What's in a Name? Should We Distinguish Colonialism and Imperialism?

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ABSTRACTS

Obwohl im allgemeinen und zumeist auch akademischen Gebrauch nicht zwischen Kolonialismus und Imperialismus unterschieden wird, plädieren einige Wissenschaftler für eine klare analytische Differenzierung zwischen den beiden Begriffen. Ein bekannter Vertreter dieser Auffassung ist der Altphilologe Moses Finley, der im Besonderen den Begriff „Kolonie" so definieren möchte, dass er sich von „Imperium" unterscheidet. Sicherlich bringt ein solches Vorgehen Vorteile mit sich, vor allem um die Eigenheit des europäischen „Siedlungskolonialismus" seit dem 15. Jahrhundert zu betonen. Dieser Artikel argumentiert jedoch, dass eine zu scharfe und voreilige Unterscheidung zwischen Kolonialismus und Imperialismus bedeutende Einbußen mit sich bringt. Sie schränkt die Möglichkeiten vergleichender Forschung erheblich ein, indem die meisten Imperien der Antike und nicht-westliche Reiche wie das chinesische ausgeschlossen werden. Es gibt jedoch über lange Zeiträume und weite Distanzen hinweg bedenkenswerte Kontinuitäten und Überschneidungen zwischen Imperien. Der moderne Kolonialismus ist eine Unterart von imperialer Herrschaft im Allgemeinen, kein von dieser getrenntes Phänomen, das eine besondere Behandlung nötig machen würde. Unsere Darlegungen wären ärmer, würden wir eine zu enge Definition von Kolonialismus zugrunde legen, welche uns die Sicht auf seine vielgestaltige Einbindung in die größere und längere Geschichte imperialer Formationen verstellt.

Though popular and much scholarly usage does not distinguish between colonialism and imperialism, some scholars have argued for a clear analytical distinction between the two. A prominent example is the classicist Moses Finley, who especially wishes to define "colony" in terms that would distinguish it from "empire". There are certainly some gains from attempting to do this, notably in emphasizing the distinctiveness of European "settler colonialism" from

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the fifteenth century onwards. But this article argues that there are also significant losses in trying to draw too hard and fast a line between colonialism and imperialism. It severely limits comparative possibilities, by excluding most of the empires of the ancient world as well as most non-Western empires, such as the Chinese Empire. There are considerable continuities and overlaps between empires across a wide swathe of space and time; modern colonialism is a sub-species of empires in general, not a separate experience requiring special treatment. Our accounts would be the poorer if we adopt too restrictive a definition of colonialism, blinding us to the many ways in which it fits into the larger and longer story of empire.

1. Colony and Empire

Although popular, and much scholarly, usage does not distinguish between colonialism and imperialism, some have felt the need to make such a distinction. The most systematic attempt has been made by the famous classicist, Moses Finley.[1] It is valuable because Finley's discussion is unusually comprehensive, covering many examples of empire, ancient and modern. It raises many of the questions commonly asked about imperial rule, and of the relations between rulers and ruled in empires. It allows us to ask, what might be gained, what lost, if we accept the distinction between colonialism and imperialism. In what ways are colonies different from empires, colonialism from imperialism? Do they operate according to different principles? How should that affect our study of empires? This paper will focus mainly on Finley's account, as providing one of the few attempts to deal systematically with this neglected area.

2. Defining Our Terms

We need first to establish some primary meanings of our terms, to understand their origins and common uses. For all Western cultures, the terms empire/imperialism and colony/colonialism derive from Rome and the Latin language. The first come from i*mperium*, the second from *colonia*.

Imperium for the Romans meant more or less absolute rule, originally in the military, later in the state. Military commanders and rulers of empires – *imperatores* – have *imperium*. Fairly soon the state or territory could itself be described as an empire, as for instance the *imperium Romanun*, the Roman Empire. With that use, *imperium* acquired what at that time and later became the accepted meaning of empire, namely, a large state exercising authority over a multiplicity of peoples and territories.[2]

1 M. I. Finley, Colonies – An Attempt at a Typology, in: Transactions of the Royal Historical Society 26 (1976), pp. 167–188.

2 R. Koebner, Empire, Cambridge 1961, pp. 11–16; K. Kumar, Visions of Empire: How Five Imperial Regimes Shaped the World, Princeton, NJ 2017, pp. 7–13.

