

# China's Buried Liberal Order

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(Note to fellow team members: This is a different argument than what I presented at the Barcelona workshop)

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## Introduction

The US-constructed liberal world order is in crisis. John Ikenberry grieves the thinning out of liberal internationalism from the original social purpose of “making the world safe for democracy” into “a barebones system” of multilateral cooperation on global problems.<sup>1</sup> Among various challenges to the liberal order, the most formidable comes from China. There has been a cascade of soul-searching analyses in 2017-18. The White House’s National Security Strategy singles out China along with Russia as a “revisionist power” that “want[s] to shape a world antithetical to U.S. values and interests.”<sup>2</sup> It laments that the US was mistaken for decades to believe “that support for China’s rise and for its integration into the post-war international order would liberalize China.”<sup>3</sup> Kurt Campbell and Ely Ratner call for “the China Reckoning” now that “Beijing has defied American expectations” by “chip[ping] away at the US-led security order in Asia, developing the capabilities to deny the US military access to the region and driving wedges between Washington and its allies.”<sup>4</sup> *The Economist* popularizes the rethinking by dissecting “how the West got China wrong” and how the bet “that China would head towards democracy and the market economy” has failed.<sup>5</sup>

Ikenberry attributes liberal internationalism’s failure to the cultural gap: that liberalism aspires to be universalistic but is in fact deeply rooted in American and Western global dominance.<sup>6</sup> The Beijing leadership finds this diagnosis congenial to their agenda to build an alternative international order to accompany China’s meteoric rise. The *People’s Daily*, the

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<sup>1</sup> Ikenberry 2011.

<sup>2</sup> White House 2017.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>4</sup> Campbell and Ratner 2018, 66-67.

<sup>5</sup> *The Economist*, 1 March 2018, How the West got China wrong.

<sup>6</sup> Ikenberry 2011.

Communist Party's mouthpiece, published a full page of commentaries on the "systemic crisis" of the Western model on January 22, 2017.<sup>7</sup> A year later on January 14, 2018, the same daily printed a high-profiled op-ed under the byline "Xuanyan" (meaning "Manifesto") which declared a "historic opportunity" to "make China great again."<sup>8</sup> The statement urged the Chinese leadership to seize this opportunity to shape a new international order when "the capitalism-led world political and economic system is full of drawbacks" and "the global governance system is undergoing profound changes."<sup>9</sup> The state-run Xinhua News Agency further announced during the World Economic Forum in Davos on January 24, 2018 that the international community must choose between "two fundamentally different outlooks" between China's "win-win development" and President Trump's "America First."<sup>10</sup> Beijing has long promoted the "China model" of authoritarian politics and state-led economics as a defense against the West's promotion of liberal democracy and market capitalism.<sup>11</sup> Now that liberalism is in trouble within the West, Beijing has triumphantly championed the "China solution" for the world.<sup>12</sup>

This chapter challenges the above conventional wisdom that China necessarily represents "the next clash of civilizations."<sup>13</sup> While it is true that the ruling Chinese Communist Party was "founded on... a hatred of American values,"<sup>14</sup> this is not preordained by Chinese culture or history. This chapter seeks to uncover China's buried, suppressed and forgotten liberal legacy. It

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<sup>7</sup> *People's Daily*, 22 January 2017, Systemic Crisis: New Developments in Capitalism.

<sup>8</sup> *South China Morning Post*, 18 January 2018, Make China great again: Communist Party seeks to seize 'historic' moment to reshape world order.

<sup>9</sup> *People's Dailey*, 14 January 2018, Xuanyan (Manifesto).

<sup>10</sup> *Xinhua News Agency*, 24 January 2018, Commentary: Share future or America First.

<sup>11</sup> Bell 2015, 1, 75.

<sup>12</sup> *Washington Post*, 31 January 2018, In the age of Trump and Brexit, China's national hubris is on the rise.

<sup>13</sup> Allison 2017, 80-89.

<sup>14</sup> Pomfret 2016, 494.

will first briefly outline amicable US-China relations in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and for a brief moment under the second paramount party leader Deng Xiaoping. It will then examine in greater detail China's indigenous liberal tradition through its millennia-long history.

### The Beautiful Country and the Middle Kingdom

Journalist John Pomfret offers the best narrated history of US-China relations from 1776 to the present.<sup>15</sup> He reminds us that the Chinese term for the United States of America is "*mei guo*" or "the Beautiful Country" to signify admiration.<sup>16</sup> When the Qing dynasty was being carved up by European and Japanese imperialists, court officials turned to the "Beautiful Country" for advice and intervention. Though the Qing suffered defeat after defeat, it nevertheless managed to limit external encroachments and avoid total colonialization. Henry Kissinger credits this to the "extraordinary skill" and "analytical skill" of Chinese diplomats."<sup>17</sup> He overlooks to mention that some of those "Chinese" diplomats were famed American, especially, Anson Burlingame, who led the first Qing delegation on a world tour, and John W. Foster, who negotiated on behalf of Emperor Guangxu with the Japanese.<sup>18</sup> Many more US diplomats offered advice behind the scene so that Chinese officials could wield international law to preserve a semblance of independence. Genuinely Chinese diplomats were graduates of elite American universities and generally pro-American.

In the 1900s when Sun Yat-sen mobilized support for his revolutionary movement in the US, he penned in "The True Solution of the Chinese Question: An Appeal to the People of the

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<sup>15</sup> Pomfret 2016.

<sup>16</sup> Pomfret 2016, 5.

<sup>17</sup> Kissinger 2012, 60-61.

<sup>18</sup> Pomfret 2016, 56-68, 90-91.

United States” that “we intend to model our government after yours.”<sup>19</sup> When the newly born republic grappled with the First World War in the 1910s, Chinese intellectuals across the entire ideological spectrum from Sun Yat-sen of the Nationalist Party to Mao Zedong who would later lead the Communist revolution all looked to Woodrow Wilson as China’s savior.<sup>20</sup> During victory parades at the end of the war, Chinese marchers held up signs that said “Make the world safe for democracy” and “Long Live President Wilson!”<sup>21</sup> If liberal internationalism eventually failed in China, it was not because Chinese culture clashed with Wilson’s ideals of self-determination and sovereign equality, which Chinese intellectuals avidly translated and read. Rather, it was Wilson’s betrayal of China -- his decision to hand over Germany’s possessions in China to Japan -- that soured Sino-American relations. Pomfret wryly remarks that “China was not worth a drop of Yankee blood” to the Wilson administration.<sup>22</sup> As Paul Reinsch, the then US ambassador to China, observed, Versailles caused “a revulsion of feeling against America” for the very reason that the Chinese had pinned high hopes on Wilson.<sup>23</sup> When Reinsch quit his job in disgust, he wondered what would be left for China but “cynical hostility to Western civilization?”<sup>24</sup> In Ikenberry’s terms, Wilson essentially placed China “outside the boundaries of the nascent liberal international order.”<sup>25</sup> It was that fateful policy that laid down the seeds for the seeming non-universality of liberalism.

