation of how Europeans came to regard themselves as uniquely civilised is a crucial but ignored point of departure for efforts to understand the political significance of the 'standard of civilisation'. However, there is more to the following investigation than drawing on process sociology to explain a particular imperialist 'civilising' discourse. Reflections on the 'standard' inevitably lead to the identification of important shortcomings in Elias's analysis of the European 'civilising process' – specifically, the neglect of how state-building and the idea of civilisation, the emergence of the overseas empires and the rise of the international society of states were inter-related parts of one larger social and political development that has shaped increasingly interconnected societies over the last five centuries. The internationalisation of the 'standard of civilisation' was a central dimension of global transformations that continue to this day.

There is one point to add before summarising the remaining sections of this article. The relative invisibility of process sociology in several spheres of social-scientific inquiry has been highlighted in many publications. The difficulty of locating the approach in the larger literature is one reason for the continuing lack of engagement with Elias's writings and one explanation of the recurrent failure to appreciate how process sociology can enrich many discussions across the social sciences and humanities. Accessibility to the main works can be partly explained by Elias's characteristic reluctance to combine his investigation of 'processes of civilisation' with detailed, critical commentaries on the leading or fashionable perspectives of the day. For scholars who encounter Elias's work for the first time – here the author speaks from personal experience – it is hard to place his writings in relation to established schools of thought, let alone determine what they contribute to current scholarly debates and discussions.

Certainly, various studies of Elias's thought have lowered the barriers to those who approach his writings for the first time (Mennell 1998; also Fletcher 1997; Van Krieken 1998). But there is more to be said. The application of Elias's writings to contemporary inquiries in the social sciences has also been limited because of the difficulty that the novice may have in understanding the core method or working principles of process sociology. Elias (2012 [1939] : 7–8) maintained that his analysis of the 'European civilising process' did not stem from a prior position on the methodology of the social sciences. Even so, recent scholarship has explained in detail the central features of the processual standpoint and clarified where Elias's writings stand in relation to more familiar perspectives in sociology and social theory (see, in particular, Dunning and Hughes 2013).The challenge is to harness the results of those inquiries to advance specific areas of investigation in other disciplines including the study of international relations where new lines of inquiry can build on Elias's highly-sophisticated understanding of the complex interdependencies between domestic and international politics which broke with the 'methodological nationalism' of so much social-scientific analysis in the period in which he was writing (for further discussion see *Human Figurations*, 2012 (2) 1).

The following discussion of the 'standard of civilisation' is undertaken in that spirit – more specifically, in the light of Elias's analysis of the impact of relations between 'survival units' on the development of human societies (Kaspersen and Gabriel 2008). The first task is to refer to some working principles of process sociology which will be used here to cast light on imperial doctrines that provided a defence of the right to govern and remake colonised or semi-colonised peoples. A second task is to explain how the 'standard' became central to the 'civilised' self-images of colonial powers that dominated international society for several centuries. It was at the heart of European images of collective superiority that influenced the nineteenth-century, secondary imperialism of powers such as Russia and Japan that attempted to join the exalted ranks of the society of states by demonstrating their ability to contribute to a global 'civilising mission'. The internationalisation of the European 'civilising process' was shaped by established–outsider dynamics that were evident in relations between the great powers as well as in their collective interaction with so-called backward humanity. Not that the 'standard of civilisation' should be regarded as a symbol of international society in the period when colonial rule was at its height; not that it should be assumed that it expired as the former colonies entered that global figuration as formally equal sovereign states in their own right. The final aim of this investigation is to provide some illustrations of how 'standards of civilisation' endure in the contemporary international order in the shape of revised perspectives on the right to transform non-Western societies as well as in numerous government statements about the legitimacy of force to combat Islamist terrorism.

Process Thinking, Civilisation and Empire

The summation of the method of process sociology that will be employed below to analyse the classical standard of civilisation and its more recent mutations is worth quoting in full:

> In studying the relations between groups of people, look first for the ways in which
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> they are interdependent with each other. That will lead directly to the central balance
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> of power in the figuration the groups form together. In assessing how far power ratios
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> are tilted towards one side or the other, how stable or fluctuating they are, look at
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> what goals and objectives, what human requirements are actually being pursued by

each side. Ask to what extent one side is able to monopolise something the other side

needs in pursuing these requirements. Then, if the balance of power is very uneven,

be alert for the operation of group charisma and group disgrace, the process of

stigmatisation, the absorption of the established group's view of the world within the

very conscience and we–image of the outsiders, producing a high measure of

resignation even though the tensions remain. Where the balance of power is

becoming more equal, expect to find symptoms of rebellion, resistance, emancipation

among the outsiders. In all this it will be relevant to look to the past, to how one group

came to impinge on the other, to how the way they are bonded to each other makes

them pursue the objectives and human requirements they actually do pursue

(Mennell 1998: 138).

The 'standard of civilisation' was an intriguing example of particular global interconnections and specific power balances in which the established groups asserted the right to control non-European societies, to condemn their 'barbarism' or lack of 'advancement', to reform their governing structures, and to shape their future course of development. Some of its features and effects were evident not only in official justifications of imperial governing structures but in countless, routine diplomatic encounters.

