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OCCASIONAL PAPERS, VOL. 1, NO. 3 - JUNE 27, 2022

CHINA'S STRATEGIC VISION | PART THREE

ENVISIONING A SINOCENTRIC WORLD

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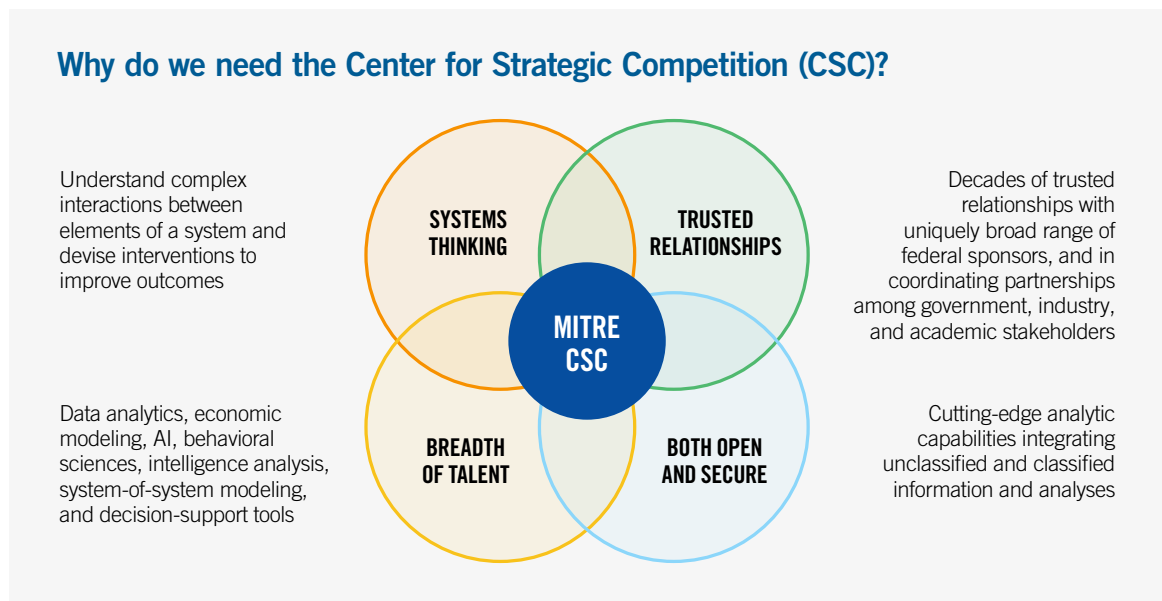
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Introduction

This is the final paper in a three-part series on the worldview and strategic ambitions of the People's Republic of China (PRC) published by MITRE's Center for Strategic Competition. Part I offered an outline of the primary concepts that Chinese Communist Party (CCP) officials bring to the table in approaching the world beyond its borders, and in framing Beijing's approaches to foreign affairs and national security issues. In Part II, I discussed the specific axes of competition that China envisions through the concept of "comprehensive national power" (CNP), and through which it approaches the strategic ambitions it has set for itself.

In this paper, I describe the future world order that Chinese strategists imagine to be possible, and that CCP leaders have made

it their objective to bring into being. This desired future environment amounts to a distinctive vision of an entire system of international relations "with Chinese characteristics," but it is far from a novel one.

Indeed, it is arguably in many of its fundamental aspects quite an ancient concept, for in its starkly Sinocentric contours it builds upon—and gives a modern, "soft power" gloss to—traditional Chinese concepts of statecraft and theories of order.

**ACCORDINGLY,
THIS SERIES OF
PAPERS OFFERS
AN EXEGETICAL
OUTLINE OF CHINA'S
STRATEGIC VISION.**

Visions of a Sinocentric World

“Reunification” and the Nation-State

As noted in the first paper of this series, ancient Chinese thinking lacked a concept of the nation-state, having instead that of “dynasty” and of “all-under-heaven.” Nationalism, in the modern sense of a specific people living and enjoying sovereignty within particular geographic frontiers, did not really develop in China until the late 19th century, and only then in reaction to the Sinosphere’s encounter with European power and mores.¹

Yet for all this late start, China’s own nationalism quickly acquired momentum and enthusiasm. Today, the polity that traditionally thought more in Confucian terms of gradients of civilization² than in those of specific national demarcations now nurses anti-imperialist grievances for wrongs inflicted against a Chinese “nation” that did not actually exist in Chinese minds at the time the “Century of Humiliation” began. Moreover, modern China now all but fetishizes as its own “ancient” and “natural” frontiers the expansive territory that the Qing Dynasty—a regime established by foreign “barbarian” Manchu invaders who had conquered China by defeating the ethnically Han Ming Dynasty—had built through its own imperial campaigns of conquest and colonization against regional peoples in the 17th and 18th centuries.³

The irony of this seems lost upon the CCP, however, which has made the “reunification” of historically “Chinese” territory a cardinal objective of national policy and one of the touchstones of the Party’s legitimacy narrative.⁴ (As we have seen, through the lens of ancient Confucian thinking, true sovereignty is indivisible,⁵ and today, “disunity” within the lands of the Sinic cultural core threatens to raise questions about whether the ruling regime deserves the Mandate of Heaven.) It is for this reason that officials in Beijing are so adamant about “reunification” with Taiwan. According to Jiang Zemin in 2001, for instance, “[i]t is the bounden duty of the Chinese Communist to end the

state of separation between Taiwan and China’s mainland and achieve the complete reunification of China.”⁶

This is no less true for Xi Jinping today, who has called “reunification” with Taiwan an “inevitable requirement for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese people.”⁷

Indeed, to some extent, popular Chinese nationalism goes even beyond what CCP officials are presently willing to say about the extent of the “China” that needs to be “reunified”—in the context of which it bears remembering that the Qing Dynasty actually included significant territories *other than Taiwan* that lie outside the present-day borders of the People’s Republic of China. Mao Zedong once bitterly declared that Russia had unfairly taken 1.5 million square kilometers of land from China, and even though Maoist officials never acted on such claims, the Soviet Union long feared that the PRC would at some point try to reclaim these territories.⁸

It has long been the view of both Chinese nationalists and many senior Chinese officials that the various agreements by which Russia’s tsars acquired such lands from the Qing Dynasty are among the “unequal treaties” that mark China’s humiliation at imperialist hands. Today, Chinese nationalists—as well as some maps published in China even in recent years—still depict China as having lost large territories to Russia, and also lay historical claim to the Korean Peninsula.⁹ Moreover, in 2015, after decades of quietly deemphasizing such memories, Chinese officials renamed a village near the city of Heihe on the Russian border as “Aigun,”¹⁰ thereby once more openly memorializing the 1858 “unequal treaty” of that name that had cost China a swathe of territory along the left bank of the Amur River.

In justifying their construction and militarization of artificial islands in the South China Sea, modern CCP officials have made extensive use of maps drawn during China’s (pre-Communist) Republican era making broad territorial

claims to that area.¹¹ Yet the reach of such claims is potentially extraordinary, for the politicized cartography of the Republican era makes some truly remarkable pseudo-historical claims against China's neighbors. One "Map of National Shame" drawn up by the Nationalist government in 1938, for instance, depicts "lost territories" that include,

"besides Mongolia, Tibet, and the rest of Inner Asia, much of Siberia, the Ryukyu Islands, Taiwan, the South China Sea, Korea, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, the Malay Peninsula and Singapore, as well as the Andaman and Nicobar Islands in the Bay of Bengal and the waters around them, Myanmar, Nepal, Bhutan, and parts of India and Pakistan."¹²

If and to the degree that China's regional strength and geopolitical self-confidence continue to grow, these dynamics could have important implications in the future.

Regional Integration

The implications for international affairs of China's rise, however, go significantly beyond the question of which specific additional foreign territories Chinese officials may feel to be rightfully theirs. The modern CCP has also increasingly come to define China's "national rejuvenation" as including the construction of a powerfully Sinocentric regional order well beyond the PRC's frontiers. With perhaps unintended echoes of Imperial Japan's idea of a "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere"¹³ in the 1930s, Beijing's strategic vision focuses intently upon making the Indo-Pacific region a single—and China-centered—economic and infrastructural whole.

CCP officials speak of this as a "community of common destiny," a phrase that first appeared under Hu Jintao in a government white paper in 2011 and has been picked up with emphasis by Xi Jinping as part of what Rush Doshi terms a "peripheral diplomacy" strategy of building

a regional network of hierarchic relationships centered around China.¹⁴ The CCP's 14th Five-Year Plan, for instance, speaks in sweeping terms about this effort:

"[We will] strengthen the construction of strategic backbone corridors out of Xinjiang and into Tibet, in the central and western regions, and along rivers, coasts, and borders, promote the upgrade and expansion of capacity-tight corridors in an orderly way, and strengthen interconnections with neighboring countries. ... We will promote the construction of the China-Europe Express Train Assembly Center.

"... We will promote the four-in-one (四位一体) connection of land, sea, sky, and cyber, take 'six corridors, six roads, many countries and many ports' ('六廊六路多国多港') as the basic framework, build an interconnection network led by economic corridors such as the New Asia-Europe Continental Bridge, with major corridors such as China-Europe freight trains, new land and sea corridors, and information highways as the backbone, and railroads, ports and pipeline networks as supports, and create new channels for international land and sea trade. ...

"We will improve the access and quality of China-Europe trains and promote the formulation of international land transport trade rules. We will expand the influence of the 'Silk Road Shipping' ('丝路海运') brand. We will promote the construction of the core areas of the 'Belt and Road' in Fujian and Xinjiang. We will promote the construction of the 'Belt and Road' spatial information corridor. We will construct an 'Air Silk Road' ('空中丝绸之路')."¹⁵

Various pronouncements make clear that all this work is part of "a process of reshaping the regional architecture [that] has started in the Asia-Pacific,"¹⁶ in order "to create a new pattern of regional economic integration" linked to China.¹⁷

One should not mistake this as merely an economic development program, however. It is also quite clear that China seeks to establish the rules of interaction under which the entire Indo-Pacific will be expected to operate. As Xi Jinping put it at his 2013 Work Forum on Peripheral Diplomacy, for instance, the concept is that ideas from China “will become the shared beliefs and norms of conduct for the whole region.”¹⁸ And this will, moreover, be a regional operating system that deliberately precludes any role or influence for others, particularly the United States. As China’s then-Deputy Foreign Minister explained in 2012, Beijing’s objective is to “elaborat[e] rules of behavior for all Asian countries ... for the peoples of Asia to run the affairs of Asia, solve the problems of Asia, and uphold the security of Asia.”¹⁹

Even during the heyday of Mao Zedong’s Marxist fanaticisms, China never really relinquished its ancient conceits of integrating the region into a virtuously Sinocentric hierarchy of political authority as “[t]he savior of all Asia, leading its peoples to a glorious future.”²⁰ In the modern era, this longstanding instinct manifests itself in the CCP’s project to “ensure that more people embrace the spirit of an Asia-Pacific family and the idea of a community of shared future”²¹ that revolves around China and generally excludes the United States. As Heath and his RAND colleagues summarize it,

“China’s international strategy aims to establish the country’s primacy in the Asia-Pacific region. It also seeks to establish Chinese leadership of the international order. ... In terms of the periphery, the end state [desired by CCP strategists] depicts China as the paramount power. China has become the most important economic, political, cultural, and technological partner across the Asia-Pacific. It maintains a strong network of client states in Central and Southeast Asia, as well as some countries in South Asia. China has set the standards, rules,

and norms by which much of the global economy operates. The United States, by contrast, defers to China on its core interests related to Taiwan, the East and South China Seas, and in relation to BRI [Belt and Road Initiative] projects. The U.S. government has modified its policies to minimize criticism of China’s domestic governance and politics. The United States participates in the economic and political life of the region on terms acceptable to China. U.S. alliances and partnerships, for example, may persist in name but no longer pose much of a threat to China.”²²

It is for this reason that, as Jianwei Wang and Doshi have both recounted, China has been so keen to create webs of regional relationships and institutions that exclude the United States, while simultaneously seeking to join and hamstring those that don’t—especially where such U.S.-inclusive institutions might involve any discussion of political or security issues.²³

Convinced that America’s superlative CNP had for years provided the foundation for an international order that promoted American values,²⁴ in other words, the CCP wishes to build a system dominated by China that promotes *the CCP’s values*. As Howard French aptly summarizes, Beijing’s approach to regional affairs is powerfully shaped by

“grievance over the loss of what China saw as its national rights as suzerain over a collection of surrounding ‘tributaries’ ... [with the result that today], in ways that are increasingly unmistakable, China’s geopolitical play draws on Chinese conceptions of the world and of the country’s own past traditions of power. Everything about its diplomatic language says that it views the Western Pacific as it once did its ancient known world, its *tian xia*, and that it intends for this region to return to its

status as a place where China's paramount standing goes unchallenged ... [and in which] [t]he price of peace with China was adherence to the rules of *tian xia*.