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<sup>19</sup> Pomfret 2016, 130.

<sup>20</sup> Pomfret 2016, 129, 149.

<sup>21</sup> Pomfret 2016, 145-6.

<sup>22</sup> Pomfret 2016, 147.

<sup>23</sup> Pomfret 2016, 148.

<sup>24</sup> Pomfret 2016, 147.

<sup>25</sup> Ikenberry 2011.

In the inter-war decades, many US-educated intellectuals remained steadfastly liberal and tried to bring “Mr. Democracy” and “Mr. Science” to China against all odds. Chiang Kai-shek of the Nationalist Party repeatedly begged for US support to resist both Japanese and Communist forces. Pomfret dismisses the old debate “Who lost China” because “China was not America’s to lose” but was “lost by the Chinese to some other Chinese.”<sup>26</sup> Yet, he believes that “Washington’s decision to treat China as a sideshow in the Pacific war” contributed to Chiang’s collapse.<sup>27</sup> Once again, while Europe was deemed critical to the post-war liberal order, China continued to be excluded.

Is Chinese culture fundamentally at odds with liberal internationalism so that any Chinese government would be automatically anti-American? In fact, the towering intellectuals of the early twentieth century who grew up under China’s traditional mandarin education but received American higher degrees were well-positioned to develop Chinese-American syntheses. Sun Yat-sen peppered his speeches with “mentions of Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Andrew Jackson, and that great Confucian sage George Washington.”<sup>28</sup> If that seemed like political rhetoric from a Chinese exile desperate for American support, P. C. Chang, the Nationalist Party’s representative involved in drafting the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, inserted the Chinese concept of “*ren*” (which he translated as “brotherhood”) into the document. Chang self-consciously married the “Western belief in the primacy of the individual with Chinese

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<sup>26</sup> Pomfret 2016, 378. He nevertheless agrees that America “clearly lost a part of China in 1919,” 148.

<sup>27</sup> Pomfret 2016, 378.

<sup>28</sup> Pomfret 2016, 129.

concern for the greater good.”<sup>29</sup> This was just one of the many examples of the era’s efforts at finding “the Great Harmony” between the “Middle Kingdom” and the “Beautiful Country.”<sup>30</sup>

Even the staunchly anti-American Mao could establish “friendship,” even a “quasi-alliance,” with the uncompromisingly anti-Communist Richard Nixon.<sup>31</sup> The two countries formally normalized relations in January 1979. When Deng Xiaoping took a state visit to the US, the *People’s Daily* brought back admiration for the “rich land, beautiful scenery, advanced technology, developed industry and high yielding agriculture” in “the Beautiful Country.”<sup>32</sup> It was the party’s fear of how much “American values once again inspired the Chinese” that the *People’s Daily* subsequently “dropped its pro-American tone and ran exposes about the ugly side of life in the Beautiful Country.”<sup>33</sup>

It may be objected that these episodes of Chinese compatibility with liberalism were imported and thus thin and fragile. The rest of this chapter will unearth China’s indigenous liberal tradition that repeatedly recurred in its millennia-old history.

### Liberal orders in Chinese history

To recover China’s own liberal legacy, we have to first suspend what Kissinger calls “the singularity of China.”<sup>34</sup> We should instead turn our attention to periods when independent states must treat each other as equals. The Song dynasty (960-1279), for instance, existed in a multistate system in contestation with first the equally formidable Khitan Liao and later the

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<sup>29</sup> Pomfret 2016, 368.

<sup>30</sup> Pomfret 2016, 368.

<sup>31</sup> Kissinger 2012, 251, 275.

<sup>32</sup> Pomfret 2016, 489.

<sup>33</sup> Pomfret 2016, 490-1.

<sup>34</sup> Kissinger 2012, 5.

superior Jurchen Jin. The Song-Liao Shanyuan Treaty of 1005 is illustrative of China's native liberal order:

“How many peace treaties signed in Europe or Asia lasted for more than 100 years? The peace treaty of Shanyuan is an outstanding example for the Chinese ability to abandon traditional theories and concepts, even if they have ruled for centuries, at the moment when these theories no longer fit their reality. New power constellations, fundamental changes in the East Asian world order at the turn of the first millennium A.D. prompted Chinese officials to adapt to a new reality in which China was no longer the centre of the world surrounded only by weaker tribute-paying countries but found itself in the middle of strong and equally legitimated states in the north.”<sup>35</sup>

Why is such an important international order little known except among historians of China? Episodes of international relations among equals are suppressed in Chinese official sources. Sinocentric received wisdom takes for granted China's “great unity under Heaven (*tianxia dayitong*).” The Chinese term for China, “*zhongguo*,” is typically used to refer only to the singular and powerful “Middle Kingdom.”<sup>36</sup> Yet, “*zhongguo*” originally denoted “central states” in the classical era (before 221 BCE) before it became the “Middle Kingdom” in the imperial era (221 BCE – 1911 CE). The fact that the Chinese language does not distinguish between the singular and plural forms makes it easy to bury periods of plural “*zhongguo*.” Chinese sources do recognize eras of division but presume that unity is the normal and inevitable course of Chinese

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<sup>35</sup> Schwarz-Schilling 2010.

