

10 How Tilly's State Formation Paradigm is Revolutionizing the Study of Chinese State-making*

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As a rule, states without orderly families and trustworthy gentleman, and without the threat of foreign invasion, will perish. Only then do we learn that we survive in adversity and perish in ease and comfort.¹

Charles Tilly's state formation paradigm is often criticized as Eurocentric and inapplicable to non-European contexts. Recent generations of social scientists, whether in political science or sociology, have been trained to challenge the Eurocentrism prevalent in putatively universal theories. Thus, critics often argue that there is no "automatic . . . relationship between war and increased state strength" and that one should not graft "mainstream social science onto comparative historical studies."² Critics overlook that Tilly's approach eschews universal laws and advocates causal mechanisms; it would be a mistake to liken Tilly's paradigm with, for instance, Kenneth Waltz's balance-of-power theory. Moreover, Tilly's paradigm examines the interaction of "coercion" and "capital" and so there are multiple state formation pathways even in Europe. This chapter suggests that a more fruitful way to understand various criticisms is to see them as specifying scope conditions. In this perspective, the

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¹ Mencius 6B15

² Miguel Angel Centeno, *Blood and Debt: War and the Nation-State in Latin America* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), pp. 104, 276.

bellocentrist paradigm is remarkably applicable to historical China because this case is far less confounded by various scope conditions. In addition, the fact that warfare gave rise to bureaucratization and citizenship in China light years ahead of Europe also makes Tilly's paradigm an ideal tool for scholars who wish to debunk Eurocentrism. Thus, even though Tilly's paradigm has suffered from repeated onslaughts in the field of state formation, it has ignited a quiet revolution in sinology. The rest of this chapter first discusses Tilly's critics and then examines Chinese state-making.

Tilly's Critics

Tilly's oft-cited quote "war made the state, and the state made war"³ has been subject to numerous criticisms.⁴ Miguel Angel Centeno argues that this "standard bellicist model" masks "a blinding empirical Eurocentrism" that obscures the fact that the Western experience represents the "true exceptionalism."⁵ He declares that "war did not make states in Latin America."⁶ The reason is that while "total wars" in Europe produced strong states made of "blood and iron," "limited wars" in Latin America produced only weak states made of "blood and debt."⁷ Robert Holden concurs that "the Tillyesque idea . . . should be discarded for Latin America."⁸ Similarly, Jeffrey Herbst argues that the European experience is predicated on scarcity in land and abundance in populations and so "does not provide a template for state-making in other regions of the world."⁹ In Africa, abundant land supplies combined with low population densities have rendered wars of territorial conquest unattractive and state-building costly. The resulting states are thus weak and fragile. Nic Cheeseman also believes that "the development of states in Africa has had little to do with war," "in stark contrast to the model developed by Tilly." In the Middle East, Dietrich Jung contends that

³ Charles Tilly, "Reflections on the History of European State-Making," in: Charles Tilly (ed.), *The Formation of the National States in Western Europe* (Princeton University Press, 1975), pp. 3–83, here at 73.

⁴ This discussion of Tilly's critics is meant to be suggestive rather than exhaustive. For more comprehensive reviews, see Brian Taylor and Roxana Botea, "Tilly Tally: War Making and State Making in the Contemporary Third World," *International Studies Review*, vol. 10, no. 1 (2008), pp. 27–56; Tuong Vu, "Studying the State through State Formation," *World Politics*, vol. 62, no. 1 (January 2010), pp. 148–75.

⁵ Centeno, *Blood and Debt*, pp. 166, 275. ⁶ Centeno, *Blood and Debt*, p. 163.

⁷ Centeno, *Blood and Debt*, p. 23.

⁸ Robert H. Holden, "Beyond Mere War: Authority and Legitimacy in the Formation of the Latin American States," Chapter 9, *this volume*.

⁹ Jeffrey Herbst, *States and Power in Africa: Comparative Lessons in Authority and Control* (Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 22.

“Tilly’s mechanisms . . . do not apply” because “the international power structures prevented large-scale interstate warfare in the region.”¹⁰

According to critics, Tilly’s thesis is wrong about not just non-European states, but also Western European states. Hendrik Spruyt, for instance, argues that the ability to wage war is just an intervening variable in European state formation, and that this factor itself has to be explained by the prior causal variable of economic change and the ensuing coalitional politics.¹¹ Phil Gorski and Vivek Sharma similarly challenge what they call “the neo-Darwinian model” and propose a “neo-Malthusian” argument that focuses on “dynastic states, patrimonial rulers and limited wars.”¹² Moreover, Jeppe Strandsbjerg contends that Tilly’s paradigm takes no account of “space formation,” which is the very foundation of the sovereign territorial state.¹³ In addition, Peter Haldén suggests that Tilly’s thesis fails to account for the absence of “state-enhancing effects” in either the Holy Roman Empire or the Habsburg domains.¹⁴