"...[T]he ideological foundations of China's move to take over its near seas [e.g., South China Sea] were bound up in the concept of *tian xia*, namely that it was China's manifest destiny to once again reign preponderant over a wide sphere of Asia—the old 'known world'—much as it supposedly had in a half-idealized, half-mythologized past. Only by doing so could the country realize its dreams; only in this way could its dignity be restored."²⁵

This is what is meant by "turning China and its neighbors into a community of shared future" as officials in Beijing give "top priority to neighborhood diplomacy."²⁶ The "Belt and Road Initiative" (BRI) for regional integration, therefore,

"is an exquisite manifestation of Xi Jinping's dream of the 'great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.' It positions China at the center of the international system, with physical, financial, cultural, technological, and political influence flowing out to the rest of the world. It redraws the fine details of the world's map with new railways and bridges, fiber optic cables and 5G, and ports with the potential for military bases. And it is a platform for sharing political values through capacity building on internet governance, safe cities, and media content. China has tried to portray the BRI as a multilateral initiative. Yet the reality is something quite different. It is a collection of often opaque bilateral agreements signed under a Chinese framework notion. The Belt and Road Forums further enhance the impression of Chinese centrality: heads of state travel to China to seek deals as supplicants to China."²⁷

Global Governance

China's objectives, however, are not solely regional. The BRI, for instance, is not merely a regional but a *global* initiative:

"The BRI captures the essence of Xi's strategic ambition. It places China at the center of a vast network of *global* physical and technological infrastructure, as well as political and security influence."²⁸

CCP officials are quite open about their desire to "reform" all mechanisms of international governance on a global basis. To some extent, the objective in this regard is tactical, for "China seeks to position itself as the leader of key multilateral organizations while delegitimizing the United States as a competitor ... as a way to restrain the United States."²⁹

Here as well, however, China's ambition is also much more sweeping. As we have seen, CCP strategists assume—as Xi Jinping put it at a Politburo study session on the topic—that the "structure of global governance depends on the international balance of power."³⁰ Accordingly, as China acquires top position in terms of comprehensive national power, CCP officials expect that China will "mak[e] the global governance system better reflect changes to the international architecture."³¹ It will thus be Beijing's turn to rebuild international institutions around itself as a sort of *paterfamilias* for the nations of the world.

"Xi Jinping has stated on numerous occasions that China intends to expand its role in global governance and has directed officials to 'inject Chinese voices' into organizations responsible for aspects of global governance, ... [so that] China play[s] a leading role in global governance. While enjoying primacy in the Asia-Pacific, China's leadership role outside

that region consists primarily in being a coordinator and facilitator for other regional leaders and their partners to resolve problems and manage global affairs. In global domains, such as cyberspace, space, and international law, Chinese preferences prevail over those of the United States.”³²

The U.S. Department of State has described this Chinese vision as “a theory of a globe-spanning universal society” led by the CCP,³³ and indeed Chinese scholars do not disagree. According to Huang Jing, dean of the Beijing Language and Cultural University, China’s political system is “incompatible with the mainstream of the existing international order,”³⁴ which explains the Party’s keenness “to reorder the world order”³⁵ so as to make things right.

This is what the Party’s 14th Five-Year Plan calls “a new type of international relations (新型国际关系),” under which the global governance system will evolve in “a more just and reasonable direction.”³⁶ China’s envisioned Sinocentric international order is thus not merely a regional but in fact a global one; it will include “a new framework for global governance with the vision of a global community of shared future.”³⁷

In this vision, among other things, China will lead the formulation of international rules and standards, including in the realms of science and technology that Beijing’s CNP theorists believe essential to acquiring—and to maintaining—national power. The CCP’s strategy aims to make China a “standards power,”³⁸ but as noted in the second paper of this series,

“global leadership in technological innovation is important to China not just for the material benefits it can bring (e.g., greater wealth, prosperity, and well-being) but also for symbolic value: its ability to show that it is *China* that now sits at the top of the global rankings.”

As Elizabeth Economy has observed, “[f]or Beijing, setting standards is the holy grail of its global technology ambition. It offers definitive proof of China’s global innovation leadership.”³⁹

Under the CCP’s “Innovation-Driven Development Strategy,” therefore, it is declared that China will

“[p]articipate in-depth in global governance of technological innovation, proactively set the topics of discussion on global innovation, [and] participate actively in the formulation of major rules on international scientific and technological cooperation”⁴⁰

This is spelled out in some detail in the 14th Five-Year Plan, which describes the many ways through which China intends to make itself the center of international technology development:

“We will promote international exchanges and cooperation in cyberspace and promote the formulation of international rules for digital spaces and cyberspace with the United Nations as the main channel and the UN Charter as the basic principles. We will promote the establishment of a multilateral, democratic, and transparent global internet governance system and establish a fairer and more reasonable network infrastructure and resource governance mechanisms. We will actively participate in the formulation of international rules and digital technology standards in areas such as data security, digital currency, and digital taxes. We will promote the construction of global cybersecurity assurance cooperation mechanisms and establish international coordination and cooperation mechanisms for protecting data factors of production, handling cybersecurity incidents, and combating cybercrimes. We will provide technology, equipment, services, and other digital assistance to

underdeveloped countries and allow all countries to share the dividends of the digital age. We will actively promote online cultural exchanges and mutual learning.”⁴¹

Once again, it would be a mistake to see this as merely being about development and prosperity, for through the prism of Chinese CNP theory, there are unmistakable undercurrents of *power* here. As one recent MITRE Corporation study has noted, Chinese officials see controlling and influencing the international institutions that set technological standards as

“a foundational and coercive lever for China to achieve a decisive victory in its path to comprehensive national power. Xi in 2016 stated that ‘whoever controls standards occupies the commanding high ground’ of the technological competition”⁴²

Setting international technology standards, then, is envisioned as both a consequence of China’s rise and as a key means by which Beijing will consolidate and perpetuate its ascendancy.⁴³

“Discourse Control”

One does not necessarily have to agree with Jurgen Habermas that the act of communication draws upon cultural “givens” that guide patterns of interpretation partly constitutive of lived social reality⁴⁴—or with Antonio Gramsci that the creation of a hegemonic ideology is a potent form of social control⁴⁵—to understand that controlling how things are described, and the moral baggage encoded in such labeling, is of enormous importance to the CCP’s strategy both at home and abroad. Indeed, such “discourse control” is perhaps *uniquely* important in Chinese politics, morality, and political culture.

Part I of this series has already noted the Confucian tradition of the “rectification of names” in connection with hierarchic conceptions of order in the context of modern Chinese CNP theory. It is worth looking at this tradition in more detail here, however, because of the ways in which it encourages what is, at times, a near-obsessive CCP focus upon controlling socio-political narratives, both within China itself and in the broader international community.

The key point of the “rectification of names” is that social order is in some important sense *created* by properly identifying the names and roles of all of its participants. As Confucius is said to have told the ancient Chinese official Tsze-lû in response to a question about what advice he would give to the ruler of the state of Wei,

“[i]f names be not correct, language is not in accordance with the truth of things. If language be not in accordance with the truth of things, affairs cannot be carried on to success.”⁴⁶

This reflects an assumption about moral and political order that the act of *naming* encodes an understanding of each named entity’s role in the social order. When one has properly named things, therefore, every actor in that order will therefore understand—and presumably keep to—their proper place. In this Confucian worldview,

“If one’s son is properly characterized *as a son*, for instance, from this designation will flow an entire spectrum of understood social roles, rituals, and responsibilities revolving around the nature of what it means to be a son and defining both his own relationships to others and others’ proper relationships to him. When these roles and rituals are properly lived out, society will function as it should—from the level of the family all the way up to great affairs of state.”⁴⁷

The function of proper naming, therefore, is socially constitutive. Through the rectification of names, Confucianism aspires to define, and hence prescribe, “an ideal social order with ‘everything in its place.’”⁴⁸ For this reason also, Confucian political and ethical theory has, in Michael Quirin’s phrasing, a “*horror vacui*”—a desperate fear in confronting the “undefined spaces” where status and role ascriptions cannot be identified.⁴⁹

Nor are these concepts merely ancient ones. On the contrary, they retain considerable salience in modern Chinese culture and politics, as well as in Beijing’s international relations. Even during the Maoist period, the ancient terminology of “rectification” survived in the Party’s enthusiasm for not simply punishing those who deviated from the CCP line, but in orchestrating elaborate ritualized narrative assertions of their guilt and *reassertions* of the proper order of things, not least, and in some sense especially, by the guilty parties themselves. Elaborate “denunciation” and “self-criticism” sessions, for instance, were a hallmark of Maoist Chinese political coercion, and countrywide “rectification campaigns” were organized against politically undesirable elements.⁵⁰

As in ancient times, however—such as with Confucius’ admonition to the superior man to “rectify yourself” as a means to bring peace to the realm—the ultimate goal of rectification is inherently political: to support the maintenance of order.⁵¹ This entails institutionalizing the ritualized conceptual erasure of any understanding that is inconsistent with everyone’s harmonious acceptance of that order. For thousands of years, Chinese political theorists have tended to view ideological pluralism as dangerous, likely to create disorder and fragment the realm. This has been a commonplace assumption since at least the days of Li Si—a disciple of the ancient philosopher Xunzi (c. 310-218 B.C.E.) during the Warring

States Period—who believed that in the ideal state, “everyone understands what to do, and tasks are without doubts and uncertainties.”⁵²

To be sure, building and maintaining a state and society based upon this monist conception of order and “harmonious” conformity required formidable ideological effort. Nevertheless, it was notably successful for a very long time. Indeed, as Yuri Pines has observed, the conceptual project of the Chinese empire

“looks like a classic hegemonic construction in the Gramscian sense. Its base ideological premises were shared by every politically significant social group and even by its immediate neighbors; no alternative political structure was considered either legitimate or desirable; and even those rulers whose ethnic or social background must have encouraged them to be critical of the imperial polity were destined to adopt it and adapt themselves to it. Until the late nineteenth century, empire was the only conceivable polity for the inhabitants of the Chinese world.”⁵³

The rectification of names is one of the technologies, as it were, with which this ideological hegemony has been maintained.

The centrality of ritualized naming as a mechanism of social control has special relevance in the context of modern Chinese political culture and foreign affairs, inasmuch as it helps explain the CCP’s preoccupation with—and desire to exert control over—how things in the moral and political world are *described*. It also has particular resonance through the prism of China’s perceptions of national humiliation and expectations for rejuvenation, because so much of the Chinese experience of the so-called “Century of Humiliation” was *not* physical and concrete but rather ideational.

As William Callahan has observed, “colonialism in China was not territorial as much as ideological,”⁵⁴ rooted in the seemingly utter subservience of China’s once-proud civilization to that of the self-confident, Industrial-Age, post-Enlightenment imperialist West. In a sense, as discussed in Part I of this series, what “humiliated” China’s ancient self-identity the most was not any physical harm the Middle Kingdom suffered, but rather the stigma of status-subservience to a foreign civilization that was more powerful than China, that was immune to the Sinic cultural assimilation into which ancient Chinese had traditionally tempted periodic barbarian overlords, and that clearly possessed “sutras of modernity” that backwards and retrograde Imperial China could not possibly match.

It follows from this particularistic sort of “humiliation” that whatever China’s size and power, the country’s “national rejuvenation” would be incomplete without ensuring that the rest of the world *acknowledges* that modern China has returned to its ancient position of civilizational primacy. Merely possessing power alone is insufficient. China’s rise to first-among-equals status—or perhaps first-among-*unequals* status, as we shall see below—and its superlative virtue must also be explicitly *validated* by the rest of the world.

This gives modern Chinese propaganda and narrative control policies a special urgency, and perhaps also a special desperation. Indeed, for these reasons it may be that the CCP regime is unusually vulnerable to “narrative” challenges, for such questioning is not merely embarrassing but—by demonstrating potential divergence between the Party’s legitimizing claims of virtue and its actual practice—can have existential implications.