"Imperialism" is a different matter. Unlike empire, it does seem as if "imperialism" was late in coming, as if there was no felt need for it as a concept for a long time. According to the detailed study by Richard Koebner and Helmut Schmidt, it was in fact only in the mid-nineteenth century that the word "imperialism" first made its appearance, and then with the highly negative connotation that has marked its use for much of the time since.[3]
To turn then to *colonia*, the parent of "colony" and "colonialism". The Latin word *colonia* stems from the verb *colere*, "to cultivate, to farm". *Colonia* came from *colonus*, who was "a tiller, cultivator [of the ground], a farmer, a planter", and also "a settler in a new country, an "outsettler, a colonist".[4] Hence *colonia* came to mean a settlement of people who had been "planted" in a territory beyond their homeland.
While colony in this sense is relatively old, "colonialism", like imperialism, is relatively new. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, "colonialism", as "the practice or manner of things colonial", was first used in the second half of the nineteenth century. Interestingly, unlike imperialism, colonialism did not initially have negative connotations, being used in a fairly neutral way. It took twentieth-century developments to give it its largely negative charge. It was in that pejorative sense that colonialism came to be the preferred term, supplanting imperialism, for many critics of the Western empires.[5]

3. Moses Finley on Colony and Colonialism

It is very much this etymology that Moses Finley draws upon in attempting to give "technical" meaning to the concepts of colony and colonialism, and to distinguish them from empire and imperialism. Finley lays out two main features of colonies. First, "for more than three hundred years, however much disagreement there may have been about the objectives of colonization or about the ways of governing colonies, there was complete agreement that a colony was a plantation of men, to which men emigrated and settled. *Colon* in French, *Siedler* in German, make the same point".
Finley immediately adds a second characteristic. "There was also, in those three hundred years, complete agreement that a colony was not only a plantation but also a dependency of the country from which the emigration was initiated." Colonization therefore cannot be equated with just any emigration – as say the Chinese diaspora in South-East Asia, or South Asians in East Africa or the West Indies.[6]
Finley is aware that his definition of colonies is not new, nor even particularly problematic. Indeed, he is at pains to stress its antiquity. But he is concerned that many people have not acted on the implications of it, and, especially in more recent times, have used colonies, colonization, and colonialism in loose and imprecise ways. What is particularly

3 R. Koebner / H. D. Schmidt, Imperialism: The Story and Significance of a Political World, 1840–1960, Cambridge 1965, pp. 1–26.
4 J. A. Simpson / E. S. C. Weiner (eds.), Oxford English Dictionary, 2nd edn, Oxford 1991, sv. "colony".
5 S. Howe, Empire: A Very Short Introduction, Oxford 2002, p. 25.
6 Finley, Colonies, p. 171.

important for him is what his "technical" concept of colony excludes – where, despite both popular and scholarly practice, it is improper and misleading to apply the term.

Thus, contrary to much common usage, Finley denies that we can speak of "colonies" in the ancient Greek world. That is because what are usually referred to as colonies in that context were not dependencies but independent communities. "The so-called Greek and Phoenician colonies of the eight, seventh and sixth centuries B.C., extending from the coasts of the Black Sea to Marseilles and Carthage, were more peaceful enterprises in some instances, less in others, but what is essential is that they were all, from the start, independent city-states, not colonies."[7]

"There can be no colonization without colonies." Hence, also in the ancient world, Finley rejects as colonization "the extensive Macedonian and Greek migration into the territories of the Persian empire conquered by Alexander the Great". This is because, after Alexander's death, these communities became independent kingdoms, the Hellenistic kingdoms of Egypt, Syria, and others.[8] But there seems no reason, on his definition, to deny that these were indeed Greek colonies while Alexander still ruled his empire, though admittedly his early death meant this was a short-lived empire.

On the same grounds – absence of dependency – Finley dismisses the concept of "internal colonization", or "internal colonialism". "No-one", he says, "speaks of the colonization of the mid-west and west of the United States."[9] Finley must have been aware that there had been discussions of the "American Empire", but since colonialism was not for him imperialism the westward movement of white Americans – clearing away the indigenous people as they went – did not constitute a case of true colonization. Conquest, per se, is not colonization. The settlers created communities that became Territories, then States of the Union, not dependent colonies.