An example was the formal dinner for the Iwakura mission from Japan that was hosted by the British Foreign Secretary, Lord Glanville, in August 1872. There was considerable interest amongst the Europeans in how the 'exotic' Japanese dignitaries conducted themselves (see Mennell 1995 for an analysis of the relationship between food, manners and the larger 'civilising process'). A member of the Swedish Embassy observed that the Japanese delegates displayed an 'unusually high level of culture' for 'Easterners' (Kayaoğlu 2010: 87–8). A very favourable impression was created by the decision to wear European clothes which demonstrated that the mission was 'semi-civilised' by Western standards. The Japanese would advance further, so it was supposed, if they emulated European forms of government and ways of life. Elias argued that the concept of civilisation provided the rationale for 'civilising initiatives' to bring 'progress' to backward peoples. It gave 'expression to the continuously expansionist tendency of colonising groups', and it captured what the Europeans were especially proud of, namely their technology, their scientific knowledge, their view of the world and, as the response to the Iwakura mission indicates, their dress code and manners, and the associated, all-round patterns of self-restraint (Elias 2012 [1939]: 15ff).

Successive waves of colonisation and direct comparisons with subjugated others were integral to the formation of European 'civilised' self-images. The relationship between colonial expansion and doctrines of civilisation provides a reminder – should one be needed – that the Europeans did not become 'civilised' as a result of purely endogenous social processes that included growing conformity with the rules of conduct that were set out in the 'manner books' which Elias (2012: [1939] 60ff, 80ff) discussed at length. They did not become 'refined' as a result of the influence of those guides and only then turn to the question of whether other peoples were their equals and deliberate for the very first time on how to treat 'backward' groups. The European 'civilising process' developed hand in hand with overseas colonial expansion and the emerging 'standard of civilisation' (Bowden 2009).

Curiously, in Elias's published work there is little discussion of the inter-relations between imperial domination and the European 'civilising process'. As van Krieken has argued, with the exception of a few passages in *The Civilizing Process*, we do not get a very clear sense from Elias [...] that at the very time that civilisation was developing in Western Europe, it was busily spreading itself over the whole globe in the most violent of ways, so that it is not unfair to say that the ritualised civility of European court society was built on the blood of murdered "primitives" and bought with the land, labour and raw materials which marauding Europeans plundered from "their" empires (1999: 300).

Moreover, throughout Elias's discussions of the state's monopolisation of violence, there is little examination of what states actually *did* with that monopoly, in relation to both their own populations and those of the parts of the world they set about colonising. Elias [...] spoke of the "spread" of Western civilisation, the "transformation of Oriental or African peoples in the direction of Western standards"(ibid: 300, italics in original).

However, the argument continues, 'It is important to supplement [...] the concept of *civilizing* processes with the idea of *civilizing* offensives' that is, 'to take account of the active, conscious and deliberate civilizing projects of [...] both various powerful groups within societies and whole societies in relation to other regions of the world' (ibid: 303, italics in original; see also Powell 2013 for further discussion of the idea of a 'civilising offensive').

It is useful to add that the 'standard of civilisation' was a key element of the colonial missions of the latter part of the nineteenth century, a joint offensive that was far from colour-blind as is evident from European convictions that colonial, 'civilising' initiatives were an integral part of the 'white man's burden' (see Vincent 1984).

Reference has been made to Elias's stress on the influence of the manners books on different social strata. But they were not the only means by which notions of civility and civilisation were circulated within and between European court societies. At every stage in the history of European imperialism, narratives of 'discovery' and 'ethnological' and 'geographical' representations of the non-European world created stark dichotomies between the 'civil' and the 'savage'. Feelings of revulsion as conveyed by reflections on the 'filthy rites' of 'backward' peoples were central to the invention of colonial binaries (Greenblatt 1982). Unsurprisingly, expressions of disgust were often reciprocated in non-European responses to alien practices. An example was revulsion at the Europeans' use of the handkerchief which was one of their symbols of their advancement beyond their 'primitive' ancestors (Elias 2012 [1939]: 147). [2][#N2] But such responses to European codes of conduct and manners had little effect given the dominant power balances in world politics.

At times, manners books and narratives of colonial encounter converged in intriguing ways. In 1520, a contemporary of Erasmus, the German author, Johan Boemus, published *Omnium Gentium Mores* (which was one of the first Renaissance compendia of non-European manners and customs (Hodgen 1964: 140). Elias drew attention to the number of editions and translations of Erasmus's influential treatise, *On Civility in Boys*. Boemus's work enjoyed its own international fame given that between 1530s and the early 1600s it was published in twenty editions and translated into several European languages. Readers were not exposed to a non-evaluative inventory of manners that were largely unfamiliar to Europeans. They were invited to recognise the 'barbarism' of other ways of life as is evident from the assertion that the religious world – views of the Saracens and Turks were the product of 'the brainesicke wickednesse of a countrefeicte prophete' (Hodgen 1964: 140). [3][#N3] Along with the manners books that reflected the influence of late medieval and early modern court societies, such narratives gave shape and direction to European discourses of civilisation and barbarism and, moreover, to the inter-related contrasts between positive images of 'white' peoples and negative images of the 'black' other (Cole 1972).