As we saw in Part I of this series, traditional Confucian thinking sees “political failure as a form of moral failure”

that could call into question a ruling dynasty’s continued possession of the Mandate of Heaven.⁵⁵ In ancient times, the tribute system—whereby foreign envoys enacted rituals of symbolic subservience to the Chinese Son of Heaven—was only *partly* about managing relations with the foreign peoples in question; it also played a crucial role in China’s own *domestic* politics. As Timothy Brook, Michael van Walt van Praag, and Miek Boltjes have observed in discussing the Ming Dynasty, tribute envoys mattered to the emperor

“because they served as public confirmation of his right to rule. This confirmation was not just for the benefit of potentates beyond his borders; it was a demonstration to his bureaucrats and his subjects that he enjoyed Heaven’s mandate and that the Ming was now the legitimate ruling dynasty. But the expectation of confirmation fueled anxiety when foreign acknowledgement of his reign was not forthcoming. ... Diplomatic theater it may have been for the tribute bearers, but for the emperor this was serious politics. ... [The tribute system] always had a second, domestic audience. The Ming emperors wanted foreigners to know that the emperor was their suzerain, but they intended that their Chinese subjects should know this as well. The ritual gift exchange was for domestic as much as foreign consumption.”⁵⁶

An examination of CCP policies with regard to “discourse control” suggest that such dynamics still have resonance today.⁵⁷ In Fei-Ling Wang’s characterization, in fact, “external comments and criticism are now the leading sources of CCP’s political legitimacy and destabilization.”⁵⁸

It is for this reason that, as described in Part II of this series, CCP propaganda officials talk of struggle for global “discourse power” (*huayu quan*) against Western “discourse hegemony,”⁵⁹ and view “grabbing

the microphone” as essential to creating a new global order centered around China. Enthralled by the idea of controlling how anyone, anywhere thinks and speaks about China—a conception in which everyone else’s narrative of China is very much *China’s* business⁶⁰—Beijing has also become increasingly aggressive in using economic pressures and other penalties to punish those who say anything the CCP dislikes. Through such means the regime is working, in effect, to *export* China’s domestic system of coerced self-censorship to the rest of the world.⁶¹

Primacy of Culture, Thought, and Values

In keeping with ancient Sinocentric concepts of an international hierarchy with Chinese culture at the center—in which morality, and even the possession of humanity itself, are tied to one’s degree of Sinic cultural assimilation⁶²—it is perhaps not surprising that the CCP also strongly emphasizes promoting appropriate deference to and respect for Chinese culture as a key element in both domestic and foreign policy, and in both cases as a central aspect of “national rejuvenation.” Part II of this series discussed some of the manifestations of the CCP’s push for such cultural power, including the emphasis in the 14th Five-Year Plan upon “the building of China into a socialist cultural powerhouse.”⁶³

The casual Western observer might perhaps assume such cultural boosterism to be no more than a loose Chinese analogue to forms of cultural promotion that are commonly seen elsewhere in the world.⁶⁴ The CCP’s approach, however, is much more than this, also resonating with ancient Chinese conceits of civilizational supremacy and Sinocentric hierarchy. This “cultural superpower” campaign is not just about culture *per se*, but also about a notion of cultural hegemony that

draws upon romanticized remembrances of the Middle Kingdom’s civilizational supremacy and the deference traditionally shown to Chinese civilization by other rulers and peoples in the East Asian cultural context.

Through the rose-colored glasses of modern propagandists, the ancient Chinese Empire was one in which

“[t]he universal spread of China’s civilization and the variety of nations that sent emissaries to China were simply a reflection of the attractiveness of the central nation, and the admiration the neighboring countries had for China’s civilization.”⁶⁵

The idea that barbarians would “‘turn ... toward Chinese customs out of admiration’ (*xiangmu Huafeng*)”⁶⁶ is one with a long history. Ancient Chinese sources, in fact, describe the Middle Kingdom as having almost a sort of socio-cultural “gravitational field,” which would draw foreign peoples to it and serve thereby to make them awestruck loyal subjects of the Son of Heaven. One 14th century description, for instance, offered this as essentially a *definition* of China:

“Central Cultural Florescence [*Zhonghua*] is another term for Middle Kingdom. When a people subjects itself to the Kingly Teachings [Confucianism] and subordinates itself to the Middle Kingdom, when in clothing it is dignified and decorous, and when its customs are marked by filial respect and brotherly submission, when conduct follows the accepted norms and the principle of righteousness, then one may call it [a part of the] Central Cultural Florescence.”⁶⁷

The assumption here was that “barbarous outsiders would gravitate to the Middle Kingdom in recognition of China’s superior culture.”⁶⁸ According to the official Qing

Dynasty compendium entitled *Huang Qing zhigong tu* (“Illustrations of the Tribute-bearing People of the Qing”), for example, barbarians both inside *and outside* China are expected naturally to “submit their allegiance and turn toward civilization.”⁶⁹ They would, in other words, “in the stock Chinese phrase, ‘come to be ruled’ (*laihua*).”⁷⁰ This was, in other words, China’s equivalent of the cultural chauvinism of the mission *civilisatrice* of 19th century European (and American) imperialists, which described itself as bringing civilizational light to benighted native savages.⁷¹

Translating these ancient instincts into the modern world, culture is viewed as an element of exploitable national power and a tool of competitive advantage. It is assumed that by making China a “cultural powerhouse (文化强国),” the level of China’s “social civilization will reach new heights, and the country’s cultural soft power will be significantly bolstered.” This will also, it is said, offer “new advantages for participating in international economic cooperation and competition.”⁷² Thus it is an objective of CCP policy to Sinicize the entire region, and even farther afield.

Xi Jinping, for instance, makes much of how he says “China’s cultural soft power and the international influence of Chinese culture have increased significantly,” crowing that “China’s cultural soft power has grown much stronger; Chinese culture has greater appeal.”⁷³ The 14th Five-Year Plan speaks of this work extensively, pledging to “[p]ass on and carry forward China’s excellent traditional culture,”⁷⁴ not just domestically vis-à-vis ethnic groups in China that need to better understand their place in a Sinocentric order,⁷⁵ but also internationally.

It is a key objective of the 14th Five-Year Plan to ensure that “the influence of Chinese culture will rise further.”⁷⁶ To this end, the CCP has pledged to

“[e]nhance the influence of Chinese culture. We will strengthen foreign cultural exchanges and multi-level civilizational dialogues, innovate and promote international communication, use online and offline [media], tell the Chinese story well, spread the voice of China, and promote bonds between people. We will carry out the activities of ‘Perceiving China’ (‘感知中国’), ‘Reading China’ (‘走读中国’), and ‘Audiovisual China’ (‘视听中国’) and successfully organize the Chinese Cultural Year (Festival) and Tourism Year (Festival). We will build a Chinese communication platform and construct a global communication system in Chinese language and culture and an international Chinese language education standards system.”⁷⁷

Cultural power is an unmistakable component of “comprehensive national power.” As in other respects, CCP leaders thus assume both that their country’s growing weight will give Chinese culture a greater attractiveness—akin, perhaps, to the globally seductive culture of American consumerist modernity for much of the 20th century—and that the rising status of China’s culture will once again help Beijing consolidate and perpetuate its future role at the center of the international system. In this future world, China will have changed the operational code of the international order “to be more compatible with China’s own national interests and values.”⁷⁸

The “China Model”

As China’s growing economic, military, and political weight has encouraged it to feel increasingly free to exert itself globally and to express its revisionist geopolitical ambitions, officials in Beijing have also been ever more willing to speak of the CCP’s system of authoritarian

governance as one that *itself* provides a model that the rest of the world should follow. References to the idea of a “China model” applicable to other countries first appeared in Chinese sources after the 2008 financial crisis, but CCP officials were initially ambivalent in their commitment to this idea. Premier Wen Jiabao, in fact, declared at one point that “China never sees its development as a model.”⁷⁹ Xi Jinping, however, was not so reticent.

The phrase “China solution” began appearing in high-level Party speeches in 2013,⁸⁰ and by the time of Xi’s remarks to the 19th Party Congress in 2017, he felt bold enough to declare that China

“offers a new option for other countries and nations who want to speed up their development while preserving their independence; and it offers Chinese wisdom and a Chinese approach to solving the problems facing mankind.”⁸¹

Far from it being a source of concern and embarrassment that the CCP’s governance model is rooted in pervasive government surveillance and police-state oppression, these characteristics are now depicted as being advantages. According to China’s “Innovation-Driven Development Strategy,” the cross-cutting efficiencies of social mobilization offered by Party-directed authoritarianism are precisely what makes the “China solution” a good one:

“The system of socialism with Chinese characteristics can combine the advantages of concentrating power for major undertakings (中力 办大事) with the market allocation of resources, and has provided basic safeguards for achieving innovation-driven development.”⁸²

This sentiment was also reflected in the 14th Five-Year Plan, which declared that thanks to the Communist Party’s leadership, China has

“many advantages for further development, including remarkable institutional superiority (制度优势), improved administrative efficiency, sustained economic growth, a solid material foundation, wealth of human resources, broad market space, strong developmental resilience, overall social stability, and sustained development.”⁸³

According to Xi Jinping, in fact, it is China’s authoritarianism that represents its strength. In a 2016 speech, for instance, he said that “[o]ur biggest advantage is that we, as a socialist country, can pool resources in a major mission.” Speaking to the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference in March 2021, he also said that it was precisely the strength of China’s governance model that it can direct the entirety of Chinese society to move in lockstep: “Our national system can concentrate force to do big things.”⁸⁴

The coming Sinocentric world that CCP leaders envision would thus appear to involve other states hewing increasingly to the Chinese model of authoritarian governance. As Elizabeth Economy summarizes,

“China ... is working to transform the global governance system, and in particular norms and values around human rights, internet governance, and economic development, to reflect Chinese values and priorities. Its vision is one in which China’s state-centered model of political and economic development is both protected and promulgated.”⁸⁵

In this vision, the authoritarian “China model” is thus as normatively attractive and globally self-replicating as Western neoliberal economic and democratic governance models have been during the last several generations.

The “But For” Party

As Zheng Wang has noted, “[h]ow the government defines history is a deeply political issue that is closely related to the legitimacy of the government and rightly shapes the national identity of China,” as well as the conceptions of national interest upon which Beijing acts in foreign affairs.⁸⁶ In this sense, the CCP’s employment and manipulation of historical memory in support of narratives of grievance, from the “patriotic education” campaign of the 1990s through to the present day, has been tremendously successful, “provid[ing] China’s ruling party with the instrument for its mass mobilization and social cohesion.”⁸⁷

It is essential to the CCP’s political legitimacy narrative, moreover, that *only the Chinese Communist Party* is seen as being capable of achieving all these goals for China, and of bringing about the country’s “national rejuvenation.” At least since the days of Jiang Zemin, it has been central to the Party’s narrative that *but for* the CCP’s leadership, China would still be—as it was in the late Qing years and under the Nationalist government—weak, corrupt, and divided, far from its longed-for “rejuvenation.”⁸⁸

Xi Jinping emphasizes this tirelessly. According to him, the Chinese Communist Party

“has united and led all the Chinese people in a tireless struggle, propelling China into a leading position in terms of economic and technological strength, defense capabilities, and composite national strength. China’s international standing has risen as never before. ... [W]ithout the leadership of the Communist Party of China, national rejuvenation would be just wishful thinking.”⁸⁹

This has implications for foreign policy, insofar as although the CCP’s primary focus for the China Dream likely centers on domestic conditions, the Party has also linked its domestic legitimacy to its ability to deliver the preeminent *international* status demanded by the concept of “national rejuvenation.” China’s ability to realize its domestic policy agenda, in other words, “depends in part on its international agenda.”⁹⁰ Denying China its expected indicia of success in “restoring” a kind of Middle Kingdom preeminence, therefore, would strike a powerful blow to the CCP’s legitimacy narrative inside China itself.

A Vision of Global Primacy

For the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics—which CCP propagandists seem to have regarded as, in effect, “the PRC’s great international debutante ball” for coming out on the world stage⁹¹—Party officials chose the slogan “One World, One Dream.”⁹² The “dream” the CCP envisioned, it is now becoming clear, is what the 14th Five-Year Plan describes as a “community of common destiny for humanity (人类命运共同体).”⁹³ Other Party pronouncements similarly speak of “a global community of shared future”⁹⁴ and “a community with a shared future for mankind.”⁹⁵

Harmony and Conformity

This specific phrasing is relatively recent, but conceptually it picks up on the concept of “building a harmonious world”⁹⁶ that became current in CCP phrasings under Hu Jintao in the late 2000s. In that usage, the idea of a “harmonious world” was built upon claims about the “harmonious society” that the Party was said to be building in China itself, thereby signaling a desire to *export* CCP conceptions of political order into the international arena.⁹⁷

This was by no means a wholly benevolent concept, of course, for the CCP’s notion of appropriate “harmony”—picking up on Confucian conceptions of order in which all actors know and keep to their proper place in a hierarchic system, and can expect chastisement or punishment for impropriety—has always been strikingly coercive. As Arthur Wright once observed, one of the “radical continuities” of Chinese history is its aspiration to a notably hierarchical and conformist, even authoritarian, ideal of harmony:

“One continuing element is a belief in the eternal truth and universal validity of the [Confucian] founder’s vision of perfected men living in a stable

and harmonious sociopolitical order. ... At the center of this vision ... is the ideal of a moral order, perceived by Confucius and validated by sages and historians down the centuries. The moral order is viewed as a set of true and invariable norms for the conduct of life in society. Elaborated in the *li*, the codified rules of social behavior, the Confucian norms find their perfect embodiment in the well-ordered patriarchal family, which is the microcosm of the order that should prevail in state and society.”⁹⁸

This conception “does not presuppose any notion of a moral order transcending the consensual order that could justify either demagogic appeals or appeals to individual conscience, and that might disrupt the consensus.”⁹⁹ Not for nothing, therefore, do Chinese dissidents suppressed by the state sometimes refer to themselves as having been “harmonized.”¹⁰⁰ And while the “community of shared future” concept is perhaps intended to sound less sinister, it draws upon these same wellsprings.