If the exclusion of the overseas Greek settlements as colonies is provocative, then the exclusion as such of most of the European possessions in sub-Saharan Africa is probably the most controversial. Hundreds of books exist with titles such as "Colonialism in Africa, 1870–1960".[10] For many people, when they think of European colonialism, it is Africa that they principally have in mind.

Finley will have none of this. It follows directly from his definition of colony that most of Africa, though possessed by Europeans, was not colonized by them. That was because in the majority of cases few Europeans settled in the African territories. There were, that is, few European "plantations" in sub-Saharan Africa, hence few European colonies. Finley is prepared to accept that that one might designate as colonies those few areas where a significant number of Europeans were to be found, even if they were not – as they were not anywhere – a majority. South Africa is one such case, with its large numbers of Boers and British, so too are Kenya and Southern Rhodesia, with their relatively large British

7 Ibid., pp. 173–174.
8 Ibid., p. 173.
9 Ibid.
10 L. Gann / P. Duignan (eds.), Colonialism in Africa, 1870–1960, Cambridge 1969.

populations. So, "in my categorization, Kenya was a colony, Uganda and the Gold Coast were not. Nor were the Congo, Senegal and the Ivory Coast […] The struggle for Africa was not, or at least not in large part, a struggle for colonies."[11] The British had a few colonies in Africa, in the south and east; but none of the French, Portuguese, Belgian or German dependencies in sub-Saharan Africa can be called colonies.

The important qualification, in which a significant number of Europeans ruling over a majority of non-Europeans can be considered as forming a colony, allows Finley to designate as colonies a number of European settlements in North Africa, most prominently French Algeria. This is in one way problematic, since Algeria as Finley knows was not by the French themselves considered a colony but – since 1848 – as part of metropolitan France. Administratively it was in this sense similar to the situation in the United Kingdom of Ireland, Scotland and Wales, which Finley declares emphatically were not colonies but sub-divisions of the kingdom.

But, remarking airily that "administrative definitions are essentially unhelpful", Finley goes on to say that though "Algeria was a fully incorporated department of metropolitan France, yet it was indubitably a colony." This is because "in every respect other than the administrative, [the non-European] Algerians in the overwhelming majority still considered themselves, more than a century after the conquest, to be the exploited subjects, not so much of the metropolis as of the settlers backed by the coercive power of the metropolis."[12] Finley here adds a crucial dimension to his idea of colony. It is now not so much, or not only – as in the case of the British in North America, Australia or New Zealand – a matter of the absolute number of Europeans, replacing or subjugating a diminishing number of indigenous peoples, and making themselves in time the majority. Now it becomes also or instead a matter of a certain relation between settlers and the indigenous people, as well as of the settlers and the metropolitan power. For him the "paramount distinction" among European overseas possessions "centres around the extent to which the settlers have both reasons and the power to determine policy, not only against the indigenous population but, even more important, against the metropolis".[13] Thus by this criterion, though not by the "majority rule", South Africa, Rhodesia, Kenya, and Algeria, with their powerful settler communities, are colonies.

Finley here introduces considerations that might seem to threaten to undermine the old, early-modern, concept of colony that he wishes to bring back. It might be very difficult to determine that the power of the *colons* in Algeria, and their relation to the indigenous people, was *categorically* different from that of the admittedly thinner stratum of Dutch residents in the Dutch East Indies, and their relation to the indigenous Indonesians. Yet one is regarded as a colony, the other not. On the other hand, it is true that the French in Algeria, like the British in Kenya or Southern Rhodesia, regarded themselves as permanent settlers in their respective countries. They felt themselves as Maghribi, or as African,

11 Finley, Colonies, p. 184.
12 Ibid., p. 187.
13 Ibid., p. 186.

as the non-European populations, if in somewhat different ways. They and their families were there to stay. It was this consciousness that was expressed so powerfully in Algerian-born Albert Camus's posthumous novel "The First Man" his passionate proclamation of his Algerian identity. As the Algerian civil war of the 1950s dragged on, with atrocities on both sides, an anguished Camus insisted that France could not just leave Algeria to its fate in the hands of the Muslim majority. "She cannot, because she could never agree to throw one million, two hundred thousand Frenchmen into the sea."[14]