Visual images of 'savagery' which circulated between the members of interconnected court societies made their own contribution to the associated 'civilising' process. An example was Theodorde Bry's publication, *Great Voyages,* the first major treatise to disseminate pictorial representations of the peoples of the New World. Published in several volumes between 1590 and 1634, the work (which was read principally by the European aristocracy and, in particular, by members of the German court societies) contained vivid illustrations of the cruelty of 'newly-discovered' groups and 'barbarous and bloody manners' such as the ceremonial consumption of human flesh (Bucher 1981: 11, 46ff, 90, 166). One other example is worth noting, namely de Bry's publication in 1590 of John White's drawings of 'naked Brazilians'(Hulton 1984). The illustrations were accompanied by representations of the ancient Picts which highlighted presumed parallels between the 'civilising mission' that had occurred alongside 'internal colonialism' in the epoch of European state-building and the imperial 'civilising offensives' that were launched in the aftermath of the unexpected discovery of 'wild' and 'barbarous' non-European peoples (Hulton 1984; Van Krieken 2011).

One further genre publicised the differences between the standards of self-restraint that were observed by 'civilised and 'savage' peoples. Early sixteenth-century maps that were produced by geographers such as Ortelius and Mercator helped to orientate people to the expanding social world through explicit representations of the 'savagery' of non-European populations. Ortelius's *Theatrum orbis terrarium* – a work of 1570 that was translated into six languages by 1612 – was the first systematic attempt to portray the earth as a whole (Cosgrove 2001: 2–3, 130ff). One of its forty-three constituent maps provided readers with an image of a 'semi-naked Africa' and a 'nude America' carrying a severed European head that symbolised their 'cruelty' and 'barbarism'. Other treatises such as the six-volume, *Civitates orbis terrarum*, which was edited by Georg Braun and Franz Hogenberg and published between 1572 and 1617 deployed illustrations of major cities to demonstrate that Europe was the crucible of civilisation (Cosgrove 2001: 133). Later works including the 1747, *Atlas complet,* broke the Ortelian mould by employing sixty-six maps to explain the history of the world from classical antiquity to the modern, enlightened era (Cosgrove 2001: 197–8).With those maps, Turgot argued, movement across space was simultaneously movement back in time (Cosgrove 2001: 198). That orientation found expression in the late eighteenth-century universal histories that traced the evolution of humanity from earliest times through the different stages of civility that were thought to culminate in the modern European age.

'Nude America' displaying its severed head is a reminder of how the 'civilised' took pride in contrasting their increasingly-pacified, restrained and refined ways of life with the violent, impulsive and child-like behaviour of 'savages'. Elias maintained that Europeans in the nineteenth century had largely forgotten the long, complex processes that had led to their relatively-peaceful political condition. They had deluded themselves by supposing that civilisation was part of their biological endowment – a natural state of affairs that could be taken for granted and seemed permanently immune from reversal. Because of the assumption that genocide was confined to 'savages', Europeans were unprepared for the 'regression to barbarism' that occurred with National Socialism (Elias 2013: chapter 5). Recent work on the Holocaust usefully extends the argument by discussing how the Nazis in their professed struggle for survival with the Bolsheviks and the Jews imported violent practices that the colonial powers had developed earlier in their relations with subject peoples (Moses 2008). The upshot of the inquiry is that Europeans might have been less shocked by the 'decivilising process' that occurred under the Nazis – and better equipped to prevent it – if they had possessed more vivid memories of the violence of the colonial past. The point can be taken further in the light of what some regard as the inexplicable violence of recent expressions of the cultural or religious 'revolt against the West'. Those involved might be less astonished if the history of territorial expansion and imperial violence was at the forefront of their minds. [4] [#N4]

The European 'Standard of Civilisation'

Elias's analysis of state formation and explanation of the processes by which Europeans came to think of themselves as uniquely 'civilised' was a major breakthrough in the social sciences. But European state formation was inextricably linked with two other developments – the rise of the overseas empires and the construction of the international society to which they – and they alone – belonged as the self-proclaimed exemplars of 'civilisation'. The intricate interdependencies between those figurations – monopolistic state structures, empires and international society – have been stressed in studies of world politics and in specialist analyses of early modern Spanish political thought. When the *conquistadores* first encountered Central and South America peoples, a classic work on the international society of states has argued, Spain and the other European powers had yet to repudiate the quest for hegemony 'in their relations with one another' (Bull and Watson 1984: 6). The now familiar distinction between 'the internal and external sovereignty of states' had yet to be 'clearly formulated' and widely accepted (Bull and Watson 1984: 6). The modern idea of the international society of states consisting of ostensibly equal sovereign states was still under construction. An analysis of Spanish political thought makes the complementary observation that the Spanish state in its 'early evolutionary stages' emerged as the 'nucleus of a rapidly growing and new form of empire' that simultaneously faced the question of how to be 'a responsible member of an international community of sovereign states' (Fernandez-Santamaria 1977: 1). The 'standard of civilisation' emerged out of those unplanned interdependencies.