<sup>36</sup> Pomfret 2016. Pomfret's use of the “Middle Kingdom” for the Qing period is correct. My analysis refers to earlier eras.



history. Kissinger, for instance, faithfully repeats the Chinese line that “[e]ach period of disunity was viewed as an aberration.”<sup>37</sup>

In order to examine whether or not “*zhongguo*” was normally singular in history, we need a precise definition of what “*zhongguo*” entails and what counts as unity. The late Tan Qixiang, the chief editor of the authoritative *Historical Atlas of China*, believed that “historical *zhongguo*” should not be delimited by either the People’s Republic or earlier dynasties;<sup>38</sup> rather, it should be defined by the maximum territorial reach achieved under the Qing dynasty.<sup>39</sup> Ge Jianxiong, his student, points out that such an expansive conception of “historical *zhongguo*” would yield only 81 years of unity from 1759 to 1840.<sup>40</sup> Ge thus turns to a more limited definition: the maximum territorial reach of the first unified Qin dynasty as achieved in 214 BC. This territorial space – roughly bounded by the Yellow River in the northwest, the Yin Shan and the lower Liao River in the northeast, the Sichuan basin in the west, the eastern part of the Yunguai plateau in the southwest, the Guangdong and Guangxi regions in the south, and the coastline in the east-- is also regarded as “the interior” (*neidi*) in court records.<sup>41</sup> The areas conquered by the Qing in Manchuria, Mongolia, Central Asia, and Tibet lie in “the periphery” or “beyond the passes” (*guanwai*). I follow this minimal definition of “historical *zhongguo*.” I then count the number of years when the central court could “(successfully) claim the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within [this] given territory.”<sup>42</sup> It turns out that even the minimal definition of “historical *zhongguo*” yields only 991 years of unity up to 2000. That is, “*zhongguo*” more often

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<sup>37</sup> Kissinger 2012, 6-7.

<sup>38</sup> Tan 2000, 2-4.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>40</sup> Ge 1994, 79.

<sup>41</sup> Ge 1994, 106, 179.

<sup>42</sup> Weber 1958, 78. This follows Weber’s definition.

took the plural form than the singular form. This is more so if we extend the analysis from the interior to the periphery. As such, Chinese history is as much cycles of multi-state systems as cycles of unified dynasties.

The rest of this chapter will examine political dynamics first in the interior and then the periphery. It may be argued that what happened within China's boundaries today should be seen as domestic rather than international relations. However, the literature on state formation and system formation highlights that the very differentiation between the internal and external realms is an anachronistic conceptualization.<sup>43</sup> Chris Reus-Smit offers a compelling rebuttal:

"Some might object to the term international being used to describe orders not made up of sovereign states... If we limit the concept of international orders to systems of sovereign states..., then the concept ... not only excludes most historical orders, it excludes most of what we routinely term 'the modern international order'. Until the 1970s, this order was not arranged solely according to the principle of sovereignty: it was a hybrid order that for five centuries conjoined sovereignty and empire, both within and beyond the European core. When a concept narrows the universe of cases so dramatically it becomes unhelpful, and a conception with greater analytical reach is warranted."<sup>44</sup>

The Sinocentric received wisdom also rarely asks how "central states" interacted with one another. As Kissinger puts it, "[a]fter each collapse, the Chinese state reconstituted itself as if by some immutable law of nature."<sup>45</sup> This "unwritten law" is presumed to be based on "cultural cohesion."<sup>46</sup> First, political singularity is supposed to be the necessary result of cultural

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<sup>43</sup> Spruyt 1994, 13.

<sup>44</sup> Reus-Smit 2018, ??.

<sup>45</sup> Kissinger 2012, 6-7.

<sup>46</sup> Kissinger 2012, 19, 60.

singularity. Second, unity is presumed to be preordained by the Confucian teaching that the unifier be “the one who has no proclivity towards killing.”<sup>47</sup> However, as Peter Lorge observes, “[h]owever compelling the idea of a unified empire was in the abstract,” competing Chinese kingdoms “did not reflexively or ‘naturally’ condense into a large, territorially contiguous... state following a period of disunity.”<sup>48</sup> Ge Jianxiong most clearly points out that, “unity – this sacred term – has been repeatedly associated with war.”<sup>49</sup> Indeed, every successful unifier won the Mandate of Heaven (*tianming*) on the battlefields.<sup>50</sup> This has been the case from the establishment of the Qin dynasty in 221 BC to the founding of the People’s Republic in 1949. I argue elsewhere that Qin achieved unification of the Warring States system by comprehensive self-strengthening reforms which facilitated total mobilization for war, relentless divide-and-conquer strategies which broke up balancing alliances, ruthless stratagems of bribery and deception which enhanced chances of victory, and brutal measures of seizing territory and killing enemy soldiers *en masse* which demoralized and decapitated losing states.<sup>51</sup> Mao Zedong was honest when he stated that “political power grows out of the barrel of a gun.”<sup>52</sup> The brutish struggle between the Nationalists and the Communists was merely the latest chapter of a long historical pattern.

How, then, do we locate liberal orders in eras of division in Chinese history? We should remember that liberal internationalism is born out of war rather than coerced unity. Eras of division could generate “great chaos under Heaven (*tianxia daluan*)” when a unifier had the

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<sup>47</sup> Mencius 2009, book 1A6.

<sup>48</sup> Lorge 2005, 27, 9.

<sup>49</sup> Ge 1994, 184.

<sup>50</sup> Lorge 2005, 311-312.

<sup>51</sup> Hui 2005, ch. 2.

<sup>52</sup> Mao 1938.

capabilities to roll up a system, but division could also nurture “great order under Heaven (*tianxia datong*)” when no single power-holder could dominate others.

As Immanuel Kant argued in the “Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch,” the perpetual peace would ultimately arise from among states bound together by three “definitive articles”: republican government, international law, and international trade.<sup>53</sup> To avoid reading history backward, we should examine liberal internationalism in these constitutive elements in historical contexts rather than in its totality in its modern form. In historical Europe, international competition stimulated the development of limited government, diplomatic relations, and commercial activities. In China, when “*zhongguo*” was divided into a multitude of “central states,” competing rulers must deal with one another as equals. Although contending “central states” inevitably fought one another, it was only when no single ruler could claim Heaven’s mandate and lay down the law for everyone else that we may speak of international order and diversity. Indeed, while the monolithic “Middle Kingdom” tended to repress dissent, dominate neighbors, and hinder trade, competing “central states” were more likely to make concessions to societal actors to mobilize support, enter into alliance agreements and peace settlements to facilitate strategic goals, and promote local and international trade to create new tax bases. We examine these liberal elements in some depth below.