Probably, for Finley, each case has to be decided on its own merits, depending on the character of settler rule, and in particular perhaps the extent to which the settler community is long-standing, extending over several generations. For such European populations, the settled territory is home, as Algeria was for Camus, and as Kenya and Southern Rhodesia were for many British settlers.[15] Such was not the case for the majority of British in India, or French in Indochina, or Dutch in Indonesia. Not only were they mainly a thin stratum of Europeans – administrators, soldiers, traders, engineers, missionaries, educators – sitting atop a population of millions of Asians. Most of them did not regard their stay in the East as permanent. They were there to do a job, to make some money, to get some experience, perhaps just to have an adventure. Unlike the old English couple in Paul Scott's novel "Staying On", who knew that they were exceptional in wishing to remain in India even after independence, most Europeans felt that they were just passing through. Home was Britain, France, or the Netherlands. Their children were usually sent to the home country for their education. After a certain time abroad in the Empire, they too expected to return to the homeland, to re-join their families and to continue a familiar pattern of life. That they were often disappointed in this – the home societies had changed in their absence – did not change their sense of who they were, and where they belonged.

For Finley, these people, and the territories they inhabited, did not form colonies but were components of *empire*. One senses that the main polemical thrust of Finley's contribution is in fact to draw a sharp line between colony and empire, colonialism and imperialism. He wishes to stop people speaking of the British Raj as a colony, or French Indochina as an example of French colonialism. The British, like the French and Dutch, and the Spanish and Portuguese before them, constructed empires, some of the largest in the world. But only some portions of those empires can be considered colonies. All empires are composed of dependencies; but only some dependencies – mostly a minority of them – are colonies. In the British Empire, India, "the jewel in the crown", was a resplendent part of empire but, according to Finley, it was never a colony.

Finley does not, at least in this article, concern himself with the properties of empires. His interest is in defining and delimiting colonies. What is left out, what many people mistakenly call colonies, he is happy to call empire, but more by implication than

14 A. Camus, The First Man, quoted in: C. Messud, Camus and Algeria: The Moral Question, in: New York Review of Books, 7 November 2013, p. 56.

15 See R. Bickers (ed.), Settlers and Expatriates: Britons over the Seas, Oxford 2014.

by detailed analysis. Part of the reason for that self-limiting restriction comes in the observation that "the semantics of colonial terminology have not been systematically investigated (unlike 'empire' and its cognates)".[16] In other words, we know pretty well what empires are; it is colonies we are confused about. That may be so; but for all the investigation of empire and imperialism we are still quite some way from agreement about these as well. The continuing disputes about "formal" and "informal" empire, and the differences between them, is just one example of an unfinished scholarly controversy. Be that as it may, and focusing on Finley's main concern – colonies and colonization – we might ask, what is gained, and what lost, by accepting his restrictive definition of colony? Finley is at pains to return us to an older concept of colony. He feels that much has been lost in the plethora of terms that now feature in official, scholarly, and popular discourse. The British Colonial Office List of 1946, he says, "carries thirty-six main headings, which do not include all the colonies but do include protectorates and trust territories". The historian and the sociologist, he argues, would do better to establish their own classification. "I shall assume", he says, "without trying to defend, that there is value in a typology."[17] Even though, he admits, his "technical" definition of colony goes against "ordinary speech", it has innumerable advantages for historians and sociologists dealing with a range of cases from ancient Greece to modern colonialism. The argument is that "for most of its history the term had its own specific denotation […] encompassing specific, intrinsic elements that can be enumerated and examined over a range wide enough to take in, say, ancient Bologna or Narbonne and modern Australia or Mozambique."[18] This is a strong claim; is it persuasive? Are we better off for adopting Finley's usage?

4. How Helpful is Finley's Contribution?

One of the great strengths of Finley's proposal is that it draws attention to the distinctive nature of European colonialism from about the sixteenth century onwards. General treatments of empire often incorporate modern European colonialism in their accounts without necessarily stressing how different it was from earlier episodes, and how consequential that difference has been. Modern European colonialism opened a new chapter in world history, one whose impact can still be seen and felt the world over. European conquests certainly involved older elements of empire, and indeed the aspiration to be a "new Rome" was common to nearly all the European empires.[19] But the new thing, the unprecedented thing, was the scale and significance of the movement of Europeans to all the corners of the world – the creation, in other words, of colonies as Finley understands that term.