Nevertheless, these critics may have less disagreement with Tilly than they realize. As Brian Taylor and Roxana Botea observe, state formation analyses of both European and non-European cases are, “at heart, entirely consistent with Tilly: less war, or less intense war, leads to weaker states.”¹⁵ Nevertheless, even this statement inadvertently turns the state formation paradigm into a universal law. Tilly’s approach in fact refrains from universal theories, which make invariable propositions irrespective of contexts, and focuses on causal mechanisms, which have varying effects depending on contexts. As an historical institutionalist, Tilly’s research goal was to identify recurrent causal mechanisms that combined differently with varying initial and environmental conditions to produce radically different outcomes.¹⁶ Critics are thus misguided if they challenge Tilly’s paradigm on the ground that there is no automatic relationship between war-making and state-making.

¹⁰ Dietrich Jung, “War-Making and State-Making in the Middle East,” in: Dietrich Jung (ed.), *Democratization and Development: New Political Strategies for the Middle East* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), pp. 3–32, here at pp. 23, 16.

¹¹ Hendrik Spruyt, *The Sovereign State and Its Competitors* (Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 30.

¹² Philip Gorski and Vivek Sharma, “Beyond the Tilly Thesis: ‘Family Values’ and State Formation in Latin Christendom,” Chapter 4, *this volume*.

¹³ Jeppe Strandsbjerg, “The Space of State Formation,” Chapter 5, *this volume*.

¹⁴ Peter Haldén, “The Realm as a European Form of Rule: Unpacking the Warfare Thesis through the Holy Roman Empire,” Chapter 6, *this volume*.

¹⁵ Taylor and Botea, “Tilly Tally,” p. 30.

¹⁶ Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 83.

Scholars of state formation should also look beyond the catchy phrase “war made the state, and the state made war.” The usual characterization of Tilly’s paradigm as “bellicist” is wrong in two senses. First, Tilly’s paradigm emphasizes “capital” as well as “coercion,” so that there are three major trajectories in Europe – “coercion-intensive,” “capital-intensive” and “capitalized-coercive.”¹⁷ When critics say that the European experience has no relevance for the non-European world, they should specify which European trajectory. Second, while it is true that “coercion” plays a more important role than “capital” in Tilly’s formulation, the term “bellicist” is misleading because it commonly means “warlike” instead of “war-centered.” According to Daniel Nexon, the term “bellocentrist” is more accurate and is also what Tilly himself preferred.¹⁸ Furthermore, when critics argue that the state formation paradigm does not operate in non-European contexts, especially the contemporary world, it is worth remembering that Tilly himself argued as much. He specifically critiqued the “political development” argument that “supposed that a single standard process of state formation existed.”¹⁹ For Tilly, such an approach also “misconstrued the Western experience on which they ostensibly drew.”²⁰ Tilly went so far to suggest that scholars should consider “the possibility that the Western experience was . . . an aberration, a dead end, or simply one among many paths.”²¹

In addition to scholars of state formation, Tilly’s paradigm is also challenged by international relations (IR) scholars who seek a “historical sociology of international relations.”²² These scholars strongly object to Kenneth Waltz’s treatment of the balance of power as a universal law across time and space. Probably because Tilly’s emphasis on “coercion” reminds them of Waltz’s on power, they mistakenly lump Tilly with Waltz. Most notably, John Hobson complains that Tilly “perfectly reproduces the neorealist theory of the state and international relations.”²³ As noted above, Tilly’s historical-institutionalist approach is highly sensitive to timing and initial and environmental conditions.

¹⁷ Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990–1992*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), p. 30.

¹⁸ Daniel H. Nexon, *The Struggle for Power in Early Modern Europe: Religious Conflict, Dynastic Empires and International Change* (Princeton University Press, 2009), p. 69.

¹⁹ Tilly, *Coercion* (2nd edn), pp. 193–4. ²⁰ Tilly, *Coercion* (2nd edn), p. 194.

²¹ Tilly, “Reflections on the History of European State-Making,” p. 4.

²² Stephen Hobden and John M. Hobson (eds.), *Historical Sociology of International Relations* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

²³ John M. Hobson, “The Two Waves of Weberian Historical Sociology in International Relations,” in: Hobden and Hobson, *Historical Sociology of International Relations*, pp. 63–81, here at p. 64.