There is also expected to be a prominent role for Chinese military power in the emerging new world, for in this vision China is seen to be a state that “safeguards world peace through real actions.” The People’s Liberation Army “serves as a strategic safeguard for world peace and development,” and China is thereby

“a builder of world peace ... and a guardian of global order, contributing Chinese wisdom and strength to building a global community of shared future and developing a better world.”¹⁰¹

The clear echoes of ancient Chinese ideas of hierarchical and monist order here are no coincidence. As CCP officials explain it, “[t]he idea of building a global community of shared future draws from the essence of traditional Chinese culture,” and reflects the idea

that “[a]ll countries should reach consensus that transcends ethnicity, beliefs, culture, and location.”¹⁰² They envision what Xi Jinping has termed “a new type of international relations” that has distinctively “Chinese characteristics,”¹⁰³ and in which China is “a global leader in terms of composite national strength and international influence.”¹⁰⁴ This Chinese international order will offer “a new option to the international community.”¹⁰⁵

Hierarchy and Inequality

Nor should anyone think that all states in this future Sinocentric system enjoy the formal juridical equality that they are afforded under modern international law. Quite consistent with Yang Jiechi’s 2010 rant to Association of South East Asian Nations ambassadors that “China is a big country and other countries are small countries, and that’s just a fact,”¹⁰⁶ CCP documents repeatedly signal that China views states as having rights and responsibilities that differ depending upon their status in the international hierarchy. As a 2019 white paper published by the State Council Information Office explains,

“Major countries should fulfill their responsibilities commensurate with their status. ... The international status of a country is measured by its openness of mind, breadth of vision, and sense of responsibility rather than its size, strength or power. Major countries should direct their primary efforts to the future of humanity and assume greater responsibilities for world peace and development ...”¹⁰⁷

This is what Xi Jinping describes as “major country diplomacy,”¹⁰⁸ in which the great powers have extra rights and privileges—including military ones¹⁰⁹—not afforded to lesser states. In this conception, furthermore, the most significant power has a unique role at the center of the system, in setting and enforcing its basic norms. CCP officials envision China being that state.

Building a New Order

Leaving aside Maoist messianism, Chinese officials have been saying since at least 2002—when Jiang Zemin declared that “the ‘old international political and economic order’ had become ‘unfair and has to be changed fundamentally’”¹¹⁰—that they wanted to restructure the international system. But what, exactly, does the CCP want to create?

It is certainly the case that in the future world it seeks, China envisions itself as having “surpassed the United States as the undisputed leader of the Asia-Pacific” and to have “surpassed the United States as the world’s most ‘indispensable power’” globally as well.¹¹¹ It is also clear that China envisions the United States adopting “a deferential position regarding Chinese leadership globally” by behaving “in a manner that is consistent with a *de facto* acceptance of a position of inferiority.”¹¹²

To date, however, there has been surprisingly little effort in the West to explore what the “global community of shared future” that China envisions as “a new option for the international community” would actually look like in detail. One of the few treatments of this issue was undertaken by Timothy Heath, Derek Grossman, and Asha Clark at RAND, who insightfully explore what China appears to mean as it contemplates “establish[ing] Chinese leadership of the international order.”¹¹³ Their conclusions in this respect are consonant with the findings of this paper, and are worth quoting in detail.

According to Heath and his coauthors, China’s desired end state can be summarized as having at least seven principal elements:

“(1) War with the United States is avoided, although this does not exclude the possibility of militarized crises or conflicts of a limited scope (e.g., proxy wars);

“(2) the United States respects China’s authority as the global leader, even as the United States remains a powerful but clearly inferior nation;

“(3) the United States largely refrains from harming Chinese interests;

“(4) China has established primacy across much of Eurasia, the Middle East, and Africa, principally through collaboration with a network of client states;

“(5) U.S. primacy has been reduced to the Americas, although it may still maintain a military, economic, and diplomatic presence worldwide;

“(6) the United States and China manage their differences according to norms upheld by China; and

“(7) the two cooperate on shared concerns on terms defined largely by the Chinese.”¹¹⁴

Their study suggests that China’s self-envisioned domination of the international system is likely to proceed less through mechanisms of direct control and rule over foreign peoples than through more “informal methods, such as patronage.” Indeed, they speculate about whether patron-client ties would become the principal model for Chinese foreign policy.¹¹⁵

“In this vision, China maintains a porous form of primacy in the Indo-Pacific, in which it coexists uneasily with major powers Japan, the United States, and India. In this theater, China is regarded by all nations as the single most important power and exercises considerable influence through a network of partner and client states, primarily among developing countries in Central, South, and Southeast Asia. Outside Asia, China serves more as the central interlocutor among major powers that, in turn, oversee a set of somewhat permeable spheres of influence. ... Major powers manage

their differences according to norms established by China, but all respect the primacy of China’s interests and authority worldwide.

“China has become the predominant economic, political, and security power in the Indo-Pacific while coexisting with major powers, such as Japan and India. ... Chinese discourse is dominant in Asia and widely understood globally; Chinese norms, values, and preferences are predominant in the global management of space, cyber, law, and maritime domains. China acts as a provider of global goods, principally in collaboration with its clients. ...

“In other parts of the world [beyond Asia], China may generally defer to other major powers that, in turn, coordinate policy with Beijing through institutionalized relationships reminiscent of a spheres-of-influence-type arrangement—but mediated through norms led by China. However, even in other parts of the world, China has client states and would accordingly expect relevant major powers to respect Beijing’s relationship with those countries.”¹¹⁶

This RAND account rings true, and is notably congruent with a growing body of scholarship from careful Western observers of Chinese politics and foreign relations. Elizabeth Economy, for instance, has emphasized that Xi Jinping’s vision of the “great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation” envisions

“a China that has regained centrality on the global stage: it has reclaimed contested territory, assumed a position of preeminence in the Asia Pacific, ensured that other countries have aligned their political, economic, and security interests with its own, provided the world’s technological infrastructure for the 21st century, and embedded

its norms, values, and standards in international laws and institutions. ... He also seeks to control the content and flow of information—both within China and among international actors—to align them with Beijing's values and priorities.”¹¹⁷

Envisioning Celestial Empire 2.0

What has been less well noted in the West, however, is the degree to which this global network of clientelistic relationships within a differentially Sinocentric normative code bears a striking resemblance to the tributary and vassalage relationships that ancient China traditionally sought to create with the rest of the world.

Some Chinese sources suggestively hint at this. As one CCP “patriotic education” textbook describes things, for instance, the goal of “national rejuvenation” is to ensure that China “rise[s] again to be an awesome and gracious great power like in the past that will stand lofty and firm in the Eastern part of the world.”¹¹⁸ Chinese scholar Yan Xuetong also minces characteristically few words in pronouncing that the objective is to “restore China's power status to the prosperity enjoyed during the prime of the Han, Tang[,] and early Qing dynasties” when it was at the center of a hierarchical world order.¹¹⁹

As China succeeds in “transforming the global order into a form more compatible with Chinese interests and values”¹²⁰ and that revolves around China,¹²¹ its vision draws upon what has become known as *tianxia* theory, based upon the ancient view of the Chinese emperor's rightful dominion over “All under Heaven.” In this view, Beijing must renew for itself the civilizational and political centrality that it imagines China to have possessed for thousands of years prior to the “Century of Humiliation” that began with the Opium War of 1842. As summarized by William Callahan, in this conception,

“China's soft power ... takes shape through the romanticization of a particular national culture into ‘universally desirable values.’ ... As it shifts from being a rule-follower to a rule-maker, ... [p]art of this ‘rule-making’ involves producing and distributing new norms and values, which Beijing promotes as ‘ancient Chinese wisdom’ on the world stage. China needs to excel not only in economic production, but also in ‘knowledge production’ that ‘creates new world concepts and new world structures.’ ... [There] is [thus] much talk about the ‘Chinese Dream’ replacing the ‘American Dream’”¹²²

The vision of a renewed *tianxia* system propounded by scholars such as Zhao Tingyang seeks to draw upon China's own “resources of traditional thought” in order to “create new world concepts and new world structures” based on the idea of *tianxia*—a morally and politically hierarchical global unity that is geographical, psychological, and institutional, but that lacks sharp physical or ethical borders.¹²³ Ancient China's idea of empire was

“a largely borderless one, both in its geographical form and in what it considered to be the relevance or applicability—what the French would call the *rayonnement*—of its ideas. One could argue that there has never been a more universal conception of rule.”¹²⁴

As the Yongle emperor—Zhu Dhi, the third emperor of the Ming Dynasty—put it, “there are no outsiders. All countries that wish to express sincerity by coming to offer tribute are to be allowed to do so.”¹²⁵ According to him, “I do not differentiate between those here and those there.”¹²⁶

Furthermore, as recounted by Zheng Wang in discussing China's ancient *tianxia* conception,

“[m]embership in this community was defined by participation in ritual order that embodied allegiance to Chinese ideas and ethics centered around the

Chinese emperor. Supreme loyalty to the culture itself, not to the state, was paramount.”¹²⁷

A modernized version of this old idea would conceive of itself in similarly moral, political, and cultural terms. It would, moreover, be no less fundamentally hierarchical, nor less coercive.

This is a model familiar from traditional Confucian society, and it helps explain modern China's fixation upon a “comprehensive” conception of national power and assumption of monist hierarchy centered on a dominant, norm-setting central state in the world system.

“Confucian theory had a strong conception of the responsibilities owed to each other by participants in the social order, but these were not inherent obligations—that is, fundamental rights or duties—but rather positional ones that derived from the relative status of each player and his role within the system. This was not a fundamentally egalitarian system, in other words, but instead one lived out principally along the *vertical* dimension, for much in this scheme flowed from the ascription of relative position (e.g., father versus son, husband versus wife, ruler versus subject, or elder sibling versus younger sibling).

“To the extent that CNP theory permitted the rectification of labels in the international arena, therefore, it followed that the relative rights and duties of countries within the global system hinged to some extent upon their relative positions on CNP league tables. Notably, this logic would seem to imply that it was appropriate for the dominant state in the international system to set the basic rules for interaction therein—as, indeed, a sovereign oversaw the maintenance of harmony in his kingdom or a father within his family.”¹²⁸

The patron-client networks identified in the RAND study as being central to the international end-state desired by Chinese strategy are, in other words, the CCP's effort to translate a version of China's ancient, Confucian-inflected system of tributary vassalage—proceeding outward in concentric circles of civilizational virtue throughout “All under Heaven”—into 21st century form. As Mark Twain is said to have observed, history may not repeat itself, but it often rhymes. One can hear such a rhyming of ancient cadences in the CCP's vision of a “community of common destiny for mankind.”

Ancient Precedents?

In one sense, this should not be surprising. Shocked by the psychic trauma of their country's grandeur-deflating encounter with Western power in the 19th century, Chinese thinkers developed

“the view—which has persisted to the present day—that the key to understanding China's uncomfortable present and uncertain future could be found in ... its ancient past.”¹²⁹

Specifically, Chinese came to conceptualize the modern international system by reference to what was arguably the only period of China's own history in which a system of competing states could be said to have existed: the Springs and Autumns (*Chunqiu*) and Warring States (*Zhanguo*) periods that predated China's first real unification under the short-lived (and notably tyrannical) Qin Dynasty in 221 B.C.E.

“From a Chinese point of view, so far as international politics is concerned, the history of our world in the present and immediately preceding centuries looks like a repetition of the Chinese history of the

Ch'un Ch'iu [Springs and Autumns] and *Chan Kuo* [Warring States] periods. ... [The Chinese had] been accustomed to a centralized organization [of the world] that would operate for world peace. But in recent times they have been plunged into a world with international conditions similar to those of the remote periods of the *Ch'un Ch'iu* and *Chan Kuo*.¹³⁰

In this context, therefore, it would not be beyond imagining—as this author has argued elsewhere¹³¹—that as modern Chinese leaders envision the mid-21st century future for themselves, they see there a modernized, updated version of the kind of relationship that many of those early Chinese proto-states had with their notional suzerain, the Zhou king. In particular, one should probably look to the Zhou Dynasty and its role during the Springs and Autumns and Warring States periods as a clue to the CCP's conceptual model for China's own future vis-à-vis the rest of the world.