### State-Society Bargains

The first definitive article argues that republican governments are naturally inclined toward peace. It is often presumed that republicanism was deeply ingrained in Western

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<sup>53</sup> Kant 1983 [1795].

civilization, evolving along a linear line from ancient Greece to the Magna Carta to the Rights of Man and the US Constitution. The term republicanism is often translated as liberal democracy. However, there was not a single democracy in Kant's time in Europe -- not even France or Britain qualified. Republicanism should therefore be minimally defined as limited government with some degree of individual freedom and popular consent. Kant did not share the ahistorical view that republicanism was the destiny of the West. He observed that it was warfare that compelled absolute monarchs to share power in exchange for support from his subjects, who had to bear the burdens of fighting and supplying resources for war. Kant's insight has been substantiated by Charles Tilly's state formation paradigm that highlights the military basis of Western democracy.<sup>54</sup>

The conventional wisdom that China's tradition is Confucian also holds that it is autocratic. This is a gross misunderstanding of Chinese history in general and classical Confucianism in particular. Citizenship rights – if defined as recognized enforceable claims on the state that are by-products of state-society bargaining over the means of war -- indigenously arose when “*zhongguo*” took the plural form. This is especially true in the more pristine Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods. Chinese classics of the time – whether Confucian writings, Legalist texts, or military treatises – are concerned with the question of how to motivate the people to fight and die in war. Driven by the exigencies of international competition, three major state-society bargains emerged.

The first bargain was peasant welfare. To mobilize the wherewithal of war, ambitious rulers introduced national conscription and national taxation. This development means that

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<sup>54</sup> Tilly 1992.

national security rested with the well-being of peasant-soldiers who paid taxes and fought wars. As starving peasants could not afford grain tax or military service, “central states” distributed land grants to ensure subsistence. State leaders also introduced intensive farming methods to improve productivity, established grain stores and provided disaster relief to stabilize the livelihood of peasants amidst annual fluctuations in yields. It is noteworthy that Confucian and Mencian thinkers of the time regarded the state’s provision of material welfare as representing a conditional state-society relationship: If the basic economic needs of the people were met, loyalty would ensue, and the state would be strong; if not, resentment would ensue, and the state would be weakened.<sup>55</sup> These measures constituted the “people-as-basis” (*minben*) doctrine. (More below.)

The second bargain was a justice-based definition of citizenship. As Xu Jinxiong observes, “rulers gradually promulgated laws which were meant to bind rulers and ruled alike... Laws were originally tools used by aristocrats to arbitrarily suppress the people. They gradually became the contractual basis on which the people would accept a given rulership.”<sup>56</sup> Bruce Brooks calls this development “the new legal quid” in exchange for “the new military quo.”<sup>57</sup> Transmitted texts and unearthed legal documents show that the right of access to justice and the right of redress before higher judges existed at least in the states of Qin, Chu, and Qi by the late fourth century BCE.

International competition further fostered the third bargain: freedom of expression. The era gave rise to the “Hundred Schools of Thought”, including Confucianism, Legalism, Daoism,

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<sup>55</sup> E. Brooks and A. Brooks 2002, 250, 259.

<sup>56</sup> Xu 1988, 543.

<sup>57</sup> E. Brooks 1998, 6.

Sunzian military thought and more. This freedom existed both in theory and in practice. Ambitious rulers competed for not just the support of peasant-soldiers, but also the assistance of talented generals and strategists. In the interest of the state, senior court ministers were expected to freely criticize rulers' mistaken policies. Independent scholars of the time were even less hesitant to speak their minds. The classical Confucianism that emerged out of this competitive environment was unmistakably liberal. Confucian followers articulated the strikingly modern principle that the people formed the basis of government and rulers were their servants. In this view, rulers would enjoy the Mandate of Heaven only if they served the people; they would lose the Mandate if they abused the people. The conventional wisdom holds that the Mandate rests with the emperor as the Son of Heaven. Yet, according to the Mencius, the Mandate rests with the people because "Heaven does not speak; it sees and hears as the people see and hear."<sup>58</sup> Mencian scholars even pushed the doctrine of popular sovereignty to the logical conclusion by contending that the people had the warrant to depose and execute tyrannical rulers because tyrants ceased to be rulers, properly speaking. This Confucian justification for tyrannicide preceded a similar doctrine developed two millennia later by the French Huguenots during the Reformation and John Locke during the Enlightenment.

Together, the three bargains of material welfare, legal justice, and freedom of expression marked the birth of citizenship rights in Chinese soil. Of course, many rulers remained abusive of the people. But the very existence of a multi-state system provided the exit option. Scholars, peasants, and traders alike could "vote with their feet" to states with the most open policies. This "right of exit" should not be underestimated because it provided in Europe "an implicit rein on

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<sup>58</sup> Mencius 2009, book 5A5.

arbitrary power”<sup>59</sup> and a “substitute for formal representation.”<sup>60</sup> One wonders what would have happened had the Chinese Enlightenment been able to run its full course.

Unfortunately, Qin’s unification of the Warring States system reversed state-society relations. The transformation of King Zheng (246-221 BC) of the state of Qin into the First Emperor (221-210 BC) of the Qin dynasty provides the most vivid illustration of the difference between the presence and absence of international competition. On the eve of unification, the state of Qin collected the best administrators, strategists, and generals of the time. King Zheng would humbly heed their advice. The king also continued the traditional policies of providing material welfare and granting handsome rewards for military contributions. State-society relations were rescinded, however, after King Zheng crowned himself the First Emperor in 221 BC. Peasant welfare was abandoned – the imperial court increased already high tax burdens and further drafted over 800,000 men to expand on the northern and southern frontiers. The principle of justice was likewise eroded – punishments became so severe that there were about 1.4 million convicts to provide forced labor to build the Emperor’s palaces and tomb. Freedom of expression was similarly muffled – all books except Qin’s court records and those on medicine and agriculture were seized and burnt, and 460 scholars who expressed doubts about the Emperor’s policies were persecuted. From 209 BCE on, the people turned to the last resort in tyranny – rebellion.

Before his demise, the First Emperor proclaimed that he brought ultimate peace to “all under Heaven.”<sup>61</sup> He was technically correct as IR scholars would similarly define peace as the

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<sup>59</sup> Jones 1981, 118.

<sup>60</sup> Moravcsik 1997, 518.

<sup>61</sup> Mosher 2000.



absence of interstate wars. But the harsh state violence on societal actors would not count toward peace in the Kantian sense.