Indeed, Tilly's paradigm is consistent with what Stephen Hobden suggests is "the most fruitful direction for the [IR] discipline to follow": multicausality, interdisciplinarity and integration of international and domestic politics.²⁴

When Tilly's paradigm is properly understood, various criticisms may be seen as specifying the scope conditions – or what Tilly called "environmental conditions" – for the bellocentrist thesis. As Tuong Vu observes, Spruyt, for instance, "does not refute Tilly's thesis completely but only suggests the limit of its scope."²⁵ Similarly, Centeno's critique may contribute to a tighter war-make-state thesis: "For the 'coercion-extraction cycle' to begin, the relevant states must not have alternative sources of financing."²⁶ This means that if there is a system where external financial sources are not forthcoming then Tilly's thesis may be applicable. A similar argument can be made about the availability of "rents" in the Third World, such as significant foreign aid in Egypt, oil in the Middle East and diamonds in Africa. If there is a system where such "rents" are not available, then we may find stronger and more responsive states rather than "rentier states." Herbst's argument regarding the population-to-land ratio may also be reframed accordingly. That is, if there is a system where "population densities are relatively high and vacant land is limited or nonexistent, so that the value of conquering land is higher than the price to be paid in wealth and men," we may find the same "life and death imperative to raise taxes, enlist men as soldiers, and develop the necessary infrastructure to fight and win battles."²⁷ Herbst suggests that the parts of Asia with "extraordinary paddy works" do resemble Europe in this regard.²⁸ Taylor and Botea offer another reason why the "war-making/state-making connection" holds in rice-growing Vietnam: the presence of "a core ethnic group and a revolutionary ideology."²⁹ This explains why "war in Vietnam contributed to state-building while war in Afghanistan was state-destroying."³⁰ This hypothesis begs the question how the Vietnamese came to form "a core ethnic group" in the first place – and if this development is related to Vietnam's long history of foreign invasion and internal wars. And this

²⁴ Stephen Hobden, "Historical Sociology: Back to the Future of International Relations?" in: Hobden and Hobson, *Historical Sociology of International Relations*, pp. 42–59, here at p. 43.

²⁵ Vu, "Studying the State," p. 153. ²⁶ Centeno, *Blood and Debt*, p. 130.

²⁷ Herbst, *States and Power in Africa*, pp. 13–14. However, as suggested by the Malthusian logic, after a certain point, very high population-to-land ratios may make state-building more challenging.

²⁸ Herbst, *States and Power in Africa*, p. 39. ²⁹ Taylor and Botea, "Tilly Tally," p. 49.

³⁰ Taylor and Botea, "Tilly Tally," p. 48.

condition may be more restricted to the modern era, while Centeno's and Herbst's conditions may be more transhistorical.

Tilly and the Case of China

Following Herbst's description, China is an Asian country where hydraulic and paddy works line the countryside. So is China a case that confirms Tilly's state formation paradigm? Tilly himself did not think so. As he suggested in *Coercion, Capital, and European States*, "Empire was long China's normal condition."³¹ Thus, "China became the great land of rebellions and civil war, but not of war among multiple states. For that, Europe held the record."³² Tilly was apparently following the conventional wisdom, both Eurocentric and Sinocentric, common before the latest research on Chinese state-making. Even Bin Wong, who is deeply influenced by Tilly's comparative history, argues that the Eurocentric narrative of warfare and extraction has "little to say" about "the dynamics of Chinese state formation and transformation" because "China was not one of several ambitious and competitive states seeking to order domestic space and expand its international presence at the expense of similar competitors."³³ As we shall see, what Tilly said about China is the most Eurocentric and unhistorical statement that he ever made.

Tilly mentioned only in passing China's Warring States era. But IR scholars – especially realists – have long presumed the similarity of this case to Europe. Most notably, Waltz suggests that "We can look farther afield . . . to the China of the warring states era . . . and see that where political entities of whatever sort compete freely, substantive and stylistic characteristics are similar."³⁴ Hobson rightly complains that realists refer to historical systems only to prove that "world politics must always have been governed by the timeless and constant logic of anarchy."³⁵ But if we dismiss historical systems just because they are realists' favorites, we would commit the same sin of ahistoricism. Indeed, a multidisciplinary study of the ancient Middle Eastern, ancient Greek, ancient Roman, ancient Indian, ancient Chinese, early modern Chinese

³¹ Tilly, *Coercion* (2nd edn), p. 128. ³² Tilly, *Coercion* (2nd edn), p. 72.

³³ R. Bin Wong, *China Transformed: Historical Change and the Limits of the European Experience* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), pp. 101, 103.

³⁴ Kenneth Waltz, "Reflections on *Theory of International Politics: A Response to My Critics*," in: Robert O. Keohane (ed.), *Neorealism and Its Critics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), pp. 322–45, here at 329–30.