Its classic formulation can be found in James Lorimer's, *The Institutes of the Law of Nations*, which declared that humanity 'in its present condition' was divided into 'three concentric zones or spheres' – 'that of civilised humanity, that of barbarous humanity, and that of savage humanity' (Lorimer 1883: volume 1: 101). The inner circle comprised Western state-organised societies governed by the rule of law and committed to protecting fundamental personal liberties; the second sphere consisted of societies such as Japan or China that clearly possessed complex state structures but fell significantly short of Western forms of 'civilised' governance; the outer circle was made up of 'simple' peoples that lacked any semblance of organised rule and represented humanity in its original condition of 'savagery'. That classification of human types expressed the Europeans' confidence in the right to dominate the 'semi-civilised' such as the Chinese and to colonise the 'savage' world. At the centre of that orientation to human societies was the ethical conviction that the modern European state was the embodiment of 'civilised existence'. The assumption was that the fundamental 'test [of] whether a State was civilised' was the extent of its ability and willingness to protect the life, liberty and property of European travellers and traders (Schwarzenberger 1962: 71). The central issue was whether other states such as the imperial government in China could ensure that Europeans enjoyed the legal and political guarantees to which they were accustomed as a result of state-enforced public law and the distinctive social habitus of 'civilised' societies.

In the absence of the relevant legal and political guarantees, Europeans concluded that their nationals could not be subject to their 'uncivilised', governing structures. They could not be exposed to the 'criminal and civil jurisdiction' of less 'advanced' peoples (Fidler 2001). Instead, the relevant European consular office was granted controls over Europeans in the event of disputes that could lead to 'uncivilised' treatment at the hands of indigenous political authorities. On that basis, Chinese imperial structures were deemed to fail the elementary test of 'civilisation' and to be deficient on several other scores – by employing 'barbaric'forms of punishment that included strangling, and applying an ethic of group responsibility to criminal acts that was fundamentally at odds with established, European conceptions of the civilised, 'we–I balance' (Gong 1984: 182; Elias 2010a).

The European powers insisted that only 'civilised' states could belong to international society and be subject to international law which they held to be one of the manifestations of their civilisation. [5] [#N5] In his remarks on the family of nations which clearly possessed 'little organisation and few officers', the international lawyer, John Westlake maintained that it nevertheless displayed some of the hallmarks of a society 'consisting of persons interested in maintaining the rules of good breeding' and committed to 'shunning intercourse with those who do not observe them' (Oppenheim 1914: 6). On such foundations, 'barbaric' and 'semi-civilised' groups that lacked the ability to comply with the relevant standards of restraint were barred from the international society of states. Indeed, Westlake added, it had been necessary for 'European states' to impose 'permanent diplomatic intercommunion' on the 'Eastern empires', such was their engrained reluctance to accept its principles (Oppenheim 1914: 6). Once again, the Chinese case is revealing. For the Europeans, the question was whether the imperial government had the capacity and desire to comply with the protocols of European diplomacy, to abide by the 'civilised' laws of war, and to uphold the conventions of 'civilised' international society that prohibited, amongst other things, slavery, piracy, polygamy and infanticide.

Their collective judgment was that China was not prepared to break with a traditional tributary system that placed China at the centre of the human world and denied the legal principle of the sovereign equality of states. But the European establishment did believe that some non-European peoples would be admitted to the society of states at some future point – when they had become 'civilised' under the tutelage of the European overlords. The idea of the 'sacred trust of civilisation' – a further illustration of how the 'civilising process' found expression in international society, in this case through its incorporation in Article 22 of the Covenant of the League of Nations – committed the great powers to restrained imperial rule. Their aim was to benefit the 'natives' rather than simply enrich the colonialists, as had occurred in the widely-condemned case of Belgian rule in the Congo with its renowned atrocities (Bain 2003). The declared ambition was to ensure that imperialism would prepare peoples who were not yet capable of standing on their feet for increasing self-reliance and eventual sovereign independence. National governments appealed to that side of the European 'civilising process' which did not authorise the use of force against 'barbarians' but called for restraints on colonial rule in line with 'civilised' self-images with their reduced tolerance of cruelty and inter-personal violence (see Linklater 2016: chapter 6 for further discussion).

As noted above, when the 'standard of civilisation' and the idea of the 'sacred trust' were devised, few Europeans believed that no more than a handful of non-European societies would succeed in transforming their domestic political structures in the coming decades. For the foreseeable future, the general consensus was, membership of international society would be restricted to established, 'civilised' states. The 'standard of civilisation' nevertheless set out what the colonised or semi-sovereign states had to accomplish before they could be considered for admission to the society of states. The Europeans constituted the global establishment that ruled the world's outsiders. A further hallmark of their elevated status was the supposition that they alone could decide when 'social inferiors' had reached a level of development that invited consideration of their suitability for membership of an international society of states which would remain, or so they assumed, fundamentally European in character.

As always, it is necessary to consider those developments in long-term perspective. Europeans had not always possessed a clear sense of their cultural superiority over China or the confidence in their unassailable right to launch a 'civilising mission' in the 'Orient'. When they first visited China, it was obvious that they had encountered an advanced society with its own 'standard of civilisation' and distinctive method of conducting foreign relations. European traders and travellers had little choice but to accept such realities. Circumstances changed quickly in the late eighteenth century and the imperial government was compelled to accept that it could no longer preserve its tributary world order or hold out for much longer against pressures from 'barbarian' Europeans to submit to their principles of international relations. Local custom dictated that other

powers should kowtow to the Emperor in ritual display of acknowledged inferiority. In a symbolic demonstration of a fundamental shift in the global distribution of power, George III's main representative in the diplomatic mission of 1793, Lord Macartney, refused to kowtow to the Emperor. By bowing on one knee, he displayed the respect to which any foreign monarch was entitled as a matter of ancient custom, but he refused to comply with the traditional rituals that conveyed voluntary submission. The Chinese were powerless to prevent the rapid, unexpected loss of traditional, great power status.