Early in the Zhou Dynasty—particularly in its “Eastern Zhou” phase—the Zhou king ruled over a patchwork of local potentates under whom existed a network of feudal territories not entirely unlike that of medieval Europe: “hundreds of tiny states and polities ruled by overlords (*zhuhou*), most of whom were relatives of the royal house.” Over time, however—and especially in the “Western Zhou” period—the Zhou ruler gradually lost effective control over his feudatories, and these territories evolved into a system of what were in effect independent states.

Nevertheless, despite their functional independence, for a very long time these local rulers still paid deference to the *theoretically* superior status of the king of Zhou. These proto-states ran their affairs most of the time—and often struggled against each other in a *de facto* multistate system—but for centuries they still turned to the Zhou king for things such as symbolic validation for their own dynastic successions, they ostentatiously

tipped their hat to Zhou as the superior and more virtuous power, and they sent obsequious tributary envoys to Zhou to acknowledge the notional superiority of the Zhou Imperial seat.

This created a “two-tier rulership system, in which under the supreme aegis of the Zhou monarch, autonomous (and eventually independent) regional lords (*zhuhou*) ruled their lands as unrivaled potentates.”¹³⁴

“The Zhou kings, Sons of Heaven (*tianzi*), continued to exercise their largely ceremonial authority over powerful overlords. Yearly court visits continued, royal envoys visited the courts of fraternal polities, and the kings initiated punitive expeditions against those overlords who dared to behave ‘irreverently’ toward the Son of Heaven.”¹³⁵

Even when lords became functionally independent, they eschewed the title “Son of Heaven,” which still belonged to their notional sovereign, the Zhou ruler, and paid ritual obeisance to the Zhou.

For its part, Zhou was content with this, provided that it received the respect it felt it deserved as a sort of *paterfamilias* for the system, to be paid homage and not to be offended.¹³⁶ It presided, in other words, over a functionally multistate but *notionally* monist political order in which a “ritualized affirmation of China's cultural hegemony over all other peoples” and various other “rituals of submission” allowed the Zhou to remain “symbolically, at least, an ‘empire without neighbours’” at the center of All under Heaven.¹³⁷

It was this schema of political order that lay behind China's longstanding emphasis upon trying to maintain what has been called its “tributary system” of relationships with foreign peoples. As Morris Rossabi has recounted, on this conceptual foundation, the Chinese

“developed a unique system of foreign relations. Starting with the assumption that their civilization was the most advanced in the world, they devised a scheme which demanded acknowledgement of their superiority. . . . The Chinese emperor, who had a Mandate of Heaven to rule his own people, was a vital link to the ‘barbarians.’ His conduct inspired them to seek the benefits of Chinese culture. His ‘virtuous action was believed to attract irresistibly the barbarians who were outside the pale of Chinese civilization proper.’ His benevolence, compassion, and generosity would serve as a model for foreign rulers and would draw them and their people closer to China. They would naturally accept the superiority of the Chinese.

“... The tribute system enabled China to devise its own world order. The Chinese court dealt with foreigners on its own terms. Equality with China was ruled out. The court could not conceive of international relations. It could not accept other states or tribes as equals. Foreign rulers and their envoys were treated as subordinates or inferiors. The court would not tolerate rulers who did not abide by its world order. It refused entry into China to those who rejected its system of foreign relations. The Chinese emperor was not merely *primus inter pares*. He was the Son of Heaven, the undisputed leader of the peoples of East Asia, if not the world.”¹³⁸

This tributary system may not always have been as rigid and hierarchically Sinocentric in practice as it was in theory,¹³⁹ but it was nonetheless “central to China’s self-image as well as its strategic vision” in ancient times.¹⁴⁰

As the reader can see, there are strong echoes of this construct in the Sinocentric vision of Hu Jintao’s “harmonious world” and Xi Jinping’s “community of shared destiny for mankind.” There are also all but

explicit evocations of these concepts in the work of modern Chinese scholars such as Zhao Tingyang and Yan Xuetong.¹⁴¹ All revolve around the conceit of a politico-moral core that presides over a network of lesser states who treat it with respectful awe and defer to its interests on key issues. As observed by French

“at the foundation of th[e] [ancient] *Pax Sinica* lay a basic proposition that was reasonably consistent: Accept our superiority and we will confer upon you political legitimacy, develop a trade partnership and provide a range of what are known in the language of modern international affairs as public goods.”¹⁴²

As the reader will by now recognize, all of these elements appear in modern-day CCP propaganda narratives and strategic planning documents—even down to the idea of providing “public goods” in response for deference and subservience,¹⁴³ as any benevolent emperor should.

International Relations Theory “with Chinese Characteristics”

Another useful framing can perhaps be found in the constructivist scholarship of Christian Reus-Smit, who has attempted to understand eras of international relations from an ontological perspective that explores how different ideas about “the moral purpose of the state” help provide “the justificatory foundations for the principle of sovereignty and the prevailing norm of pure procedural justice” that shape distinctive periods of international order.¹⁴⁴ For him, while the idea of national sovereignty has existed for centuries—at least in Western cultural contexts—its actual meaning has varied because the concept of sovereignty has “always been encased within larger complexes of metavalues, encoded within broader constitutive frameworks.” He terms these complexes “constitutional structures,” and describes them as existing in a three-fold form:

“a hegemonic belief about the moral purpose of the state, an organizing principle of sovereignty, and a systemic norm of procedural justice. Hegemonic beliefs about the moral purpose of the state represent the core of the normative complex, providing the justificatory foundations of this organizing principle of sovereignty and informing the norm of procedural justice. Together they form a coherent ensemble of metavalues, an ensemble that defines the terms of legitimate statehood and the broad parameters of rightful state action. Most importantly for our purpose, the prevailing norm of procedural justice shapes institutional design and action, defining institutional rationality in a distinctive way, leading states to adopt certain institutional practices but not others.”¹⁴⁵

According to Reus-Smit, the different societies of states that have existed over the centuries have each had a distinctive constitutional structure, each conceiving the moral purpose of the state differently and proposing a somewhat different organizing principle for sovereignty based upon that moral understanding. Each society of states, moreover, adopts a norm of procedural justice built upon this foundation, and this norm helps determine the basic institutional framework of that particular state system.

As an example—though he also discusses the state systems of ancient Greece, Renaissance Italy, and the early-modern “Absolutist Europe” of divine-right monarchies—Reus-Smit contends that the society of states that developed in the 19th century and that has come to constitute the international system as we know it today finds the moral purpose of the state to lie in facilitating individual citizens’ liberty and permitting them to fulfil their potential. The organizing principle for sovereignty in the modern international system

is thus the “liberal sovereignty” of rights-bearing individuals interacting within and protected by a state structure that is accountable to them via the ballot box. Correspondingly, the governing norm of procedural justice is a form of “legislative justice” that manifests itself in institutional form at home in parliamentary democracy and abroad in contractual international law and multilateral institutions.¹⁴⁶

Through this lens, one might imagine that China’s modern *tianxia* theorists—and the CCP leaders in whose self-romanticizing vision the rest of the world will come to look at and defer to *them* much as the Zhou king’s largely independent vassals of old did with him—may be in effect proposing a candidate state-system of their own. The Sinocentric order of Xi Jinping’s “community of shared destiny,” a “new type of international relations” guided by ancient “Chinese wisdom and strength,” aspires to compete with Western ideas of juridically coequal sovereignties, contractual international law, and human rights by offering its own version of the metavalues and constitutional structure that Reus-Smit conceptualizes.

1) In the *tianxia* vision, the purpose of the state has nothing to do with individual rights and potentialities. Rather, the purpose of the state is for the people whose affairs it organizes to *play their proper role* in a “harmonious” and vertically constituted system of social order centered on China as the civilizational and politico-moral leader and norm-setter for the system. In such a system, as a good Confucian might expect, those above are expected to show benevolence to their inferiors; those below must show loyalty, respect, and deference to their superiors; and all must know—and stick to—their specified place and role.

2) Accordingly, the organizing principle of national sovereignty in *tianxia* is not democratic self-governance by a voting population within defined frontiers, but rather one's *degree of Sinicization*—that is, the extent to which any given people accepts and acts according to the value system of the harmonious order. Possessing sovereignty, therefore, is not about having independence and autonomy in a strong sense, but instead merely about how thoroughly one associates oneself with the values of the systemic leader and behaves properly thereunder: those who entirely reject the proper order of things by rejecting those values would actually not enjoy sovereignty at all.

3) The governing norm of procedural justice here is *harmonious acceptance*—that is, acceptance of one's status within the system, and one's willingness to live out the well-understood roles encoded in each such assignment of status. It is a Confucian sort of *propriety*, rooted in the diligent performance of one's duties within the proper social order.

4) The institutional rationality that arises from the metavalues of this envisioned state system is one of *tributary diligence*.¹⁴⁷ It is a performative international politics in which entities demonstrate their fidelity to the governing norm of procedural justice (*i.e.*, harmonious acceptance), in part by giving appropriate status-deference to and validating the legitimacy of the systemic center.¹⁴⁸

Conclusion

This analysis, of course, is not to suggest that the *tianxia* concept will actually come to be the hegemonic normative system for a global (or even regional) system of states analogous to the state systems explored by Reus-Smit in ancient Greece, Renaissance Italy, absolutist Europe, and modern Western-derived international relations. To *wish* things so is not to *make* them thus, and there is as yet little sign that the other states of the world will accept the bold claim of Chinese moral and patriarchal authority over them that CCP strategists seem eventually to envision. Nor is there much sign that such an ambitious and virtue-claiming system of social control through cultural and moral attraction could succeed or be sustainable through coercive force alone, especially when it is exercised by a ruling caste that has the CCP's taste for oppressive brutality when offended.

A Sinocentric vision grounded in idiosyncratic and culturally specific 2,500-year-old conceptual precedents and buttressed by generations of romanticized imagining by Chinese nationalists is thus perhaps far too ambitious to succeed in the modern world. Nevertheless, it is important to understand this Chinese strategic vision if one is to see how the constituent elements of CCP strategy and policy fit together, and to understand the motivational complex *behind* Chinese policy. It is the contention of this three-paper series that these myriad elements form a relatively coherent whole that can indeed be understood—both in their particularistic contours and in their direction—through the prism of this Sinocentric vision.

If the CCP's vision for China's future is one that U.S. leaders and those in the rest of the world would be comfortable seeing come to pass, wider awareness of these patterns in Communist Party thinking may have little operational consequence, except perhaps to suggest the usefulness of continuing the West's traditional post-Maoist policy of encouraging the PRC's rise.¹⁴⁹ If, on the other hand, the CCP's strategic vision is of a world that such leaders would find *unacceptable*—one in which, for instance, the United States would shift from urging China to be a “responsible stakeholder” in the existing international system¹⁵⁰ to playing its assigned role in a future Sinocentric world order on the CCP's terms—this awareness should be a foundation for action. Specifically, understanding China's strategic vision should be a call to action in developing effective competitive strategies *against* the fulfillment of that vision.

If Lawrence Freedman is right that strategy may be considered “a story about power told in the future tense from the perspective of a leading character,”¹⁵¹ the reader will now have what is hopefully a much stronger grasp not just of China's strategy, but also of *why* the rest of the world confronts the challenges it does in modern China. And if in turn the ancient Chinese strategist Sunzi (a.k.a. Sun-Tzu) is right that the best way to defeat an adversary is to thwart his strategy,¹⁵² it is the hope of these papers to help U.S. leaders be better prepared for such success through an awareness of what it is they need to thwart.

About the Author

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branch and U.S. Senate committee staff positions, as a think tank scholar, and as an intelligence officer in the U.S. Navy Reserve. He is the author of *The Mind of Empire: China's History and Modern Foreign Relations* (2010) and *China Looks at the West: Identity, Global Ambitions, and the Future of Sino-American Relations* (2015). The views expressed herein are entirely his own, and do not necessarily represent those of anyone else.