16 Finley, Colonies, p. 168.
17 Ibid.
18 Ibid., p. 170.
19 Kumar, Visions of Empire, pp. 37–44.

No other subdivision of the human species has occupied so many parts of the earth as Europeans. The result has been the establishment of a large number of "neo-Europes" around the globe. People of European descent – European creoles – make up over ninety per cent of the population of Australia and New Zealand, over eighty per cent of the population of North America, and over three-quarters of the population of South America. There are or were substantial communities of Europeans in North and South Africa, and smaller pockets in Asia.[20]

The established settler communities – in the Americas and Australasia, and parts of Africa – developed a distinctive pattern of life that differed in many respects from the smaller communities of Europeans in other parts of the European empires. This too is something that Finley's concept brings out more clearly than those concepts that elide colony and empire. There were different attitudes and policies – often of a savagely exclusionary kind – towards indigenous peoples, leading to their expulsion from their homelands, sometimes to their near-extinction. This is part of what Michael Mann, noting the relative egalitarianism that prevailed among the settler communities, has called "the dark side of democracy".[21] This compares, say, with the attitudes of the British community in India or the French in Indochina, where awareness of the antiquity of the civilization, together with the relatively small size of the European communities, compelled generally a more cautious and often respectful attitude towards the native peoples.

There were differences also in the attitudes towards the homeland. The small European communities in most of Asia and sub-Saharan Africa continued to keep their metropolitan identities, as British, French, or German, often stressing them even more than their counterparts at home. That was to a good extent true for much of the time also of the larger settler communities, as has been clear in the extensive work that has now been done, in the case of the British Empire, on the "British World" of the white dominions.[22] The American colonists insisted on their Britishness, and claimed the rights of "true-born Englishmen", until their break with Britain. Australians, Canadians, New Zealanders, and British South Africans did similarly. But, like the Americans, when the time came, they did not find it difficult to declare their own identities, different from the metropolitan British, as Australians, Canadians, etc. In the established settler communities, where the residents saw themselves as there to stay, along with their descendants, it was inevitable that a new sense of the self would emerge, in environments and climates often wildly different from those of their home countries. This might often lead to clashes with the metropolitan authority, even before independence or autonomy was attained by settlers. This was less easy for those Europeans who had to keep themselves in readiness, sooner or later, for the return home.

20 J. Belich, Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Anglo-World, 1783–1939, Oxford 2009, pp. 25–42.

21 M. Mann, The Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing, Cambridge 2005, pp. 70–98.

22 C. Bridge / K. Fedorowich (eds.), The British World: Diaspora, Culture and Identity, London 2003.

The term "colonial empire", so ubiquitous in the literature, by eliding the two entities hides the distinctiveness of the modern European empires that – unlike most of the ancient or non-Western empires – laid down their presence in the world by settling – "planting" – large numbers of their own peoples on virtually every continent. The value of Finley's exercise in classification lies above all in stressing that. The European imperial experience was in that respect unique, and it has had profound effects on the legacy of empire.

But what, on the other hand, might be lost in drawing so hard and fast a line between colony and empire? Does it prevent us from generalizing about the British or French empires, which contained both colonial and non-colonial elements? Is there no place for ideologies of empire, and concepts such the "civilizing mission" that not only found individual forms in the various empires but can also be held to have been a general European justification of empire?[23] The fact that so many scholars, as well as other commentators, feel no need to distinguish between colony and empire, suggests that in discussing empire in general we may unduly constrain ourselves if we insist too strongly on the distinction. The search for commonalities in the imperial experience is as important as the stress on differences. The European settler colony no doubt needs to be noticed for its special qualities. But it was also part of a wider movement of empire, one that saw itself in a particular tradition of empire, with its own hallmarks. For European rulers it was important to be included in the "family of empires", to show that they understood what it was to be an empire.