³⁵ John M. Hobson, "What's at Stake in 'Bringing Historical Sociology Back into International Relations?'" in: Hobden and Hobson, *Historical Sociology of International Relations*, pp. 3–41, here at p. 10.

and pre-Columbian Mesoamerican systems shows that Waltzian realists have misplaced their faith. Contrary to Waltz's assertion that "hegemony leads to balance . . . through all of the centuries we can contemplate,"³⁶ all eight historical systems exhibit weak balance of power against hegemony. The co-editors Stuart Kaufman, Richard Little and William Wohlforth conclude that "What is universal in international systems . . . is a mix of anarchy and hierarchy."³⁷

Hobson is so critical of Tilly's state formation paradigm that he overlooks Tilly's relevance to his other project on Eurocentrism. In *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilization*, Hobson lashes out at Eurocentric accounts that suggest that "the West has allegedly enjoyed dynamically progressive, liberal and democratic values and rational institutions from the outset" while the East "has allegedly endured despotic values and irrational institutions."³⁸ He particularly rebuts Marx's view of China as a "rotting semicivilization."³⁹ Peter Perdue, a prominent historian of the Qing dynasty, similarly complains that "Hobsbawm, Wallerstein, and Landes all find in the fragmentation of Europe the source of the dynamism that led it to conquer the world . . . But they limit this dynamic only to Europe."⁴⁰ While anti-Eurocentrism has led Hobson to dismiss Tilly's bellocentrist paradigm, the same sentiment has inspired Perdue and other sinologists to integrate Tilly into the study of Chinese state-making. Like Hobson, recent generations of sinologists reject the presumption of China's cultural uniqueness and work strenuously to situate Chinese history with world history. They find Tilly a lightning rod in this endeavor. As Daniel Little highlights, "Tilly's work served to provide new questions for Chinese historians and new conceptual frameworks within which to attempt to explain the large processes of change that they were analyzing. State-formation, taxation, military provisioning and popular politics were themes and theories that Tilly's work helped to frame within recent work in Chinese history."⁴¹ This, of course, does not

³⁶ Kenneth Waltz, "The Emerging Structure of International Politics," *International Security*, vol. 18, no. 2 (1993), pp. 44–79, here at p. 77.

³⁷ Stuart J. Kaufman, Richard Little and William C. Wohlforth, "Conclusion: Theoretical Insights from the Study of World History," in: Stuart J. Kaufman, Richard Little and William C. Wohlforth (eds.), *The Balance of Power in World History* (New York: Palgrave, 2007), pp. 228–46, here at p. 228.

³⁸ John M. Hobson, *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilization* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 8.

³⁹ Hobson, *Eastern Origins*, p. 12.

⁴⁰ Peter C. Perdue, *China Marches West: The Qing Conquest of Central Eurasia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), pp. 525, 527.

⁴¹ Daniel Little, "Charles Tilly's Influence on the China Field," June 11, 2008. See: <http://thechinabeat.blogspot.com/2008/06/charles-tillys-influence-on-china-field.html>.

mean that Tilly-inspired historians believe that China is just like Europe. As Alice Miller nicely puts it, “This is emphatically not to say that China’s experience need be judged according to the degree it conformed to or deviated from the trajectories of European nation-states.”⁴² Rather, the purpose of the new Chinese historiography is to “unite the models of historical change in the West with an apprehension of the unique and indigenous patterns and trends of a more ‘China-centered’ approach” so as to “locate ‘China’ in its broader regional and even global context in a genuinely world history.”⁴³

Chinese State-Making in the Classical Period

How do war-making and state-making processes unfold in the Chinese case? As I argue elsewhere,

Many IR scholars have made passing references to the ancient Chinese system to support their claim to universality ... Indeed the ancient Chinese system witnessed processes of international competition that are strikingly familiar to IR scholars. Similar to the early modern European system, the ancient Chinese system experienced prevalence of war, disintegration of feudalism, formation of international anarchy, emergence of territorial sovereignty, and configuration of the balance of power. However, this system eventually succumbed to universal domination. This is an uncomfortable fact that few IR scholars are prepared to confront.⁴⁴

To understand why ancient China shared similar processes with early modern Europe but reached diametrically opposite outcomes, I propose a dynamic theory of international politics. International competition is seen as processes of strategic interaction between domination-seekers and targets of domination who use competing strategies and who are simultaneously facilitated and burdened by competing causal mechanisms. Realists tend to examine only countervailing mechanisms and strategies that check attempts at domination, that is, the balance of power and the rising costs of expansion and administration. I suggest that we pay equal attention to coercive mechanisms and strategies that facilitate domination, that is, divide-and-conquer strategies, ruthless stratagems

⁴² Alice Miller, “Some Things We Used to Know about China’s Past and Present (But Now, Not So Much,” *The Journal of American-East Asian Relations*, vol. 16, no. 1–2 (2009), pp. 41–68, here at p. 65.

⁴³ Miller, “Some Things We Used to Know,” pp. 60, 63.

⁴⁴ Victoria Tin-bor Hui, “Toward a Dynamic Theory of International Politics: Insights from Comparing the Ancient Chinese and Early Modern Europe,” *International Organization*, vol. 58, no. 1 (2004), pp. 175–205, here at p. 176.

and self-strengthening reforms.⁴⁵ In the ancient Chinese system, realist checking mechanisms indeed operated to block attempts at domination. But states overcame them with coercive strategies and policies. Ultimately, the state of Qin achieved universal domination in 221 BC by pursuing the most comprehensive self-strengthening reforms and the most ruthless stratagems.