Reference was made earlier to the importance of applying the working method of process sociology to specialist areas of world politics. The summation of the key organising principles stressed the importance of investigating any social figuration by analysing the forms of interdependence between people, the main power alignments, and the extent to which any stratum could monopolise critical resources and capabilities. When the distribution of power is highly uneven, the argument was, it is essential to examine the elements of 'group charisma' (the sense of possessing special endowments) and 'group disgrace' (which was the consequence of elite strategies of stigmatisation that were accompanied by strong pressures on subordinated social strata to incorporate the perspective of the establishment in their world-views). Considered in that light, the 'standard of civilisation' reflected a major shift in the power balance between European and non-European peoples. It illustrated a movement towards the monopolisation of economic and political power and towards a global monopoly of the 'means of orientation' that found expression in the conviction that many forms of life 'languished' in a 'savage' condition that would end if they successfully imitated their 'social superiors'. [6] [#N6] The 'standard' was unmistakably part of a larger web of stigmatising initiatives that were designed to transform the self-images of outsider groups. Resignation to an 'inferior' place in the world was to be secured not just through coercive means but by encouraging the internalisation of established conceptions of 'civilised' existence and the voluntary acceptance of top-down initiatives to secure social 'improvement'.

The point has been made that the 'standard of civilisation' is an important illustration of how the European 'civilising process' shaped world politics through the powerful medium of colonial discourse. Process sociology points the way towards a deeper understanding of its political significance. As an expression of a particular global balance of power and inter-linked monopolising tendencies, and as a means of conveying European intentions to dominate and remake the governing structures in other societies, the 'standard' would play a decisive role in globalising core features of the 'civilising process'. The theme can be usefully illustrated by considering the phenomenon of secondary or imitative imperialism.

Secondary Imperialism in the 'Civilised' Society of States

Elias (2012 [1939]: 426) argued in the late 1930s that the growing transformation of non-European peoples to comply with Western values was the more recent phase of 'the continuing civilising movement'. The reference was to an era in which the global distribution of power was more unequal than it is today, and when the majority of non-European elites were keen to emulate the international establishment and to convince its members of their determination to make the journey to 'civilisation' by complying with their social standards. For some outsider societies, proof of their worth and good faith could be demonstrated by creating secondary empires that collaborated in the larger global 'civilising mission'.

Political developments in late nineteenth-century Japan are instructive. In 1875, the Japanese reformer or 'moderniser', Fukuzawa Yukichi, published his *Outline of a Theory of Civilization* which set out to explain the essential characteristics of Western civilisation to a Japanese readership. Although not uncritical of the West, the author was adamant that Japan had little choice but to replicate core features of Western political development which provided the yardstick for assessing the rate of progress. To preserve its independence,

ran the argument, Japan had to transform itself into a European-style nation-state that possessed the astonishing political and military powers that the revolutionary idea of the 'imagined community' of co-nationals had made possible. The harshness of Western involvement in China provided a dark reminder of what might lie ahead if Japan failed to make a rapid transition to modern statehood.

The reconstruction or 'modernisation' of the Japanese state was to be accomplished by adopting a foreign policy stance that was informed by European ideas about the relationship between civilisation and empire. Fukuzawa Yukichi contended that Japan could not wait patiently for other Asian countries to become sufficiently civilised to want to join it in a coalition against the West. He maintained that the only course of action was to place distinctive features of the Western orientation to the wider world at the centre of Japan's relations with societies such as Korea, China and Taiwan. In the attempt to overturn European views that it was no more than a 'semi-civilised' society, the Japanese government did indeed establish colonial rule in Taiwan in 1874 with the explicit aim of demonstrating its capacity and willingness to bring the blessings of 'civilisation' to an 'uncivilised' people (Suzuki 2011).

Similar patterns of state reconstruction and comparable strategies to promote national identification and imperial civilising missions appeared in other regions. Russian expansion into Central Asia in the nineteenth century was directly modelled on British rule in India. The Russians' treatment of the rebel Chechen leader, Shamil, who had been captured in August 1859 sheds light on the imperial 'civilising mission' with respect to 'Asian peoples'. Tsar Alexander II used Shamil's presence at official parades and ceremonies to advertise Russia's success in absorbing elite members of 'a less civilised society' into its institutional arrangements (Wortman 2006: 203–4). The treatment of a leader who enjoyed celebrity status in Europe was designed to show that Russia had reached the position where it could promote 'an Asian mission, to carry Enlightenment eastward, and to mediate between Europe and the Orient' (Barrett 1994: 363ff). Merciful conduct towards a 'barbaric' enemy who would have been treated harshly in the past symbolised Russia's progress towards 'civilisation'.