In the European case, the hold of Rome was paramount.[24] For Europeans, Rome had invented empire. They studied it through the classical authors – Sallust, Vergil, Cicero, Plutarch, Tacitus – that formed the bedrock of the education of the European ruling class. Rome had wrestled with the problem of imperial citizenship, coming up with categories that were thought to be highly applicable to the European overseas empires, incorporating as the Roman Empire did "barbarous" peoples such as the Gauls and Lombards. The Roman Empire too had incubated Christianity, eventually adopting it as the state religion and thus ensuring its future and its widespread diffusion. Charlemagne's Holy Roman Empire, in self-consciously reviving the Roman tradition, had confirmed this union of religion and empire. All European empires adopted this heritage, even after the division of Christianity into Catholic and Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant. Moscow might in the sixteenth century proclaim itself "the third Rome", in succession to Rome and Byzantium, but whatever the differences, the promotion of Christianity was a common feature of all the European empires.

There are other problems with Finley's attempt to erect a boundary between colony and empire. One concerns the concept of "internal colonialism", which many have found illuminating in considering the development of certain societies, whether or not they had formal empires, and whether or not they had colonies (as Finley understands them).

23 S. Conrad, German Colonialism: A Short History, S. O'Hagan (trans.), Cambridge 2008, p. 137.
24 Kumar, Visions of Empire, pp. 37–73.

Thus the westward movement of the American colonists after independence may not have led to the establishment of colonies, but there certainly seems something "imperial" in the expansion to the Pacific, as noted earlier. The debate about the "American Empire" has many facets; but whatever its global aspects, a strong case can be made for considering America as at least a land empire, in this case perhaps comparable to Russia's eastward expansion to the Pacific in the construction of its empire.[25] The United Kingdom has also already been mentioned as a land empire formed through internal colonialism. We might also consider the fruitfulness of the concept in relation to large multi-ethnic states such as India and Nigeria. Too strong an emphasis on the distinction between colony and empire, and between colonialism and imperialism, inhibits the search for comparisons and parallels that can often be highly instructive.

This points to the need not too overemphasize too much, as is common in much of the literature, the distinction between land and overseas empires. Some countries – Britain, Spain, France – in any case had both.[26] The two types of empire have their differences, no doubt, and some of these can be very important, but there are also continuities and similarities between them which should not be overlooked. This links to a similar observation that can be made about the equally common distinction between "ancient" and "modern" empires. Most ancient empires were land empires, though some, like the Roman Empire, had significant, though "near-abroad", overseas possessions. Moreover, few possessed (Finley-type) colonies. There were settlements on occupied land, but they were usually incorporated directly into the state, as with the provinces of the Roman Empire. For Finley the ancient world is replete with empires and imperialism, but conspicuously lacking in colonies and colonialism.

If colonialism is the distinctive hallmark of modern empires, this view of settlements in the ancient world tends to make the empires of that world something very different from modern empires, and requiring perhaps separate treatment. At the very least that would vastly diminish the field for purposes of comparative analysis. Michael Adas has noted that

> *the term 'colonization' has come to refer almost exclusively to historical processes involving western Europeans, or their settler progeny* […] *Colonialism is deemed to be one of the global forces that has defined the modern age; empires are seen as modes of state expansion with an ancient lineage, increasingly anachronistic in an age of industrialization and high technology.*[27]

One consequence of this persistent "Western-centrism", Adas further observes, is to relegate many non-Western examples, such as China and Mughal India, to the archaic

25 M. Khodarkovsky, Russia's Steppe Frontier: The Making of a Colonial Empire, 1500–1800, Bloomington, IN 2002; V. G. Kiernan, America: The New Imperialism. From White Settlement to World Hegemony, 2nd edn, London 2005.

26 K. Kumar, Nation-States as Empires, Empires as Nation-States: Two Principles, One Practice? in: Theory and Society 39 (2010) 2, pp. 119–143.

27 M. Adas, Imperialism and Colonialism in Comparative Perspective, in: The International History Review 20 (1989) 2, p. 371.

realm of empire. Western colonialism is world-spanning; "empires" are more restrictive cases of largely regional expansion, involving the conquest of neighbouring peoples and states (i.e., "empires" are almost exclusively land empires; overseas empires are "colonial"). The East had empire in abundance ("Oriental Despotism"); but, like the ancient world according to Finley, it lacked colonialism. This limits its role in world history. Adas suggests that this restrictiveness of approach does not just hide important points of similarity between Western and non-Western empires but, equally, interesting differences (some of which are contained in the contrast between land empires – both Eastern *and* Western – and overseas empires).[28]