If realist theories explain the ancient Chinese system only half-way, what about Tilly's bellocentrist paradigm? It is worth repeating that we are dealing with a pristine case unencumbered by any scope conditions for state formation: Tilly's "capital," Herst's low population-to-land ratios and Centeno's alternative financial sources. As such, the warfare dynamics work well beyond any state formation scholars could imagine. First, *war made the state* as international competition compelled ancient Chinese states to pursue self-strengthening military, economic and administrative reforms. In the so-called governance arms race,⁴⁶ the state of Qin developed the highest state capacity to engage in total mobilization for war. Second, *states made war* as self-strengthened states could mobilize more wherewithal of war, enjoy higher chances of victory, consolidate conquered territories and extract resources from conquered populations. The system thus witnessed increasingly intense international competition, with frequent warfare, recurrent territorial transfers and dramatic rise and decline – even death – of great powers. The war-make-state-and-state-make-war cycle produced such a Hobbesian-cum-Machiavellian world that it eventually reached the logical culmination, producing the triumph of the universal Leviathan.

Centeno and Holden argue that the warfare thesis does not work in Latin America. It is noteworthy that war also weakened rather than strengthened the state in early modern Europe. While ancient Chinese states pursued self-strengthening reforms (i.e., they mobilized the wherewithal of war by increasing the state's administrative-extractive capacity), early modern European states, in particular, "Spain" and "France," followed self-weakening expedients (i.e., they mobilized the wherewithal of war by relying on intermediate resource-holders such as military entrepreneurs, tax farmers, creditors and venal officers).⁴⁷ Such

⁴⁵ The term "self-strengthening reforms" is adopted from the late Qing concept "self-strengthening movement (*zhiqiang yundong*)," and the classical concept "rich country and strong army (*fuguo qiangbing*)."

⁴⁶ This term is borrowed from Kaufman, Little and Wohlforth, "Conclusion: Theoretical Insights from the Study of World History," p. 229.

⁴⁷ Victoria Tin-bor Hui, *War and State Formation in Ancient China and Early Modern Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 32–7, ch. 3 and 4. My discussion of European "self-weakening expedients" is indebted to Thomas Ertman, *Birth of the*

expedients turned European states into composites of contradictions: despotic but ineffective, autonomous but incapable and bulky but rotten from within. Thus, while war made the state through self-strengthening reforms in ancient China, war *deformed* the state through self-weakening expedients in early modern Europe. Europe could eventually escape the stagnation trajectory often associated with the East only because “the United Provinces,” “England,” “Sweden” and “Prussia” charted an alternative, state-strengthening model which was later emulated by Revolutionary France and other European states. Paradoxically, then, the “European experience” is rather applicable to the non-European world, especially Spanish colonies in Latin America.

The Chinese case further confirms Hobson’s argument regarding the “myth of the centralized and rational Western state, 1500–1900.”⁴⁸ Europeanists often believe that state formation processes are uniquely European and modern. Max Weber famously argued that China “represents the purest type of patrimonial bureaucracy that is unencumbered by any counterweight.”⁴⁹ However, the Chinese bureaucracy had been the object of admiration by European reformers in earlier centuries. Jesuits, who began to arrive in China at the turn of the seventeenth century, took great pains to learn Chinese civilization. They were immensely impressed by Chinese administration and wrote many tracts on the subject. The new knowledge of China reached Europe at precisely the time when progressive reformers were searching for ways to rid their states of venality. A work by Matteo Ricci appeared in five European languages by 1648.⁵⁰ Chinese influence was particularly strong in Prussia. According to Herrlee Creel, when Europe’s first written civil service examination was introduced in Berlin in 1693, “the inspiration came from China.”⁵¹ Of course, the Chinese bureaucracy had been in existence for two millennia since the late Warring States period. As Wong points out, “Ideas and institutions that are specifically ‘modern’ in the West are simply not ‘modern’ in China.”⁵² Vu thus remarks that, “If China is still sometimes treated as an ‘anomalous case,’ more sophisticated studies have turned the tables and made European states look like historical laggards.”⁵³

Leviathan: Building States and Regimes in Medieval and Early Modern Europe (Cambridge University Press, 1997).

⁴⁸ Hobson, *Eastern Origins*, p. 284.

⁴⁹ Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (eds.), vols. I and II (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), p. 1102.

⁵⁰ Herrlee G. Creel, *The Origins of Statecraft in China* (University of Chicago Press, 1970), p. 24.

⁵¹ Creel, *Origins of Statecraft*, p. 24. ⁵² Wong, *China Transformed*, p. 101.