Endnotes

- ¹ Zheng Wang, *Never Forget National Humiliation: Historical Memory in Chinese Politics and Foreign Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), at 72-75.
- ² See Christopher Ford, *The Mind of Empire: China's History and Modern Foreign Relations* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2010), at 83.
- ³ See, e.g., Ford, *The Mind of Empire*, *supra*, at 239-41 & 267; see also William A. Callahan, *China: The Pessoptimist Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), at 109.
- ⁴ Whether advanced by China's rulers or by rebels contesting foreign conquerors, the slogan "Give us back our rivers and mountains!" (*huan wo ho shan*)—first associated with the famous general Yüeh Fei of the Southern Song Dynasty in its 12th century struggles against the Jurchen-ruled Jin Dynasty—has "remained a battlecry of Chinese patriots through the centuries." Robert Ruhlmann, "Traditional Heroes in Chinese Popular Fiction," in *The Confucian Persuasion* (Arthur F. Wright, ed.) (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1960), at 154; cf. Alastair Iain Johnston, "Cultural Realism and Strategy in Maoist China," in *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics* (Peter J. Katzenstein, ed.) (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), at 252 (noting that "Chinese decision makers tended to see territorial disputes as high-value conflicts, partly because of a sensitivity to threats to the territorial integrity of the state").
- ⁵ Ford, *The Mind of Empire*, *supra*, at 34 & 37.
- ⁶ Zheng Wang, *supra*, at 131.
- ⁷ Quoted by Timothy R. Heath, Derek Grossman, & Asha Clark, "China's Quest for Primacy: An Analysis of Chinese International and Defense Strategies to Outcompete the United States," RAND Corporation (2021), at 33, available at https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RRA400/RRA447-1/RAND_RRA447-1.pdf.
- ⁸ See, e.g., Igor Denisov, "Aigun, Russia, and China's 'Century of Humiliation,'" Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (Moscow) (October 6, 2015), available at <https://carnegiemoscow.org/commentary/60357>; Christian F. Ostermann, "East German Documents on the Border Conflict, 1969," in "New Evidence on the Sino-Soviet Border Dispute, 1969-71," Cold War International History Project Bulletin (undated), at 188-89 (discussing a September 1969 meeting between Soviet Premier Aleksei Kosygin and Chinese Foreign Minister Zhou Enlai), available at <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/publication/ACF1AA.pdf>.
- ⁹ See Callahan, *supra*, at 105, 109, & 111-15.
- ¹⁰ Denisov, *supra*.
- ¹¹ See, e.g., Hannah Beech, "Just Where Exactly Did China Get the South China Sea Nine-Dash Line From?" Time (July 19, 2016), available at <https://time.com/4412191/nine-dash-line-9-south-china-sea/>; U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs, "China: Maritime Claims in the South China Sea," *Limits in the Seas*, Report No. 143 (December 5, 2014), at 3, available at <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/LIS-143.pdf>.
- ¹² *Sacred Mandates* (Timothy Brook, Michael van Walt van Praag, & Miek Boltjes, eds.) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), at 194-95.
- ¹³ Cf. Jeremy A. Yellen, *The Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere: When Total Empire Met Total War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019).
- ¹⁴ Rush Doshi, *The Long Game: China's Grand Strategy to Displace American Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), at 169-75 & 211. This has been, at least, its primary motivation in recent years. According to Jianwei Wang, however, China's initial push for "peripheral diplomacy" began years earlier, as part of Beijing's effort to break out of the international isolation caused by the CCP's massacre of pro-democracy students and workers in Tiananmen Square on June 4, 1989. Jianwei Wang, "China's Multilateral Diplomacy in the New Millennium," in *China Rising: Power and Motivation in Chinese Foreign Policy* (Yong Deng & Fei-Ling Wang, eds.) (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), at 159, 166; see also Ming Wan, "Democracy and Human Rights in Chinese Foreign Policy: Motivation and Behavior," in *China Rising*, *supra*,

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at 279, 286 (noting that China's "clash with the West" over the events of 1989 helped spark new Chinese diplomatic efforts to reach out to Third World countries).

- ¹⁵ National People's Congress, *Outline of the People's Republic of China 14th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development and Long-Range Objectives for 2035* (published by Xinhua News Agency, March 12, 2021) ["14th FYP Outline"], at 26-27 & 101, available at https://cset.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/t0284_14th_Five_Year_Plan_EN.pdf [Chinese source <https://perma.cc/73AK-BUW2>] The range of infrastructure projects underway—both in the physical and the digital realm—as well as the scale of investments involved, is indeed extraordinary. See, e.g., "China's National Development Strategy and Industrial Policy: A Path to Comprehensive National Power," MITRE Corporation paper prepared for the U.S. Air Force Office of Commercial and Economic Analysis (January 2022), at 31-32 & 34 ("First announced in 2013 as 'One Belt One Road' (OBOR), China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is Xi Jinping's signature foreign policy initiative, and today is the world's largest infrastructure program. BRI comprises a global network of land, maritime, space, and undersea fiber optic channels, loosely identified as 'belts' on land and 'roads' at sea. It includes an expanding set of other 'economic corridors,' from energy to digital information to health. Within each channel, Chinese entities partner with local host nation corporations and government authorities on a wide variety of projects: transportation infrastructure, logistical data management, communications networks, satellite navigation systems, and many others. With over 140 partner states, the BRI represents thus far an investment of \$1 to \$8 trillion. ... In addition to pursuing trade benefits and a shifting economic center of gravity, BRI allows placement and access to critical physical and digital infrastructure. From transportation nodes and links to undersea cables to satellite communications equipment, ground and orbital—BRI-enabled physical and digital presence provides an ability to place software, sensors, and/or weapons that can degrade, disrupt, deny, deter, and/or annoy both U.S. commercial activity and U.S. and allied military logistics and mobilization activities. Consequently,

PRC presence beyond its shores extends China's power, influence, and strategic deterrence capability, increasing the potential for China to shape the behavior of third-party BRI-partner countries.").

- ¹⁶ Doshi, *supra*, at 227 (quoting Joint Sino-Russian Initiative).
- ¹⁷ Doshi, *supra*, at 240 (quoting Xi Jinping statement at the 2013 Work Plenum on Peripheral Diplomacy).
- ¹⁸ Quoted by Doshi, *supra*, at 182.
- ¹⁹ Quoted by Doshi, *supra*, at 209.
- ²⁰ Benjamin I. Schwartz, "The Chinese Perception of World Order, Past and Present," in John King Fairbank, *The Chinese World Order* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1968), at 284.
- ²¹ State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, "China and the World in the New Era" (September 27, 2019) [hereinafter "SCIO, 'China and the World in the New Era'"], at 47, available at https://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/201909/27/content_WS5d8d80f9c6d0bcf8c4c142ef.html.
- ²² Heath et al., *supra*, at xv & 105; see also, e.g., *id.* at 7. BRI and other Chinese investments in overseas ports also allow Beijing to gain control of foreign infrastructure that at the very least supports Chinese economic growth and resilience in the face of potential future economic sanctions, and may even also provide dual-use capacity that could be converted to People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy applications in time of conflict. See, e.g., Economy, *supra*, at 108 (discussing port projects in Kenya, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Malaysia, and Cambodia, and noting that "China owns or has a stake in nearly two-thirds of the world's 50 largest ports").
- ²³ See, e.g., Jianwei Wang, *supra*, at 101-02 & 122-33. Both Jianwei Wang and Doshi recount China's fear of and resistance in the early 1990s to U.S. efforts to formulate the Asia Pacific Economic Forum (APEC) as the Asia Pacific Economic Community, contrasting China's approach in that case to its enthusiasm for U.S.-exclusive mechanisms such as the "ASEAN+3" forum (China, Japan, and South Korea) and the Shanghai Cooperation

Organization (SCO). See Jianwei Wang, *supra*, at 172, 177, 189, & 184; Doshi, *supra*, at 101-02. Howard French also describes China's establishment of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) as a major watershed not merely as an early example of China's willingness to build mechanisms for Sinocentric regional integration, but also because of "the cascading adhesion [to the AIIB] of almost every traditional American ally, starting with Britain, in spite of Washington's strenuous attempts to dissuade them from joining, or at least slow the stampede." French, *supra*, at 187.

- ²⁴ Doshi, for instance, quotes the memoirs of Wang Yusheng, China's first ambassador to APEC, to demonstrate the degree to which Chinese officials resented the international order they felt had been created by the United States' combination of military power, strong dollars, large economy, information technology dominance, and an "outspoken media." Doshi, *supra*, at 105-06 & 114-15.
- ²⁵ Howard W. French, *Everything Under the Heavens: How the Past Helps Shape China's Push for Global Power* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2017), at 70, 120, 135, & 248-49.
- ²⁶ SCIO, "China and the World in the New Era," *supra*, at 45 & 44.
- ²⁷ Elizabeth C. Economy, *The World According to China* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2022), at 126. It is also worth remembering that although China promotes BRI engagement as a way through which other developing countries can share in the success of China's own developmental model, there is a world of difference between China developing while holding *its own debt* and BRI partners developing while *China holds their debt*. See, e.g., Elizabeth C. Economy, *The World According to China* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2022), at 99. In practice, BRI projects often rely exclusively upon Chinese companies and labor. Nearly 90 percent of construction projects under the BRI, for instance, reportedly rely exclusively upon Chinese companies, with World Bank figures also showing that perhaps two-thirds of BRI projects are run by Chinese entities. *Id.* at 99-100.

(Note that it is reportedly difficult to assess exactly how many BRI projects there actually are, as well as what is actually to be spent thereupon. *Id.* at 97-98.) Chinese-held debt represents a powerful source of leverage for Beijing over countries in the developing world. More than three-fifths of China's BRI partners are rated at below investment grade risk, and more than two-thirds are rated as "at risk." According to one study of 50 recipients of Chinese loans in the developing world, the average debt to China rose from 1 percent in 2005 to 15 percent in 2017. China is hardly shy, moreover, about leveraging debt relationships into deeper ties of dependency. When Sri Lankan authorities were unable to service debts for refurbishment of the port of Hambantota, for instance, China demanded (and secured) a 99-year lease to that port. Similarly, in Ecuador, unserviceable debt for a hydroelectric project led to China claiming some 80 percent of the country's oil exports for at least the next five years. *Id.* at 100-01. This is ironic indeed, given that Chinese nationalists long excoriated Britain's 99-year lease on Hong Kong's "New Territories" as a travesty of imperialist injustice. See, e.g., Christopher S. Wren, "China Calls Hong Kong Pacts Invalid," *New York Times* (October 1, 1982) (quoting the China News Agency that "Hong Kong is part of Chinese territory. The treaties concerning the Hong Kong area between the British Government and the Government of the Manchu Dynasty of China were unequal treaties that have never been accepted by the Chinese people. The consistent position of the Government of the People's Republic of China has been that China is not bound by these unequal treaties and that the whole Hong Kong area will be recovered when conditions are ripe."), available at <https://www.nytimes.com/1982/10/01/world/china-calls-hong-kong-pacts-invalid.html>.

- ²⁸ Economy, *supra*, at 22 (emphasis added).
- ²⁹ Heath et al., *supra*, at 145.
- ³⁰ Xinhua News Service, "Xi Stresses Urgency of Reforming Global Governance," *China Daily* (October 14, 2015), quoted by Heath et al., *supra*, at 81.
- ³¹ SCIO, "China and the World in the New Era," *supra*, at 47.