China is certainly a case in point. It is true that, despite the famed voyages of the Ming admiral Zheng He, China did not seize the opportunity to establish overseas colonies. The Chinese Empire remained a land empire – one of the largest in history. But that should not of course exclude China from any large-scale, comparative, account of empires, including the European overseas empires. This is particularly so if we do not treat the Chinese Empire as some sort of timeless, unchanging entity, with an uninterrupted, two-millennia lifespan from 221 B.C.E. to 1912 C.E. There were several marked discontinuities, most notably the Mongol conquest that established the Yuan Dynasty (1279–1368), and the Manchu conquest that of the Qing (1644–1912). During the Qing dynasty, especially in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, China expanded massively in Inner Asia, annexing Tibet, Mongolia, and Xinjiang. It also strengthened its hold over the south of the country, and it occupied the nearby island of Taiwan. By the end of the eighteenth century the Qing had more than doubled the size of the country. This was, in the eyes of many scholars today, "Manchu colonialism".[29]

Of course, "Manchu colonialism" is not colonialism in Finley's sense. The Inner Asian territories were undoubtedly dependencies, but they did not involve plantations of significant numbers of Chinese from the homeland. But it is here that the narrowness of Finley's concept of colony most glaringly reveals itself; or, perhaps more importantly, where the attempt to separate colony from empire most shows its limitations. One can, if one wishes, focus on the distinctiveness of settler life and the settler community. That is the strength of Finley's approach, and the main justification for trying to revive the old – that is, the early-modern – meaning of the term colony. But it seems perverse to restrict colonialism to simply the establishment of these dependent settler communities, when, as the Chinese case clearly shows, empires can and do usually have both this type of colonialism (e.g. in Taiwan) and colonies in the wider and – today – more conventional sense, as in the Inner Asian dependencies. It is not just that colonies do not have to be overseas. Nor do they have to be composed of a majority of members of the metropolitan power. What is more important is the fact of dependency, and, more importantly, that they are in some important sense not a normal part of the metropolis.

28 Ibid.

29 Special issue "Manchu Colonialism", International History Review, 20 (1998) 2, pp. 253–504; P. C. Perdue, China Marches West: The Qing Conquest of Central Eurasia, Cambridge, MA 2005.

What comes out in this discussion is the danger of seeking too precise a definition of colony, as attempted by Finley, and trying then to prise apart colony from empire. Colonies and colonization come in a variety of forms. Some take the form identified by Finley – plantations of large numbers of settlers. But others might involve a relatively small group of metropolitan people ruling over diverse groups, and yet living in ways that are clearly distinguishable from those of the metropolitan society. That would apply not just to China's Inner Asian colonies but also, say, the settlements of Russians in Central Asia and the Far East in the eastward drive of the tsarist Russian Empire. We have already considered America's westward movement as equally a kind of colonization, even though the settlers did not establish separate, autonomous, communities.

Finley's intervention was stimulating and productive, though it has not yet received the attention it warrants. It forces us to think more clearly about what we mean by many terms – colony, colonialism, colonial empires – that are common in the literature but are often loosely used as synonyms for empire and imperialism. There *is* something distinctive about colonies as Finley understands the term. They do seem – as Fieldhouse and others suggest – to mark a new departure in the imperial story, from about 1600 onwards.[30] European imperialism from that time, for all the continuities with past forms of empire, does seem to incorporate a new element, in the creation of dependent yet largely self-governing communities of settlers.

At the same time, it seems dangerously restrictive to carve out a separate intellectual domain of "colonies and colonialism", as something demanding very different treatment from that we give to empire and imperialism. Colonies – of different kinds – are a part of empire. They only have existence as manifestations of an imperial drive. They do not form a self-sufficient universe. The very fact of dependency means that they exist in structures that go beyond them, that incorporate many diverse elements, and that have purposes and intentions that often offend one or more of its component parts. Empires are agglomerations, often untidy and unwieldy, but also with visions and ideologies that give meaning to their existence in the world, and the justification for their continued presence.[31] The colonies that are part of them draw on these ideologies, even as they sometimes use them against the imperial centres themselves. We should beware of treating colonies as distinct from empires; they are part and parcel of them; their story is an imperial story; even when they separate from them, they carry the marks of their membership of empire well into their future.

30 D. K. Fieldhouse, The Colonial Empires: A Comparative Survey from the Eighteenth Century, 2nd edn, Houndmills 1982.

31 Kumar, Visions of Empire.