In November 1864, the Russian Foreign Minister, Gorchakov, celebrated Russia's territorial expansion as evidence of its membership of the civilisation of the imperial powers. Russian advances to the East had followed the example of 'all civilised states which are brought into contact with half savage nomad populations possessing no fixed social organisation'; security interests dictated the conquest of 'Asiatics' who respected 'nothing but visible and palpable force'; the commitment to 'civilising' the eastern neighbours was part of Russia's 'special mission' that could complement the reforms that American, French, Dutch and British peoples had brought about in their respective zones of conquest (Wortman 2006: 203–4). Certainly, the presence of 'Asiatics' at the Russian court impressed Europeans such as the French writer, Théophile Gautier, who wrote in 1859 about how 'the white glove of civilization […] concealed a little Asiatic hand accustomed to play with the handle of a dagger, grasping it with his nervous, dark fingers'; but the treatment of Shamil demonstrated how the 'backward' could become attuned with appropriate stewardship to the aristocratic etiquette of court society (Wortman 2006: ibid). Secondary imperialism demonstrated how the 'standard of civilisation' encouraged states that were intent on strengthening their case to be regarded as valued members of international society to adopt political strategies that had the effect of globalising central features of the European 'civilising process'.

For many non-European governments, securing that objective involved the labour of understanding and adapting to the central features of the society of states including international law. Specialist institutes for 'Western learning' and for 'the study of barbarian books' were established in Japan the 1850s. Translations of major Western international legal treatises followed in the mid-1860s. As for Tsarist Russia, Peter the Great ordered the compilation of selected instructions from European manners books in order to educate Russian diplomats in essential protocols that reflected the influence of the French court. The resulting work, *The*

Honourable Mirror of Youth, which was published in 1717, was designed to instruct diplomats who were about to be sent to 'Western court society' in 'how to eat and speak properly and [...] [how] to distinguish themselves from peasants' (Wortman 2006: 54). To ensure effective training, over one hundred members of the aristocratic elite were sent to the School for Diplomats in Strasbourg where they were required to study, amongst other things, Francois de Callières influential treatise,*The Art of Diplomacy* (Callières 1983 [1716]).Written by a leading figure in French court society during the reign of Louis XIV, the work discussed the 'ceremonial forms and gestures' of the 'aristocratic-courtly and cosmopolitan' diplomatic culture which aspiring Russian ambassadors would be expected to observe (Scott 2007; Mastenbroek 1999).

Some governments had previously provided education on bodily comportment and in aristocratic court etiquette regarding spitting and nose blowing. An intriguing example was the 1601 regal instruction to Polish diplomats which stated that they should be 'manly and solemn according to the occasion – not womanly, not childish, not fearful, not shameful, not irritable, not frivolous'. It was imperative to 'look at the person to whom you are sent, without any movement, without looking sideways, without shaking the head. Hands should be quiet, without any trembling, nor tugging at the beard' (cited in Bogucka 1991: 201). Of special interest in the light of Elias's discussion of the manners books (Elias 2012 [1939]: 142ff), was the command to 'abstain from coughing, spitting, blowing the nose, and scratching the head or other parts of the body' and the accompanying injunction not to 'pick your nose or teeth or bite your lips' (cited in Bogucka 1991: 201). [7],[#N7]

As for relations between the European establishment and non-European outsiders, as part of its effort from the middle of the nineteenth century to be recognised as a 'civilised monarchy', the Siamese government dispatched representatives of the 'highest social rank' to Britain for training in 'proper decorum and European languages'. Their success in understanding 'court etiquette' led the *London Gazette* to praise the 1857–8 mission – following an audience with Queen Victoria – 'for setting an example of deference and good taste which it would be well for the Orientals frequenting our Court to be made to follow' (Engelhart 2010: 425).The process was not exactly painless. During an audience with the Queen, the delegation, which was dressed in traditional attire, astonished onlookers 'by crawling on all fours from the entrance of the hall of audience to the throne' (Gong 1984: 226). An eight-page letter to the Earl of Clarendon followed in which the delegation combined a plea for forgiveness with a request for instruction in the finer details of court etiquette.

That episode in the larger web of established–outsider dynamics invites some comments that draw on Elias's account of the changing understandings about shame and embarrassment that were integral to the whole European 'civilising process' (Elias 2012 [1939]: 457ff). The letter to the Earl of Clarendon suggests that the Siamese delegation was ashamed and embarrassed by its 'uncivil' conduct. With the globalisation of the 'standard of civilisation' and the rise of aspirations to join the European-dominated society of states, such emotional responses to court ritual were hardly surprising. Those reactions were part of the long 'civilising process' in which court societies created the social principles that 'inferiors' felt obliged to follow. As part of that development, several Asian languages introduced their own concepts for civilisation in the latter part of the nineteenth century – *siwilai* in Siamese or Thai, *wen-ming* in Chinese and *bunmei* in Japanese. Those innovations were testimony to the influence of the European 'standard of civilisation' – to its role in encouraging peoples in the 'semi-civilised' world to reflect on their place within the lengthening political and economic entanglements that radiated outwards from the West, to consider how the more powerful regarded them, to overhaul 'outmoded' political institutions and to monitor closely whether or not they were 'progressing' towards 'civilisation'.

A Contemporary Standard of Civilisation?

The conceptual inventions that were noted in the previous paragraph almost certainly led many Europeans to conclude that some non-European peoples were firmly on course to satisfy the imperial 'standard of civilisation'. Several non-European societies such as China, Turkey and Egypt became members of the 'civilised' society of states in the first part of the twentieth century. As for the overseas colonies, a large number became sovereign states and equal members of the United Nations in the aftermath of the Second World War.