⁵³ Vu, “Studying the State,” p. 151.

China was light years ahead of Europe in terms of not only bureaucratization, but also citizenship. As I argue elsewhere, citizenship rights “indigenously sprouted on Chinese soil long before they blossomed on European soil.”⁵⁴ This argument, of course, goes against both Eurocentric and Sinocentric conventional wisdoms. As Hobson points out, “Eurocentrism typically extrapolates backwards the modern conception of political democracy all the way to Ancient Greece. It then fabricates a permanent picture of Western democracy by tracing this conception forwards to Magna Carta in England (1215), then to England’s Glorious Revolution (1688/9), and then on to the American Constitution (1787/9) and the French Revolution (1789) . . . The immediate problem here is that . . . as late as 1900 genuine political democracy in the West remained a fiction.”⁵⁵ Reminiscent of Edward Said’s orientalism, this fiction is widely shared among Chinese and sinologists. Although Karl Max’s notion of “Asiatic mode of production” and Karl Wittfogel’s notion of “hydraulic despotism” have been rejected, it is still presumed that the origins of democracy are unique to Western civilization and alien to Chinese civilization. Wong suggests that citizenship is “a culturally foreign concept.”⁵⁶ Elizabeth Perry believes that the Chinese conception of rights “from Mencius to Mao” refers only to socioeconomic rights and has no place for political rights.⁵⁷

Hobson argues that “the theory of oriental despotism is a fabrication.”⁵⁸ Again, he could use Tilly’s paradigm to make his case. Tilly observed a paradox in European state formation: Militarization goes with civilianization, and centralization goes with constitutionalism.⁵⁹ When European rulers pursued dynastic ambitions in the international arena, they were compelled to bargain with resource-holders in the domestic realm. State–society bargaining for the wherewithal of war then created a variety of rights. If citizenship rights are defined as recognized enforceable claims on the state that are by-products of state–society bargaining over the means of war,⁶⁰ then we can restore the military basis of citizenship rights – both political and socioeconomic – in Chinese state-making.

In the Warring States period, ambitious rulers faced the familiar challenge of how to motivate the people to fight and die in war. International competition thus compelled three state–society bargains. The

⁵⁴ Hui, *War and State Formation*, p. 168. ⁵⁵ Hobson, *Eastern Origins*, pp. 290, 293.

⁵⁶ Wong, *China Transformed*, p. 93.

⁵⁷ Elizabeth J. Perry, “Chinese Conceptions of ‘Rights’: From Mencius to Mao – and Now,” *Perspectives on Politics*, vol. 6, no. 1 (2008), pp. 37–50.

⁵⁸ Hobson, *Eastern Origins*, p. 283. ⁵⁹ Tilly, *Coercion* (2nd edn), pp. 122, 206.

⁶⁰ Tilly, *Coercion* (2nd edn), pp. 101–2.

first was material welfare: Because the security of the state rested with the well-being of the peasantry, rulers made land grants to peasants in return for military service, taxes and corvée. The second bargain was legal protection: Various states publicly promulgated legal codes meant to bind rulers and ruled alike. The third bargain was freedom of expression: an interstate market of talent nurtured the flourishing of the “Hundred Schools of Thought.” Wong argues that the European phenomenon of popular sovereignty had no place in China’s late imperial state dynamics.⁶¹ He overlooks that the Warring States era was a different world. The received wisdom that the Mandate of Heaven rested with the Son of Heaven was a post-unification construction by Han’s Emperor Wu (r. 140–87 BC). The Mandate of Heaven as originally articulated in the classical era insisted on the ultimate sovereignty of the people. Most notably, the *Mencius* unequivocally places the Mandate in the hands of the people because “Heaven does not speak; it sees and hears as the people see and hear.”⁶² In discussing the bad last Shang ruler, Mencius is quoted to say: “I have heard about the killing of the ordinary fellow Zhou, but I have not heard of the assassination of any ruler.”⁶³ This passage is reminiscent of Hobbes’ complaint about resistance theorists: “they say not regicide, that is, killing of a king, but tyrannicide, that is, killing of a tyrant, is lawful.”⁶⁴ Mencian thinkers thus preceded European resistance theorists in arguing that tyrants ceased to be rulers, properly speaking.

Chinese State-Making in the Modern Period

Does the bellocentrist paradigm work only in the classical era? While IR scholars have paid much attention to the Warring States period, historians of China have focused on the modern period. Before the new wave of Chinese historiography, however, theorists of both Eurocentrism and Sinocentrism view modern China in very negative light. In the Chinese nationalist narrative, the period from the First Opium War (1839–42) to the establishment of the People’s Republic (1949) is known as the “century of national humiliation.”⁶⁵ Marx was so disparaging of China’s backwardness that he believed the “only hope for progressive emancipation . . . lay with the Opium Wars and the incursion of British

⁶¹ Wong, *China Transformed*, p. 101. ⁶² Mencius 5A5. ⁶³ Mencius 1B8.