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- ³² Heath et al., *supra*, at 42 & 106.
- ³³ Policy Planning Staff, Office of the U.S. Secretary of State, *Elements of the China Challenge* (November 2020 [Revised December 2020]), at 9, available at <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/20-02832-Elements-of-China-Challenge-508.pdf>.
- ³⁴ Economy, *supra*, at 8.
- ³⁵ *Id.* at 5.
- ³⁶ 14th FYP Outline, *supra*, at 102.
- ³⁷ SCIO, “China and the World in the New Era,” *supra*, at 36 (emphasis added).
- ³⁸ Economy, *supra*, at 196.
- ³⁹ Economy, *supra*, at 138. Setting international technology standards can also offer China benefits in other arenas as well, of course, beyond merely the profits that would accrue to Chinese companies if their technology became the model to which other players conform. Elizabeth Economy notes, for instance, the degree to which China’s “New IP Initiative”—promoted at the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) by the PRC Ministry of Industry and Information Technology as well as China Unicom, China Telecom, and the technology company Huawei—would legitimize government control of information within a society. (That initiative would encourage governments to control Internet Service Providers [ISPs] within their territory, and indeed to “monitor and gate individual access” by every internet-access device therein, including through the installation of a so-called “shut-up command” that would allow central network administrators to cut off all communications to or from a particular Internet Protocol [IP] address.) *Id.* at 198.
- ⁴⁰ CPC Central Committee and the State Council, *Outline of the National Innovation-Driven Development Strategy* (published by Xinhua News Agency, May 19, 2016), at 17, available at <https://cset.georgetown.edu/publication/outline-of-the-national-innovation-driven-development-strategy/> [Chinese source: http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2016-05/19/c_1118898033.htm].
- ⁴¹ 14th FYP Outline, *supra*, at 44-45. There is even a “Health Silk Road,” which includes trying to promote the global adoption of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) “without subjecting TCM to the same rigorous testing demanded of Western treatments.” Economy, *supra*, at 15.
- ⁴² “China’s National Development Strategy and Industrial Policy,” *supra*, at 15; see also Heath et al., *supra*, at xvi-xvii (“In the multilateral domain, the strategy envisions a broad effort to shape rules, norms, and agendas to favor the interests of China and its clients at the expense of the United States.”).
- ⁴³ An additional benefit for China is that the CCP uses Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) engagement to spread practices consistent with its own domestic approach to content-suppressive electronic surveillance and social control. Under BRI, for instance, Chinese technicians train other governments in Chinese-style methods for monitoring and controlling civil society. Overseas “safe cities” development projects also help Beijing internationalize its domestic approaches to centralizing internet monitoring, video surveillance, tracking of cell phones with location services, and uploading of user biometric data into centrally managed data centers. Economy, *supra*, at 25 & 111-14.
- ⁴⁴ Cf. Christian Reus-Smit, *The Moral Purpose of the State: Culture, Social Identity, and Institutional Rationality in International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), at 28 (citing Habermas in *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*).
- ⁴⁵ According to Gramsci, social hegemony and political government by an oppressive dominant class—as he viewed the bourgeoisie of his time in Italy in the early decades of the 20th century—was run and perpetuated in part through the creation and maintenance of a hegemonic ideology that helps it manufacture “consent” by the masses. See, e.g., Antonio Gramsci, *The Antonio Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings, 1916-1935* (David Forgacs, ed.) (New York: New York University Press, 2000), at 306-07. It was thus part of the project of the Marxist revolutionary, he felt, to work to create a

countervailing ideology, and work to make it hegemonic instead. *Id.* at 249-50. Gramsci thus emphasized, among other things, working to understand and thereafter to counter “how the ideological structure of a dominant class is actually organized”—a project that would require analysis of such things as the role of the press, civil groups and associations, libraries, and anything else that could help shape opinion and ideas, including even such things as “architecture and the layout and names of streets.” *Id.* at 380-81. All such instruments were potential levers of social control that could be used to enslave or to liberate.

⁴⁶ Confucius, *Analects*, Book XIII, Chapter iii, in Confucius, *Confucian Analects, The Great Learning & The Doctrine of the Mean* (James Legge, trans.) (New York: Dover Publications, 1971), at 263-64.

⁴⁷ Ford, *The Mind of Empire*, *supra*, at 30.

⁴⁸ *The Wisdom of China and India* (Lin Yutang, ed., New York: Modern Library, 1942), at 811.

⁴⁹ Michael Quirin, “On the Horror Vacui. Confucian Tendencies in the Present-Day Chinese Morality Debate,” in *Confucianism and the Modernization of China* (Silke Krieger & Rolf Trauzettel, eds.) (Mainz: V. Hase & Hohler Verlag, 1991), at 134.

⁵⁰ See, e.g., Cheng Gangyuan, *Secrets of the CCP's United Front Work Department* (Washington, D.C.: Citizen Press, 2019), at 133-34 (discussing the CCP's April 27, 1957, “Directive about Rectification Campaign” published in *People's Daily* on May 1 of that year). Interestingly, in keeping with this emphasis upon eliciting acknowledgement of wrong and endorsement of the Party's virtue by alleged malefactors, Chinese propaganda has always specially prized statements *by foreigners* that seem to validate its narratives. In the international arena, it has been observed, it is “the ‘deepest desire’ of modern Chinese nationalists ... for others to accept China's claims of international face. It was not enough, therefore, just to describe the United States as evil ‘in order to depict Chinese virtue.’ On top of this, ‘America must *itself* confirm Chinese claims of American evil and Chinese goodness.’” Christopher Ford, *China Looks at the West: Identity,*

Global Ambitions, and the Future of Sino-American Relations (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2015), at 239 (quoting Peter Hays Gries, *China's New Nationalism: Pride, Politics, and Diplomacy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), at 60). Accordingly, “international acceptance and approval have become major sources of legitimacy for the CCP at home.” Fei-Ling Wang, “Beijing's Incentive Structure: The Pursuit of Preservation, Prosperity, and Power,” in *China Rising*, *supra*, at 19.

⁵¹ Yuri Pines, *Envisioning Eternal Empire: Chinese Political Thought of the Warring States Era* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009), at 120-21 (quoting Confucius from the *Lunyu*). (The *Lunyu* is the earliest Zhanguo text, “a putative collection of Confucius' sayings. *Id.* at 27.) As Pines has also suggested, another function of this ideological project is to legitimize the ruling elite who oversaw the hegemonic harmoniousness to which this vision aspired. As it originally developed during the Warring States Period, the Chinese effort to structure political order around “rule by ritual (*li zhi*)” under a supposedly benevolent Confucian virtuocracy of worthy ministers coincided with the need of a new aristocratic elite without blood connection to the Zhou royal house to legitimize their own positions of dominance within the increasingly independent states that had emerged out of the decline of Zhou Dynasty power. See Yuri Pines, *Foundations of Confucian Thought: Intellectual Life in the Chunqiu Period, 722-453 B.C.E.* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002), at 4-6. One can perhaps see echoes of this today in the CCP's attraction to ancient conceptions of order and its conceit of benevolent meritocratic technocracy. See, e.g., Christopher Ford, “‘Occupy Wall Street’ and Communist China's Emerging ‘Neo-Kong’ Discourse of Antidemocratic Legitimacy,” Hudson Institute (May 2012), available at <https://www.hudson.org/content/researchattachments/attachment/1035/cford--occupywallstreet--053112.pdf>.

⁵² Quoted by Pines, *Envisioning Eternal Empire*, *supra*, at 181-82.

⁵³ Pines, *Envisioning Eternal Empire*: *supra*, at 2.

⁵⁴ Callahan, *supra*, at 27.

- ⁵⁵ Arthur F. Wright, "Introduction," in *The Confucian Persuasion*, *supra*, at 3, 9.
- ⁵⁶ Brook et al., *supra*, at 64-69.
- ⁵⁷ Among other things, the degree to which the need for such superiority-signaling foreign validation made Ming emperors "alert to every slight, shortfall, and other breach of propriety," Brook et al., *supra*, at 66, has its modern counterpart in what I described in the first paper of this series as a CCP "rhetorical and positional prickliness that is at once haughty and deeply insecure, manifesting itself both in a tendency to levy moralistic criticisms at others and a desperate fear of admitting error or being seen as *unvirtuous* in ways that could lead to questions about possession of the Mandate of Heaven (e.g., selfishness, self-aggrandizement, aggression, corruption, or incompetence)."
- ⁵⁸ Fei-Ling Wang, *supra*, at 29.
- ⁵⁹ See, e.g., Doshi, *supra*, at 322.
- ⁶⁰ See, e.g., Ford, *China Looks at the West*, *supra*, at 455-60.
- ⁶¹ See generally, Christopher Ford & Thomas Grant, "Exporting Censorship: The Chinese Communist Party Tries to Control Global Speech About China," National Security Institute Law and Policy Paper (April 2022), available at <https://nationalecurity.gmu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Exporting-Censorship-FINAL-WEB-2.pdf>.
- ⁶² See, e.g., Ford, *The Mind of Empire*, *supra*, at 86-88. Barbarians were traditionally viewed as lacking the attributes of Chinese culture that made them human, and were hence commonly described "in terms of metaphors drawn from the animal kingdom." Chinese disagreed about whether barbarians were actually capable of becoming fully Sinicized—though in ancient times "[the] orthodox view" was that this was possible—but all agreed that those who (for whatever reason) remained non-acculturated were not truly human. Richard J. Smith, *Chinese Maps* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), at 8-9. Those who were resolutely or incorrigibly non-Sinicized could only really be dealt with by violence. As the ancient *Zuozhuan* text put it, "[t]he Rong and Di [barbarians] know nothing of affection or friendship and are full of greed; the best plan is to attack them." Quoted by *id.* at 10. (The *Zuozhuan* is perhaps the most significant single repository of Chinese historical records from the Warring States Period (Chunqiu), with its 180,000 characters giving year-by-year accounts spanning the period from about 722 to 468 B.C.E. It is traditionally often said to have been compiled by Zuo Qiuming of the State of Lu. See Pines, *Foundations of Confucian Thought*, *supra*, at 7, 12, 14-15, 27, 39, & 206.)
- ⁶³ 14th FYP Outline, *supra*, at 82-84. The translator's note here observes that Xuexi Qiangguo (学习强国) is "a mobile app run by the CCP Central Propaganda Department that indoctrinates users in Chinese Marxist theory, particularly the speeches of Xi Jinping." *Id.* at 83 n.19.
- ⁶⁴ See, e.g., "Learn French, Live French, Love French," *Alliance Française* website (undated), available at <https://afusa.org>.
- ⁶⁵ French, *supra*, at 244 (quoting the book *The China Dream* by commentator Liu Mingfu).
- ⁶⁶ Smith, *supra*, at 7.
- ⁶⁷ Quoted by Smith, *supra*, at 8. This is literally the case, for China's literary name for itself, *Zhongguo* actually means "cultural magnificence centered on the Yellow River Plain." Brook et al., *supra*, at 57; cf. Liam Kelly, "Convergence and Conflict: Dai Viet in the Sinic Order," in *id.* at 81, 82 (noting that in "the language of inequality" used in exchanges of letters between Ming Dynasty officials and those in Dai Viet [Vietnam], China was referred to as "[t]he 'Middle Kingdom' (Trung Quoc) or 'Cultural Magnificence of the Center' (Trung Hoa)"). Historically, the idea of China as the "central cultural florescence" also made an appearance in the ideologies of Chinese *rebels* opposed to foreign conquest dynasties such as that of the Manchus (i.e., the Qing Dynasty). See Yuji Muramatsu, "Some Themes in Chinese Rebel Ideologies," in *The Confucian Persuasion*, *supra*, at 241 & 241.
- ⁶⁸ Smith, *supra*, at 9. Even powerful conquering barbarians such as the Mongols and Manchus were described in Chinese records as "gravitating to China out of 'admiration for righteousness.'"
- ⁶⁹ Quoted by Smith, *supra*, at 19-20.

- ⁷⁰ Smith, *supra*, at 9. Even powerful conquering barbarians such as the Mongols and Manchus were described in Chinese records as “gravitating to China out of ‘admiration for righteousness.’”
- ⁷¹ See, e.g., Geoff Wade, “Civilizational Rhetoric and the Obfuscation of Power Politics,” in Brook et al., *supra*, at 75, 78.
- ⁷² 14th FYP Outline, *supra*, at 7. The translator’s note comments that “[t]he Chinese term 体育—translated throughout as ‘sports’—can also mean ‘physical education’ (PE).” *Id.* at 110 n.26.
- ⁷³ Xi Jinping, “Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, remarks to the 19th Party Congress of the Chinese Communist Party” (October 18, 2017), *Xinhua News Agency* (November 4, 2017), available at https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/19thcpcnationalcongress/2017-11/04/content_34115212.htm.
- ⁷⁴ 14th FYP Outline, *supra*, at 84.
- ⁷⁵ *Id.* at 133 (“We will implement the Party’s basic guiding principles on religious work, adhere to the direction of the Sinicization of China’s religions, and actively guide the mutual adaptation of religions and socialist society.”).
- ⁷⁶ *Id.* at 8-9.
- ⁷⁷ *Id.* at 85-86.
- ⁷⁸ Anonymous, “The Longer Telegram: Toward a New American China Strategy,” *Atlantic Council* (2021), at 23.
- ⁷⁹ Economy, *supra*, at 7-8.
- ⁸⁰ Doshi, *supra*, at 284.
- ⁸¹ Xi, “Secure a Decisive Victory,” *supra*.
- ⁸² *Outline of the National Innovation-Driven Development Strategy, supra*, at 2.
- ⁸³ 14th FYP Outline, *supra*, at 3.
- ⁸⁴ Quoted in Economy, *supra*, at 142 & 4.
- ⁸⁵ Economy, *supra*, at 168.
- ⁸⁶ Zheng Wang, *supra*, at 6-7.
- ⁸⁷ *Id.* at 242.
- ⁸⁸ *Id.* at 127-29 & 138.
- ⁸⁹ Xi, “Secure a Decisive Victory,” *supra*.
- ⁹⁰ Heath et al., *supra*, at 41.
- ⁹¹ Ford, *China Looks at the West, supra*, at 339.
- ⁹² See, e.g., Zheng Wang, *supra*, at 145; Callahan, *supra*, at 217.
- ⁹³ 14th FYP Outline, *supra*, at 3. The term is used repeatedly, including even in areas such as cyberspace. See, e.g., *id.* at 44 (calling for the “construction of a community of common destiny in cyberspace (网络空间命运共同体)”).
- ⁹⁴ SCIO, “China and the World in the New Era,” *supra*, at 32, 36, 38-39, & 48.
- ⁹⁵ Xi, “Secure a Decisive Victory,” *supra*.
- ⁹⁶ Zheng Wang, *supra*, at 239 (quoting Wen Jiabao from 2009).
- ⁹⁷ See generally, Ford, *China Looks at the West, supra*, at 428-40.
- ⁹⁸ Wright, “Introduction,” *supra*, at 3.
- ⁹⁹ Haun Saussy, *Great Walls of Discourse and other Adventures in Cultural China* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Asia Center, 2001), at 173 (quoting David Hall & Roger T. Ames, *Thinking from the Han* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), at 279). This emphasis upon moralistic, “harmonious” consensus is so powerful that in popular fiction in ancient China, “[g]ood characters say and do exactly what is expected of them, invariably with identical phrases and attitudes.” (Evil characters have more scope for “a somewhat freer invention and more colorful details,” but even *their* depiction “remains very stereotyped.”) Ruhlmann, *supra*, at 148.