During the Qin-Han transition, “*zhongguo*” had a second chance to return to plurality because the rebel leader Xiang Yu sought to revive the pre-Qin system of “central states.” But he was overtaken by Liu Bang who established the Han dynasty on the model of the Qin dynasty in 202 BC.<sup>62</sup> Yuri Pines argues that Xiang Yu’s agenda created “grave consequences” because “the vacuum of legitimate power eventually led to chaos, and the war of all against all devastated most of the Chinese world.”<sup>63</sup> Shi Shi disagrees, suggesting that it was Liu’s ambition to seize “all under Heaven” that prolonged wars and brought about massive sufferings. He conjectures that if Liu had been thwarted, “*zhongguo*” would have developed a federal system more conducive to regional autonomy, political freedom, and cultural diversity.<sup>64</sup> Instead, Liu Bang destroyed the prospect of restoring citizenship rights as well as plural “central states.” The founding Han emperor nevertheless exercised restraint, no less because he had effective jurisdiction over only the western half of the empire. After succeeding emperors eliminated all independent kingdoms in the east, however, the Han dynasty from Emperor Wu on would come to resemble the Qin dynasty. Shi Shi even argues that the key difference between the Qin and the Han was pure coercion versus coercion masked by deception.<sup>65</sup>

Chinese history books profusely praise the Han dynasty for resurrecting the classical “people-as-basis” principle. It is true that early Han emperors revived “a strong interest in

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<sup>62</sup> Shi 2007. The conventional chronology dates the beginning of the Han dynasty in 206 BC when Qin collapsed. Shi suggests that Liu Bang did not declare the establishment of the Han dynasty until he had vanquished Xiang Yu in 202 BC.

<sup>63</sup> Pines 2000, 318.

<sup>64</sup> Shi 2007.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

peasant welfare... because an economically viable peasantry was understood to be the basis for a politically successful government.”<sup>66</sup> However, unity effectively turned “all under Heaven” into the Son of Heaven’s private property. There was no effective mechanism to prevent the emperor from enslaving his subjects and exploiting their labor. Qin’s First Emperor was not alone in extracting heavy taxations and hard labor to build luxurious palaces and tombs. Han’s Emperor Wu also used large amounts of annual revenues to build his tomb, palaces, and gardens.<sup>67</sup> Emperor Wu also sent expeditionary armies much farther than the Qin, thereby impoverishing the subjects who had to pay for war and serve in the army.

Subsequent unified dynasties did not do much to improve peasant well-being. The prevalence of peasant uprisings in imperial China should make us rethink the conventional wisdom that unity promoted peasant welfare. It was rather during eras of division that competing regimes would improve agricultural productivity, construct irrigation systems, and develop originally underdeveloped regions in their efforts to enlarge tax bases.<sup>68</sup>

Most of all, Han’s Emperor Wu and subsequent unified emperors claimed to follow Confucianism but strangled freedom of expression and legal justice. Emperor Wu reinterpreted the Mandate of Heaven to rest it with the emperor as the Son of Heaven rather than the people. The Ming’s founder Emperor Hongwu further extirpated offensive passages from the *Mencius*, in particular, “The people are the most elevated, next comes the state, the sovereign comes last.”<sup>69</sup> He even persecuted scholars and officials whose literary verses could potentially be read as criticisms of the emperor. Not even Qin’s First Emperor would punish scholars who made no

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<sup>66</sup> Wong 1997, 77.

<sup>67</sup> Ge 1994, 196-197.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 194, 221-222, 227-228.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 172-173.

actual criticisms of imperial policies. It is this imperial façade that has misled Chinese to see Confucianism as a doctrine of autocracy.

In contrast, when “*zhongguo*” was divided, there was no absolute emperor and no official doctrine. Of course, division did not always nurture the “hundred schools of thought” because wars of mutual annihilation disrupted philosophical pursuits. After the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods, China had to wait until the May Fourth Movement in 1919 for another Chinese Enlightenment. (See the first section.) Nevertheless, whenever “*zhongguo*” existed in plurality, the pressure of international competition would always compel rulers to look for new talents and new ideas. Dissenting opinions could also find shelter in neighboring “central states.” Even Pines, a champion of the “great unity,” acknowledges that “in terms of intellectual history China benefited from periods of division much more than from periods of unified government.”<sup>70</sup>

### International Order

The second definitive article calls for the establishment of “a federation of free states.” Kant distinguished between a league of peace, which sought to end all wars, and a treaty of peace, which sought to stop only one war. As no league of peace existed in Kant’s time, we should look for its minimalist manifestation in the form of international order based on international treaties and diplomatic practices. Kant was cynical of peace treaties, noting that Grotius, Pufendorf, Vattel and other jurists were “always piously cited” not in the service of peace, but “in justification of a war of aggression.”<sup>71</sup> Yet, he warned against undue pessimism about the recurrence of war. He believed that it was the destructiveness of war that would lead statesmen

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<sup>70</sup> Pines 2000, 324.

<sup>71</sup> Kant 1983 [1795], 116.

to learn the painful lesson that war must be eliminated. Although each individual treaty ineluctably broke down, successive treaties could build on earlier ones. Indeed, Ikenberry demonstrates that major peace settlements that ended systemic wars such as those at Westphalia, Utrecht, Vienna, and Versailles served as “constitutional orders” for the European system.<sup>72</sup> In the aftermath of WWII, Europe has further evolved into an “international society” in which states “have established by dialogue and consent common rules and institutions for the conduct of their relations, and recognize their common interest in maintaining these arrangements.”<sup>73</sup>

Liberals are not alone in arguing that while states make war, states also make peace. Kenneth Waltz, the icon of neorealism, argues that there is “an order without an orderer”<sup>74</sup> in international politics because “[t]he constant possibility that force will be used limits manipulations, moderates demands, and serves as an incentive for the settlement of disputes.”<sup>75</sup> Although realists use the term “anarchy” to describe international relations, this term means the absence of world government rather than chaos. As Waltz elaborates, “[a]mong states, the state of nature is a state of war. This is meant not in the sense that wars constantly occur but in the sense that, with each state deciding for itself whether or not to use force, war may break out at any time.”<sup>76</sup>

In Chinese history, international order emerged whenever “*zhongguo*” took the plural form, especially during the classical era when there was no precedence of successful unification.

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<sup>72</sup> Ikenberry 2000.

<sup>73</sup> Buzan 1993, 330.