⁶⁴ Thomas Hobbes, *Birth of the Leviathan*, pt. 2, ch. 29.

⁶⁵ See *Jindai Zhongguo bainian guochi ditu* (*Atlas of the Century of National Humiliation in Modern China*), edited by People’s Press Cartography Office (Renmin chubanshe ditushi) (Beijing: People’s Press, 1997).

capitalists.”⁶⁶ Consistent with Hobson’s aspiration to bring agency back to the East, Tilly-inspired historians have highlighted how successive Chinese regimes engaged in rigorous state-building efforts.

As Alice Miller contends, if state formation refers to “the development of increasingly large standing armies . . . , new methods and levels of taxation to finance increasingly expensive military establishments, state bureaucracies to manage an expanding array of state functions, an enhanced capacity to penetrate society and mobilize increasingly large segments of its population for its purposes; and an integrative capacity to enlist the identification of its subjects as ‘citizens’ with state fortunes,” then Tilly’s framework “does offer a basis from which to analyze the patterns of China’s modern state-building.”⁶⁷ Miller argues that China’s “first effective effort at modern state-building” took place under the late Qing in the 1900s.⁶⁸ The sweeping reform measures included reorganization of the central bureaucracy, creation of China’s first modern army and police, establishment of modern schools and introduction of a constitutionalist movement. Although these measures triggered the “Tocquevillian effect” (that an authoritarian regime is most vulnerable to a revolution when it begins to reform itself)⁶⁹ rather than saved the Qing, Miller emphasizes that they “did lay the foundation for successive episodes of state-building thereafter, first under the early Republic, then under the Nationalists in Nanjing after 1928, and then under the communists . . . after 1949.”⁷⁰ Covering the same late Qing and Republican eras, Ja Ian Chong examines Chinese state formation against the backdrop of foreign intervention. While the critical role of foreign encroachment is reminiscent of the Latin American experience, a state formation perspective also calls into question the victimization narrative that foreign intervention ineluctably weakened the Chinese state.⁷¹

In mainstream Chinese historiography, the Qing dynasty had already failed in an earlier round of reforms called the “foreign affairs movement” or “self-strengthening movement.” The program was shattered by China’s defeat in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–5. Recent

⁶⁶ Hobson, *Eastern Origins*, p. 12.

⁶⁷ Miller, “Some Things We Used to Know,” pp. 64–5.

⁶⁸ Miller, “Some Things We Used to Know,” p. 67.

⁶⁹ Tocqueville argued that “the most perilous moment for a bad government is one when it seeks to mend its ways . . . Patiently endured so long as it seemed beyond redress, a grievance comes to appear intolerable once the possibility of removing it crosses men’s minds. Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Old Regime and the French Revolution* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1955), p. 177.

⁷⁰ Miller, “Some Things We Used to Know,” p. 67.

⁷¹ Ja Ian Chong, “Imposing States: External Intervention and the Politics of State Formation,” unpublished PhD thesis (Princeton University, 2008).

historiography, especially research by Allen Fung on the army and Benjamin Elman on the navy, shows that the Qing's defeat was not at all preordained.⁷² Foreign observers at the time had expected a close fight, even a Chinese victory. What caused the Qing defeat was the lack of drilling and training among the rank and file and of unity among various divisions and fleets. Nevertheless, the "humiliating" result of the war led Chinese intellectuals and foreign observers to reason backward and conclude that the Qing's self-strengthening efforts were doomed from the start. While the lack of coordination is certainly a sign of state weakness (a problem that the New Policies of the 1900s sought to address), it is remarkable that international competition compelled drastic state-building reforms in the modern period as in the classical period.

The Chinese nationalist narrative also omits historians' insight that war "politicized the citizenry in a liberating sense."⁷³ The decades from the 1890s to the 1930s represented a time when Chinese intellectuals openly debated the notions of constitutional monarchy and republicanism. Philip Kuhn points out that the first petition by the educated elite to the Qing court for popular representation in 1895 was "only conceivable under the duress of imminent foreign conquest."⁷⁴ Orville Schell highlights that the May Fourth era (around 1919) was a great "Chinese Enlightenment."⁷⁵ Arthur Waldron observes that the Republican period under the Northern government of 1912–28 was "a period of professedly parliamentary rule,"⁷⁶ enjoying "substantial economic growth, . . . freedom of the press . . ., and a flowering of culture."⁷⁷ Likewise, Stephen MacKinnon points out that the short-lived Nationalist-Communist unity government at Hankou in 1938 was marked by power-sharing among rival militarists and thus witnessed "the absence of the repressive power of the state."⁷⁸ Against the backdrop of Japanese

⁷² Allen Fung, "Testing the Self-Strengthening: The Chinese Army in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895," *Modern Asian Studies*, Special Issue: War in Modern China, vol. 30, no. 4 (1996), pp. 1007–31; Benjamin Elman, "Naval Warfare and the Refraction of China's Self-Strengthening Reforms into Scientific and Technological Failure, 1865–1895," *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 38, no. 2 (2004), pp. 283–326.