What was overturned in that new phase of the 'civilising process' was the shared assumption amongst members of the global establishment that they monopolised the right to decide when the peoples of Africa, Asia and the Pacific had earned the entitlement to determine their own affairs as equal sovereign members of international society. Such paternalism fell into disrepute with changing power balances within the international system – on the one hand, between self-professed, anti-colonial powers such as the United and the Soviet Union and the European empires and, on the other, between the traditional great powers and Third World national movements. No less important were fundamental changes within the imperial societies themselves as major strands of public opinion became persuaded by the nationalists' case for achieving immediate independence. A particular moment symbolised the change in the dominant standards of international legitimacy. The United Nations General Assembly Resolution 1514 of December 1960 declared that self-government should not be delayed until such time as the Western governments were convinced that the colonies were capable of good government. The idea of answerability to an external 'standard of civilisation' was in retreat at that point. The old power asymmetries that had led to the stigmatisation of outsider groups had changed radically; organised counter-movements to end collective humiliation by achieving sovereign independence had become significantly more powerful. Shifting political currents were reflected in international law. Before the outbreak of the Second World War, some international lawyers had argued that the old legal principle was 'anachronistic and insulting' to the non-European states that had already joined 'the Family of Nations' (see Bowden 2005). The use of the term, 'insulting', is revealing. It signified the break with the era when civilisation was a 'praise word' that was integral to European 'group charisma' and invariably accompanied by the assorted forms of 'group contempt, group ostracism, group disgrace and group abuse' that were central to the whole colonial era (Elias 2009b).

As discussed above, the idea of civilisation had a specific role in the attempted monopolisation of the means of orientation to the social and political world. It was at the heart of the Europeans' attempt to impose a specific image of human progress on ruling elites in other regions. It was used to foster levels of self-monitoring and self-control that were designed to facilitate the movement from 'backwardness' to the conditions that prevailed in 'advanced' societies. With major changes in the balance of power between the old empires and their colonies, any attempt to justify foreign policy behaviour by appealing to a 'standard of civilisation' immediately provoked political controversy. In the contemporary era, the discourse conjures up images of racial and cultural supremacy that have been discredited as official means of legitimating the exercise of political power.

The idea of socialisation has been commended as a neutral term that can be used to describe the role that the dominant Western powers continue to play in reshaping non-Western societies (see Suzuki 2011). But that concept overlooks the respects in which several current attempts in world politics to promote 'good governance' are best regarded as illustrations of the most recent phase of the 'civilising process' that gathered pace around five centuries ago. There is no space to consider the main examples here. Suffice it to add that Western endeavours to reconstruct failed states, to support 'democracy promotion', to defend universal human rights and to advance global 'market civilisation' indicate how the 'standard of civilisation' survives in the contemporary era in tandem with the long-standing conviction that the modern Western state remains the key to a 'civilised' existence (Andrieu 2010; Donnelly 1998; Fidler 2001; Hobson 2008; Paris 2002;

Stivachtis 2006; Stroikos 2014). Critics of those endeavours have emphasised clear parallels with the colonial binaries that existed in the period when the European powers openly and proudly supported the classical 'standard of civilisation' (see the detailed discussion in Hobson 2012).

In his defence of military intervention in the Middle East in August 1860, the French General, Beaufort, stated that 'the Emperor has decided that, in the name of civilised Europe, you will go to Syria to help the Sultan's troops avenge humanity disgracefully vilified' (Bass 2008: 194ff.). One of the core features of the 'standard of civilisation' was expressed in that statement, namely outrage at specific forms of violence combined with the declared intention to use force to overwhelm 'barbarous' adversaries. Broadly similar attitudes to violence survive to this day. They were apparent in several speeches that George W. Bush made in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 to defend waging war against the 'enemies of civilisation' and in the Administration's exercise in redefining torture in dealings with 'unlawful combatants' (Barnes 2015; Collett 2009; Neocleous 2011). Since then, the idea of civilisation has been used frequently to condemn the violence of others and to legitimate using military force against them. The following examples show how unofficial versions of a 'standard of civilisation' inform contemporary government statements that condemn what is regarded as unacceptable violence:

> On 15 November 2015, Barack Obama described the terrorist attacks in Ankara and Paris as not just an attack on Turkey and France that was driven by a 'twisted ideology' but as 'an attack on the civilised world' (www.reuters.com [http://www.reuters.com]);
>
> On 13 September 2014, Cathy Russell, US Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women's Issues, stated that the treatment of women by 'Islamic State' (namely abduction, enslavement, rape and forced marriage) amounted to 'the most blatant rejection of the progress we have made as a community of nations and the universal values that bind civilization' (www.wirenews.co.uk [http://www.wirenews.co.uk]);
>
> On 1 September 2015, The Director-General of *UNESCO*, Irina Bokova, stated that the destruction of temples in Palmyra by 'Islamic State' was an 'intolerable crime against civilization' (whc.unesco.org [http://whc.unesco.org]); [8] [#N8]
>
> On 2 October 2015, in an address to the United Nations General Assembly, the Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, claimed that Israel was 'civilization's frontline in the battle against barbarism', and specifically against the 'fanaticism' of ISIS (www.haaretz.com [http://www.haaretz.com]); [9] [#N9]
>
> Not to be out done, at the meeting of the 23rd Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) in Manila on 19 November 2015, the Chinese President, Xi Jinping, declared – following a presumed attack by ISIL on a Chinese citizen – that the government would take action against 'any terrorist crime that challenges the bottom line of human civilization' (www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_z/engxxx_662805/t1317353/shtml).