<sup>74</sup> Waltz 1979, 89.

<sup>75</sup> Waltz 1979, 113.

<sup>76</sup> Waltz 1979, 102.

The first half of the classical era known as the Spring and Autumn period (770-453 BC) witnessed elaborate feudal rites, diplomatic protocols, international covenants, alliance agreements, and peace settlements, and thus stability for three centuries.<sup>77</sup> However, in contrast to the European trend, treaties and customs were weakened rather than strengthened over time. Inter-state norms broke down in the second half known as the Warring States period (453-221 BC). While great powers in the Spring and Autumn period entered into extensive alliances, those in Warring States period largely relied on their own coercive capabilities. When wars were bilateral rather than multilateral, peace settlements typically involved imposition of territorial concessions. The system became highly unstable when Qin launched “campaigns of all-out conquest”<sup>78</sup> to achieve unification. The policy of “attacking not only territory but also people”<sup>79</sup> resulted in “unlimited carnage and brutality.”<sup>80</sup> Although international anarchy did not have to mean disorder, it produced “great chaos” when the aspiring unifier attempted to seize “all under Heaven.”

If the drive to achieve unity destroyed the international order in the late Warring States period, the same motivation also created zero-sum competition in subsequent eras of division. Pines argues that “China never developed adequate means of peaceful coexistence between contending regimes” and that “no serious attempt to create a viable multi-state order was ever made after the [Spring and Autumn] period.”<sup>81</sup> He overlooks to mention that this is because the most powerful contenders always sought to subjugate all others and relentlessly pursued opportunistic expansion with self-strengthening reforms, divide-and-conquer strategies, and

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<sup>77</sup> Hong 1975; Sun 1999.

<sup>78</sup> Lewis 2000, 627-628.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 639.

<sup>80</sup> Sawyer 1994, 286.

<sup>81</sup> Pines 2000, 324, 322.

ruthless stratagems. Amidst mutual extermination and cunning, it is significant that contesting “central states” nevertheless entered into alliance agreements and peace treaties to facilitate strategic goals, however opportunistically. This is not unlike the European experience in which international law emerged despite repeated attempts to achieve domination.

### International Commerce

The third definitive article invokes international commerce and its pacific effects. The predominant economic paradigm in Kant’s time was mercantilism which viewed international trade as zero-sum competition and economic gains as important sinews for war. Kant adopted Adam Smith’s paradigmatic shift: Rational statesmen should prefer trade to war because trade brought joint gains to all trading partners while war was expensive and further incurred the opportunity cost of forgone trade. In addition, trade indirectly promoted peace by strengthening the first definitive article: Trade was conducive to limited government because the market created a zone of autonomy in which individuals had the right to choose. Despite this breakthrough in economic theory, European rulers routinely “impeded or hindered” commerce in practice.<sup>82</sup> In the end, it was the existence of international competition that limited rulers’ ability to do harm.

In China, the development of international commerce followed a similar trajectory as state-society bargains and international order. In economic as well as political development, the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods represented a golden era. When rulers of competing “central states” improved agricultural productivity and ease of transportation to

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<sup>82</sup> North and Thomas 1973, 70.

enhance resource mobilization, they also inadvertently accelerated trade expansion. The development of credit and of media of exchange – from sea shells to silk to metal coins – further eased commercial transactions. With burgeoning trade, capital cities grew in size, and new cities and towns emerged. While many merchants of the time operated on relatively small scales and were often artisans themselves, a growing group of long-distance traders made profits out of price differentials across regions. At the same time, “industrialists” engaged in mining and processing of metals, minerals and salt. The richest businessmen accumulated wealth that rivaled state treasuries. For most of the classical era, “war was not the sole business” of the time and people had the “leisure to get rich and enjoy it.”<sup>83</sup> Although the state of Qin introduced severe measures to suppress trade, commercial activities flourished in the rest of the Warring States system. When Qin pushed for unification, however, “war with its increasing demands on the budget” began to have adverse impact on people’s livelihood.<sup>84</sup> After unification, the First Emperor forcibly moved 120,000 merchant households of conquered states to Qin’s capital to assert absolute control.

Subsequent unified dynasties continued to manage local and international trade with a heavy hand. Confucian classics advocated free trade but Chinese rulers distrusted traders who were not bound to the soil. Although unity could in theory promote trade expansion by facilitating system-wide infrastructure and eliminating internal customs,<sup>85</sup> powerful central courts managed trade so tightly that they stifled it. Although the Han’s founder had promised to abolish Qin’s harsh system, Emperor Wu compulsorily moved rich men – along with local elites

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<sup>83</sup> Personal communication with Bruce Brooks, 27 November 2000.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Pomeranz 2000.

and ranking officials – from the provinces to the capital area in 127 BCE. The court also sought to undercut merchants by taxing them heavily, by state management of intra-regional trade, and by salt and iron monopolies.<sup>86</sup> The Ming dynasty's founder Emperor Hongwu even revived Qin's policy of "promoting agriculture and suppressing trade." Relying on land taxes as its main source of revenues, the Ming court restricted private movement or migration, closed border gates and custom houses, banned mining of minerals, and even degraded the status of merchants by making it illegal for them to wear silk. Although his son Emperor Yongle sponsored Zheng He's blue water fleets which went as far as eastern Africa between 1405 and 1421, there were no efforts to develop international trade. In the mid-sixteenth century, the Ming court imposed such harsh bans on the sale of silk, iron products and copper coins abroad (especially to Japan) that even legitimate merchants were "forced to become pirates."<sup>87</sup> The Ming court then responded to the pirate problem with a total ban on shipping. Commerce revived only when the ruling court lost its tight grip on the society toward its end.

This is not to say that there was nothing but stagnation in imperial China; commerce breathed freely when an enlightened emperor came to the throne or when dynastic courts lost their command over the society. Indeed, trade flourished in the Tang dynasty, when the central court lost effective control over most of the empire after the An Lushan rebellion (755-763). The emergence of autonomous and semi-autonomous provincial warlord regimes "had a stimulating effect on the economy."<sup>88</sup> The increasing use of mercenary troops – who had to be paid in cash – created incentives for warlords to foster a more vigorous commercial economy and a free

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<sup>86</sup> Hsu 1965, 363.

<sup>87</sup> Lorge 2012, 92.