- ¹⁰⁰ See, e.g., Kai Strittmatter, *We Have Been Harmonized: Life in China's Surveillance State* (New York: Custom House, 2020); Paul Wiseman, "Cracking the 'Great Firewall' of China's Web Censorship," *ABC News* (April 24, 2008), available at <https://abcnews.go.com/Technology/story?id=4707107&page=1>;
- ¹⁰¹ SCIO, "China and the World in the New Era," *supra*, at 9, 40, & 38-39.
- ¹⁰² *Id.* at 32.
- ¹⁰³ Xi, "Secure a Decisive Victory," *supra*.
- ¹⁰⁴ Xi Jinping remarks in 2017, *quoted by* Doshi, *supra*, at 31.
- ¹⁰⁵ SCIO, "China and the World in the New Era," *supra*, at 31.
- ¹⁰⁶ *Quoted by* Ben Lowson, "China's Diplomacy Has a Monster in its Closet," *The Diplomat* (October 13, 2018), available at <https://thediplomat.com/2018/10/chinas-diplomacy-has-a-monster-in-its-closet/>.
- ¹⁰⁷ SCIO, "China and the World in the New Era," *supra*, at 34.
- ¹⁰⁸ Xi, "Secure a Decisive Victory," *supra*.
- ¹⁰⁹ See, e.g., SCIO, "China and the World in the New Era," *supra*, at 40 ("The Chinese army faithfully adheres to the concept of a global community of shared future, [and] actively fulfills the international responsibilities of the armed forces of a major country").
- ¹¹⁰ Heath et al., *supra*, at 83 (*quoting* Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, "Jiang Zemin Delivers Report to the 16th CPC National Congress," webpage (November 8, 2002)).
- ¹¹¹ Heath, et al., *supra*, at 103.
- ¹¹² *Id.* at 99.
- ¹¹³ *Id.* at xv; *see also id.* at 7.
- ¹¹⁴ *Id.* at 96-97; *see also id.* at 102 (summary table).
- ¹¹⁵ *See id.* at 56; *see also id.* at 28 & 45.
- ¹¹⁶ *Id.* at 48-50.
- ¹¹⁷ See, e.g., Economy, *supra*, at 2-3.
- ¹¹⁸ Callahan, *supra*, at 40 (*quoting* Liang, *A Record of the National Humiliation*, at 2).
- ¹¹⁹ Callahan, *supra*, at 197 (*quoting* Yan Xuetong, "The Rise of China and its Power Status," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, no. 1 (2006), at 13.)
- ¹²⁰ Anonymous, "The Longer Telegram," *supra*, at 29-31.
- ¹²¹ *Id.* at 8.
- ¹²² Callahan, *supra*, at 4 (*quoting* Zhao Tingyang, *Tianxia tixi: Shijie zhidu zhexue daolun* [The Tianxia system: A philosophy for the World Institution] (Nanjing: Jiangsu jiaoyu chubanshe, 2005), at 2, 3.).
- ¹²³ Callahan, *supra*, at 209 (*quoting and citing* Zhao Tingyang, *Tianxia tixi: Shijie zhidu zhexue daolun* [The Tianxia system: A philosophy for the World Institution] (Nanjing: Jiangsu jiaoyu chubanshe, 2005), at 2, 3, 40, 108; and Zhao Tingyang, "All Under Heaven," in Hagt, "Debating China's Future," *China Security*, vol. 4, no. 2 (2008), at 15).
- ¹²⁴ French, *supra*, at 3.
- ¹²⁵ *Quoted in* Brook et al., *supra*, at 67.
- ¹²⁶ Wade, *supra*, at 78; *see also, e.g.,* Brook et al., *supra*, at 62 (*recounting* Emperor Yingzong of the Ming [a.k.a. Emperor Tianshun] explaining to the ruler of Da Viet [Vietnam] that "We are the Emperor, and having received Heaven's great mandate, We rule the *hua* [Chinese] and the *yi* [foreign barbarians]. One culture provides the norm for all places, its influence transforming all beyond the four quarters. Of all who are vaulted by Heaven and sustained by Earth, there is none who does not submit in heart.").
- ¹²⁷ Zheng Wang, *supra*, at 73.
- ¹²⁸ Ford, *China Looks at the West*, *supra*, at 143-44.
- ¹²⁹ Ford, *The Mind of Empire*, *supra*, at 245; *see also generally, id.* at 181, 221-27, & 244-47.
- ¹³⁰ Fung Yu-Lan, *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy* (Derek Bodde, ed., New York: Free Press, 1966), at 178-81. The Pinyin transliteration of the terms *Ch'un Ch'iu* and *Chan Kuo* are, respectively, *Chunqiu* and *Zhanguo*, as used elsewhere in this series of papers.

¹³¹ Ford, *The Mind of Empire*, *supra*, at 274-78; Ford, *China Looks at the West*, *supra*, at 441-48.

¹³² Pines, *Foundations of Confucian Thought*, *supra*, at 2.

¹³³ *Id.* at 2-3 & 105-06.

¹³⁴ Pines, *Envisioning Eternal Empire*, *supra*, at 15 & 19.

¹³⁵ Pines, *Foundations of Confucian Thought*, *supra*, at 3.

¹³⁶ See generally, e.g., Ford, *The Mind of Empire*, *supra*, at 19-20.

¹³⁷ Smith, *supra*, at 13; see also, e.g., Pines, *Foundations of Confucian Thought*, *supra*, at 108 (“Zhou rituals were designed for a world with only one legitimate ruler.”).

¹³⁸ Morris Rossabi, “Introduction,” in *China Among Equals: The Middle Kingdom and its Neighbors, 10th-14th Centuries* (Morris Rossabi, ed.) (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), at 2-4; see also Tao Jin-Shen, “Barbarians or Northerners: Northern Sung Images of the Khitans,” in *China Among Equals*, *supra*, at 66 (“China and her neighbors were divided into two worlds: the internal or the ‘civilized’ center was surrounded by the uncivilized world of the ‘barbarians.’ The ‘barbarians’ who admired Chinese civilization and wished to reside in the Chinese world and to adopt Chinese customs were permitted to do so. They would eventually be transformed into Chinese. Those who refused absorptions into the Chinese world were expelled from China.”).

¹³⁹ Scholars such as Tao Jin-Shen, for instance, have noted the degree to which the ostentatious symbolism of the tributary system sometimes “masked what were really relations between equal and independent states.” Tao Jin-Shen, *supra*, at 66-67; see also Wang Gungwu, “The Rhetoric of a Lesser Empire: Early Sung Relations with Its Neighbors,” in *China Among Equals*, *supra*, at 47, 49 (noting degree of practical flexibility displayed in the late T’ang Dynasty); Pamela Crossley, “Guest Ritual and Qing International Relations,” in Brook et al., *supra*, at 148, 151 (noting that China’s ritualized formal tributary relationships were nearly totally detached from political and strategic realities). Similarly, Gary Ledyard has described Chinese history as cycling between “Yin” and “Yang” periods, with the latter being “the heyday

of the ‘tribute system’” in which “China is dominant, demands and receives submission and tribute from newly subject peoples, and reclaims the allegiance of former tributaries. In the other direction, Chinese culture spreads far and wide and arguably exerts more influence and wins more respect for China than its armies do.” “Yin” periods, by contrast, are characterized by “the progressive decline in vitality of Chinese political, military, and social institutions,” and by barbarian incursions into China. Ledyard admits, however, that there tends to be “a certain strain and contradiction” in Chinese historical sources when discussing such periods of barbarian ascendancy, as the Middle Kingdom’s monist ideology struggles to rationalize, excuse, or deny such an inversion of the natural order of things. Gary Ledyard, “Yin and Yang in the China-Manchuria-Korea Triangle,” in *China Among Equals*, *supra*, at 313, 333-38. Wang Gungwu suggests that it was “probably unthinkable” for a Chinese dynasty to admit non-superiority vis-à-vis foreign barbarians. See Wang Gungwu, *supra*, at 47 (discussing T’ang discourse).

¹⁴⁰ Smith, *supra*, at 13.

¹⁴¹ Picking up on Confucius’ actual (non-Latinized) name—Kongzi—and playing on the American political label of “neocoon,” Ford has actually described Yan and his intellectual compatriots in modern China as propagandists of a new pseudo-Confucian “Neo-Kong” authoritarianism. See, e.g., Ford, “Occupy Wall Street,” *supra*.

¹⁴² French, *supra*, at 5. See also, e.g., Wright, “Introduction,” *supra*, at 10 (noting that one of the traditional elements of dynastic “mass propaganda” in ancient China was “an ideology of Chinese dominance over other peoples, a rationale of a civilizing mission at once moral and cultural”).

¹⁴³ See, e.g., SCIO, “China and the World in the New Era,” *supra*, at 22 (“China is providing more public goods to the international community.”); Economy, *supra*, at 1 (quoting Xi Jinping that in response to the COVID-19 pandemic China would provide vaccines to the world as a “public good.”).

¹⁴⁴ Reus-Smit, *supra*, at 31 & 33.

¹⁴⁵ *Id.* at 6; *see also id.* at 169.

¹⁴⁶ *Id.* at 7-9.

¹⁴⁷ In a brief passing comment upon Reus-Smit's framing, Peter Katzenstein once suggested that "tributary trade" could be seen as being "the distinctive fundamental institution of the Sino-centric world." *See* Peter J. Katzenstein, "Conclusion: National Security in a Changing World," in *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics* (Peter J. Katzenstein, ed.) (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), at 516 (citing, *inter alia*, Arthur Waldron, "Chinese Strategy from the Fourteenth to the Seventeenth Centuries," in *The Making of Strategy: Rulers, States, and War* (Williamson Murray, MacGregor Knox, & Alvin Bernstein, eds.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994)). This, however, seems inadequate, inasmuch as it suggests that the central point is about economic relationships (i.e., trade) rather than about social ones and the ritualized enactment of politico-moral hierarchy. (Nor did Katzenstein offer an account of what the other elements of Reus-Smit's metavalues complex might be in Chinese manifestation.)

¹⁴⁸ The precedents for this, as one might expect, go back a long time. As Brook, van Praag, and Boltjes note, in the Confucian system, ritual was central to managing foreign relations as well as relations within the state and the

family. Processes of ritual enactment formed "the means through which something like a Chinese *jus gentium* [law of nations] found its expression," as tributary, envoys "act[ed] out a choreography of deference" according to mutually understood "rules of interpolity communication." As they recount, "[t]he embassy or tribute system under the Qing was not a means of managing foreign relations so much as a device for protecting ritual protocol." Brook et al., *supra*, at 60 & 150.

¹⁴⁹ *See, e.g.*, Assistant Secretary of State David Stilwell, "U.S.-China Bilateral Relations: The Lessons of History," remarks at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (December 13, 2019) (outlining various ways in which prior U.S. leaders deliberately helped facilitate China's rise, *available at* <https://www.csis.org/analysis/speech-assistant-secretary-state-east-asian-and-pacific-affairs-david-r-stilwell>).

¹⁵⁰ *See* Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick, "Whither China? From Membership to Responsibility," remarks to the National Committee on U.S.-China Relations (September 21, 2005), *available at* https://www.ncuscr.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/migration_Zoellick_remarks_notes06_winter_spring.pdf.

¹⁵¹ Lawrence Freedman, *Strategy: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), at 608.

¹⁵² Sunzi, *The Art of War* (Lin Wusun, trans.) (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2007), at 29.

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