Some analysts of world politics have argued that international society may have entered a transitional phase as a result of China's determined opposition to Western 'standards of civilisation' regarding human rights and democracy promotion and in the light of its claims to 'exceptionalism' that are expressed in the 'Beijing Consensus' (Suzuki 2012). Clashing conceptions of 'civilisation' may become a central feature of international society in future decades although, in China's case, it is important to note how far traces of the old 'standard of civilisation' endure in qualified 'Occidentalist' leanings amongst particular sections of the governing elite

that seek acceptance by an 'idealised' West (Suzuki 2014). Whatever lies ahead, it will be essential to analyse the global patterns of interdependence, the central power balances in international society, and the forms of inequality that result in specific established–outsider dynamics; it will also be necessary to be aware of changing political capabilities that may lead to resistance to practices of stigmatisation and to concerted attempts to shed externally-imposed feelings of social inferiority. Process sociology contains invaluable resources for understanding how the 'civilising process' reconfigured European societies and initiated social and political transformations that have affected humanity as a whole in an era of unprecedented global interconnectedness. Certain limitations in the approach have been noted in this examination of the 'standard of civilisation'. The upshot is that more detailed explorations of the complex interdependencies between state-formation, imperialism and international society are needed to extend Elias's pioneering study of the European 'civilising process'.

Endnotes

1. This article is based on a keynote lecture delivered at the *Conference on Social Character and Historical Processes: A Conference in Honour of Stephen Mennell* held at Newman House in Dublin on 7–8 January 2016. I am grateful to Barbara Górnicka, Stephen Mennell and Andre Saramago for comments on an earlier draft. ⬆ [#N1-ptr1]

2. Greenblatt (1990: 62) refers to an Amerindian's disgust at the European practice of using handkerchiefs to collect and carrying about mucus. 'If thou likest that filth', the person is quoted as saying, 'give me thy handkerchief and I will soon fill it'. ⬆ [#N2-ptr1]

3. Especially influential was the 'avalanche' of anti-Turkish pamphlets (*Türkenbüchlein*) from the early- to mid-fifteenth century in Germany which highlighted 'barbaric' atrocities against Christians (see Cole 1972; also Bohnstedt 1968). ⬆ [#N3-ptr1]

4. The problem that is highlighted here was illustrated by Donald J. Trump's speech on 7 December 2015 (following the terrorist attacks in San Bernardino) in which he called for banning Muslims from entering the United States until 'our country's representatives can figure out what is going on' (www.donaldjtrump.co.uk [www.donaldjtrump.co.uk]). See Mennell (2007: chapter 12) and Mennell (2015) for an analysis of how US military and political dominance has reduced the pressures and incentives to understand the society from the standpoints of others and to acquire a more 'detached' perspective on American foreign policy. ⬆ [#N4-ptr1]

5. The link between civilisation and international law endures as is evident from the statement that the UK Home Secretary made in the House of Commons on 21 January 2016 following the official inquiry into the murder of Alexander Litvinenko, a former officer of the Russian secret service. The report concluded that it was probable that the Russian state had been involved in the killing. The Home Secretary stated that its actions were 'a blatant and unacceptable breach of the most fundamental tenets of international law and of civilised behaviour' (www.gov.uk [https://www.gov.uk/]). ⬆ [#N5-ptr1]

6. See Elias (2009a: 135-6) on the reality that the power and authority of the Catholic Church were heavily dependent on its 'monopoly of the most basic means of orientation', namely the control of 'revealed religion, in large parts of Europe'. Struggles to monopolise the ways in which people orientate themselves to the world were as central to the European 'civilising process' as the monopolies of violence and taxation that Elias discussed in considerable detail. ⬆ [#N6-ptr1]

7. Four years earlier, on 25 July 1597, Elizabeth I had publicly castigated — to the immense delight of the courtiers — the Polish ambassador for 'insolent boldness' in the presence of a monarch and for a failure to respect diplomatic etiquette that revealed a lack of understanding of 'the law of nature and nations' (Green 2000). Elias's comments on the great European 'supra-national' court society of the seventeen

and eighteenth centuries are worth recalling here (see Elias 2010b: 4–5). But he did not examine its expression in the remarkably-homogenous diplomatic culture that reflected the political influence and high standing of the French absolutist court. Furthermore, the great powers' response to the disdain that the French revolutionaries displayed towards long-accepted protocols shows how traditional established–outsider relations changed with the rising influence of middle class groups. At the 1797Congress of Rastatt, representatives of the revolutionary government decided to break with the aristocratic dress code by wearing coats and trousers. One such envoy, Treilhard, shocked the Austrians by striding into a room where he proceeded to pound the table and to shout loudly. 'I have never seen', one of the participants stated, 'such conduct among civilized men and even less among men of affairs' (Frey and Frey 1993). Metternich referred to 'such ill-conditioned animals' who were 'more savage than white bears' (Frey and Frey 1993). A 'standard of civilisation' regarding diplomatic protocol did not only exist then in the relations between the European establishment and non-European outsiders. [#N7-ptr1]

8. I am grateful to Andre Saramago for drawing this statement to my attention. [#N8-ptr1]

9. I wish to thank Moran Mandelbaum for bringing this speech to my attention. [#N9-ptr1]

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