<sup>88</sup> Graff 2001, 240.



market in land. When the cash-trapped Tang court introduced the salt monopoly to increase tax revenues, it filled the new bureaucracy with experienced merchants rather than scholar-officials, thus enhancing rather than obstructing trade.

After the classical era, the late Tang (and the Song, to be discussed below) provided the most conducive environment for commerce: On the one hand, there was some semblance of central authority to avoid wars of annihilation common in eras of division; on the other hand, the heavy hands of imperial officials either could not reach local merchants or they steered clear of inhibiting regulations. Entrepreneurial Chinese were thus left to seek business opportunities as best as they could.

### The Periphery

The foregoing analysis contrasts the three Kantian elements in unity versus division in “the interior.” This section extends the argument to “the periphery.” It was only in the eighteenth century that the periphery ringing the interior – from Manchuria in the northeast through Mongolia in the north and Xinjiang (New Territories) in the northwest to Tibet in the southwest -- became parts of China. James Millward details the Qing’s intricate policy to manage the multiethnic empire.<sup>89</sup> The Qing court was unquestionably more tolerant of diversity compared with its successor -- the current Chinese Communist Party. Yet, the Qing was far more repressive of diversity compared with preceding dynasties. Why did the Manchus have the need to manage diversity to begin with? It was because they succeeded at what previous dynasties had failed -- subjugating Inner Asian regimes in the vast periphery.<sup>90</sup> Moreover, the Qing’s diversity

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<sup>89</sup> Millward, this vol.

<sup>90</sup> For Qing’s conquests, see Perdue 2005.

management varied with imperial power. While the conquerors originally promised local rulers high autonomy, they gradually replaced hereditary native rulers with salaried officials who might still be native but beholden to court dismissals (under the policy termed “*gaitu guiliu*”). If Qing officials and Han nationalists of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries understood that only sovereign independence could guarantee national survival and cultural revival, the same logic applied when they were colonizers themselves.

### State-society Relations

The contrast in state-society relations between singular “*zhongguo*” and plural “*zhongguo*” is even more pronounced if we extend the analysis from the interior to the periphery. As Christopher Beckwith observes, “The early Chinese accounts of the [Xiongnu]... reveal that ... those living in frontier areas were fully aware of the fact that life in the nomad-ruled states was easier and better than life in the... agricultural states, where peasants were treated little better than slaves.”<sup>91</sup> In addition to material welfare, steppe populations could also breathe some air of freedom because nomadic regimes were based on more egalitarian rule. In the early Han, kings of independent kingdoms in the east such as Liu Xin of Han and Lu Wan of Yan defected to the Xiongnu when they were accused of treason against the emperor. In the Xianbei-ruled Western Wei, Yuwen Tai (507–556) treated his generals and officials as “social equals” and ruled in an informal, collegial style.<sup>92</sup> Even the Qing dynasty (1644-1911), which imposed the harshest criminal code on Chinese society, originally evolved from a Jurchen/Manchu steppe regime based on relatively egalitarian authority. Nevertheless, steppe rulers adopted Chinese-style autocracy

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<sup>91</sup> Beckwith 2007, 333.

<sup>92</sup> Pearce 1987, 394-403.

once they conquered China. When the Qing dominated the periphery, the unprecedented scale of “great unity” also eliminated the remaining space for peasant well-being and political equality.

### International Order

Of course, any analysis of international order in Chinese history must examine relations not only among divided “central states,” but also between China and neighbors. The early emperors of every “great dynasty” -- the Han, the Tang, the Ming and the Qing – were not content with ruling the interior but sent out expeditionary armies to dominate “all under Heaven.” Han’s Emperor Wu, who elevated Confucianism, set the example for all to follow by launching campaigns to Vietnam and Korea as well as Central Asia, Mongolia, Tibet, and Nanchao/Dali (modern Yunnan).<sup>93</sup> However, even the most resourceful emperors repeatedly had difficulties subjugating Inner Asian regimes. It was only with revolutionary developments in logistical support and Western cannons that the Qing could succeed in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

If Chinese emperors typically treated weaker neighbors in Korea and Vietnam as inferior, they were forced to recognize powerful regimes in Inner Asia as equal from time to time.<sup>94</sup> Most notably, the early Han dynasty reached peace agreements with the Xiongnu before Emperor Wu came to power. The Tang dynasty likewise signed a treaty of mutual recognition with the then powerful Tibetan kingdom in 783. Such treaties of equals were not as common as they should be because the Confucian conception of China as number one and of “uncivilized barbarians” as beastlike animals presented serious perceptual constraints to the conduct of external relations. An official of the Han dynasty, Jia Yi, objected to negotiations with the Xiongnu because such a

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<sup>93</sup> Swaine and Tellis 2000, 48.

<sup>94</sup> Rossabi 1983.

policy violated the Confucian conception of a hierarchical order. His arguments would be repeatedly cited in subsequent dynasties to argue against diplomatic solutions. The Chinese court would enter into peace negotiations only when it was compelled by relative weakness. This had the unfortunate effect that treaties of equals were uniformly considered “humiliating.” Paradoxically, “barbarian” regimes adopted the Confucian hierarchical worldview when they were stronger, forcing the “Son of Heaven” to explicitly acknowledge equality and even superiority. The prime examples are the treaties the Song dynasty signed with the Khitan Liao and the Jurchen Jin.<sup>95</sup> In the 1005 Treaty of Shanyuan discussed earlier, the Northern Song agreed to pay annual payments of 200,000 bolts of silk and 100,000 taels of silver to the Liao.<sup>96</sup> If it was difficult enough for the Northern Song (960-1126) to accept diplomatic equality with the Liao, it was even harder for the Southern Song (1127-1279) to admit inferiority to the Jin in a treaty signed in 1138. During the negotiation, the Jin delegate put on Chinese rituals which showed that the Jin was the suzerain and the Southern Song the vassal. As the weaker power, the Song acquiesced and agreed to make annual payments of 250,000 taels of silver and 250,000 bolts of silk. In the 1141 Shaoxing Peace Accord, the Southern Song accepted a further downgrade in status. The treaty, preserved in Jin records but not in Chinese ones, states that “future generations of [Song] children will solemnly obey the rules of the vassal.”<sup>97</sup>

However “humiliating” these treaties were, they helped to maintain a semblance of international order. Despite emperors’ unchanging rhetorical claim to rule “all under Heaven”, there was enough structural variation in the degree of anarchy for international order to recur in

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<sup>95</sup> Tao 1983, 72.

<sup>96</sup> Lau 2000, 180-221.

<sup>97</sup> Wang 2010, 89.

historical Asia. When the “Middle Kingdom” coexisted with powerful neighbors as when “*zhongguo*” was a system of “central states,” Chinese leaders would conduct diplomatic relations on equal terms.

### International Commerce

International commerce was also more promising if we look beyond the interior to the periphery. Contrary to the Sinocentric stereotype that nomadic regimes raided China because they were warlike, backward, and poor, the steppe zone in Central Eurasia was a land of advanced civilization and economic development.<sup>98</sup> Christopher Beckwith argues that the famed Silk Road was not merely a transmission belt for luxurious goods to travel between the East and the West; rather, it served Central Eurasia above all else. From Chinese, Greek, and Arabic historical sources, Beckwith concludes that Central Eurasian regimes “highly valued and energetically pursued” commerce<sup>99</sup> and consistently insisted on “free trade at border markets.”<sup>100</sup> When Mongols launched raids on Ming garrisons, “the source of the conflict” was “the deliberate Chinese prohibition of trade.”<sup>101</sup> Similarly, the “real problem” between the Zunghar Mongols and the Qing dynasty was “the latter’s periodic restriction or even prohibition of trade.”<sup>102</sup> In both cases, peace ensued as soon as trade restrictions were removed. As such, the vast periphery was the potential source of economic freedom as well as political freedom. This phenomenon reinforces the importance of independent peripheral regimes for the relative stability of the

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<sup>98</sup> Beckwith 2007; Di Cosmo 2002; Waldron 1990.

<sup>99</sup> Beckwith 2007, 329.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 344.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 346.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

historical Asian system. Central Asia descended into a land of poverty only after the Qing and the Russian empires carved it up in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

### The Song: The Most Promising Era of Chinese Liberal Internationalism

This long historical analysis must begin and end with the Song dynasty (Northern Song 960–1126; Southern Song 1127–1279). The Song era best illustrates the what-might-have-been scenario if “*zhongguo*” were to take the plural form for more sustained periods. The Song was the only dynasty that did not achieve unification of the interior – by the founder’s own reckoning, he failed to “recover” northern provinces that included modern Beijing. This “failure” paradoxically formed the basis of China’s best chance for indigenous liberal internationalism. As discussed earlier, the Song-Liao Shanyuan Treaty of 1005 established peace for a century, however “humiliating” it was. In state-society relations, the Song court allowed broader freedom of expression for scholars to reformulate Confucianism into neo-Confucianism, laying down what Wm. Theodore de Bary calls “the liberal tradition” that would regrettably be stifled under the subsequent Ming and Qing dynasties.<sup>103</sup> As for commerce, the Song was the only Chinese dynasty that actively fostered local and international trade. Surrounded by hostile neighbors in a competitive system, and limited by the supply of arable lands for agricultural taxes, the Song could increase revenues only by turning to commercial taxes. As a result, traditional handicrafts (e.g., weaving, pottery) flourished and new industries (e.g., metallurgy, printing) developed. With more and more people seeking employment in private workshops and factories, old towns expanded and new cities emerged. Trade expansion, in turn, stimulated the development of bills of exchange, use of credits, and invention of brand names and advertisements. When the Song

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<sup>103</sup> Theodore de Bary 1983.

was driven further south by the Jurchen Jin, the southern court “was forced to augment its declining land tax revenues by levying taxes on seaborne trade,”<sup>104</sup> a revolutionary development in Chinese history. Most of all, the Song was driven by international competition to invent the compass, movable printing press, and firearms. These world-class innovations would later be taken by Marco Polo to Europe and contributed to the rise of the West centuries later.

### Conclusion

The liberal international order is in crisis no less because China is now attacking it as a vestige of Pax Americana. Yet, the claim that liberal internationalism is fundamentally at odds with Chinese culture is mere political rhetoric. This historical study demonstrates that there is no inherent “clash of civilizations” between China and the US. China admired America in their encounters in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. China also has an indigenous liberal legacy that is deeply rooted in state-society bargains, diplomatic relations and commercial activities for millennia. Chinese rulers would practice elements of the liberal order whenever they were not powerful enough to rule “all under Heaven” -- not unlike how Beijing has lived with the Washington-constructed Bretton Woods order until the recent acerbic turn.

Chinese history also shows that the mere presence of Kantian elements did not guarantee the Kantian peace. This was partly because Chinese rulers had the strong urge to rule “all under Heaven.” Ikenberry believes that a functioning liberal order “require[s] some degree of shared ‘social purpose’.”<sup>105</sup> Reus-Smit likewise contends that effective international orders cannot be the “unintended consequence of great-power security” (as Waltz argues) but must be “the

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<sup>104</sup> Swaine and Tellis 2000, 31.

<sup>105</sup> Ikenberry, this volume.

product of design.”<sup>106</sup> In China, international orders would repeatedly emerge as simple by-products of interstate competition. Yet, such international orders would eventually break down because there was no shared understanding of peaceful coexistence. Instead, there was always the desire to dominate “all under Heaven.” The only variable was which contending power would win out.

This is not an argument about Chinese exceptionalism by other means. We should be mindful of how difficult it was to realize the Kantian peace even in Europe. When Kant published the “Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch” in 1795, the argument was nothing but “a philosophical sketch.”<sup>107</sup> Kant himself anticipated setbacks on the path to the perpetual peace. In the ensuing two centuries, Europe experienced the rise of absolutism and the birth of fascism as well as the Napoleonic Wars and the two world wars. As Ikenberry notes, “in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it is hard to see a distinctive or coherent liberal international agenda.”<sup>108</sup> It was not until the post-WWII era that all elements of the Kantian peace would take hold and transform the West from a zone of war into a zone of peace. If there is any argument about cultural distinctiveness, it is the US that charted a different course from “the old world.” Nineteenth-century Chinese were correct to see Americans as the nicer “barbarians.” Unfortunately, today’s Chinese leaders no longer hold the “Beautiful Country” in high regard. At the same time, the US president himself has abandoned liberal internationalism in favor of an “America First” doctrine.

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<sup>106</sup> Reus-Smit 2018, ??.

<sup>107</sup> Kant 1983 [1795].

<sup>108</sup> Ikenberry 2011.



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