⁷³ Stephen MacKinnon, "The Tragedy of Wuhan, 1938," *Modern Asian Studies*, Special Issue: War in Modern China, vol. 30, no. 4 (1996), pp. 931–94, here at p. 943.

⁷⁴ Philip A. Kuhn, *Origins of the Modern Chinese State* (Stanford University Press, 2002), p. 123.

⁷⁵ Orville Schell, "China's Hidden Democratic Legacy," *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 83, no. 4 (2004), pp. 116–24.

⁷⁶ Arthur Waldron, *From War to Nationalism: China's Turning Point, 1924–1925* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 264.

⁷⁷ Waldron, *From War to Nationalism*, p. 264.

⁷⁸ MacKinnon, "The Tragedy of Wuhan," p. 935.

invasion, “parliamentary-like debate,” “third-party movements” (independent of both the Nationalists and Communists), the free press and the arts flourished and “reached a twentieth-century zenith.”⁷⁹ The conclusion of the Communist-Nationalist civil war, unfortunately, aborted China’s democratic experiments. After 1949, totalitarian states emerged on both sides of the Taiwan Strait.

Chinese State-Making in the Imperial Period

It may be said that, even if the bellocentrist paradigm works in China in the formative (656–221 BC) and modern (1839–1949) periods, it surely cannot work in the two millennia in between. After all, the most deeply held belief about China in both Eurocentrism and Sinocentrism is Chinese oneness. As Hobson observes, the Eurocentric contrast between “an eternal image of ‘dynamic West’ versus an ‘unchanging East’”⁸⁰ ultimately rests with the differentiation between the “European multi-state system” and the “Eastern single-state system.”⁸¹ Bin Wong agrees, suggesting that “China never really experienced permanent fragmentation after its period of intense interstate competition ending in the third century B.C.E. . . . China’s equilibrium political form came to be a unified agrarian empire.”⁸²

The Tillyan approach calls into question the Chinese presumption of unity and uniformity and helps to uncover a picture of duality and diversity. Of all Tillyan insights, the foremost is the injunction against the retrospective approach. If we take for granted the states we see today and work backward for their state-making experiences, we would bury the “hundreds of states that once flourished but then disappeared.”⁸³ Such an approach also leads to the certainty of hindsight bias that blinds us to various suppressed historical alternatives not taken. Tilly thus advocated the prospective approach, whereby the researcher proceeds from a political unit’s formative era and searches forward for alternative paths and outcomes.⁸⁴ It is noteworthy that the Chinese nationalist discourse takes precisely the retrospective approach. The late Tan Qixiang, the chief editor of the state-sponsored *Zhongguo lishi dituji* (*Historical Atlas of China*),⁸⁵ explicitly argued that historical China should

⁷⁹ MacKinnon, “The Tragedy of Wuhan,” p. 937. ⁸⁰ Hobson, *Eastern Origins*, p. 8.

⁸¹ Hobson, *Eastern Origins*, p. 17. ⁸² Wong, *China Transformed*, pp. 76–7.

⁸³ Tilly, *Coercion* (2nd edn), p. 9.

⁸⁴ Tilly, “Reflections on the History of European State-Making,” pp. 14–15.

⁸⁵ Tan Qixiang, *Jianming zhongguo lishi dituji* (*Concise Historical Atlas of China*) (Beijing: Xinhua shudian, 1991). Following the Chinese convention, Chinese names begin with surnames unless the scholars in question go by English names.

be seen from the perspective of today's Chinese.⁸⁶ The problem is best illustrated by the very Chinese term for China, “*zhongguo*.” Today, “*zhongguo*” is taken to mean the singular, powerful “middle kingdom.” But when “*zhongguo*” was first coined in the classical period, it referred to “central states” in the plural form. Even in the imperial era, “*zhongguo*” was a geographical concept – like “Europe” – and did not become a country name until the late nineteenth century.⁸⁷ Because the Chinese language does not distinguish between the singular and plural forms, the original meaning of “*zhongguo*” is easily lost in retrospective accounts.

To interrogate the presumption of *zhongguo*'s oneness, I borrow from the Tillyan-cum-Weberian conception of the effective state as one “that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory.”⁸⁸ In this perspective, establishment of Chinese unity should involve effective exercise of central control. As for the “given territory,” China's official historians generally take “historical China” to refer to the maximum territorial reach achieved under the Qing dynasty. Ge Jianxiong, however, acknowledges that such an expansive definition is biased against Chinese unity by fiat: The “central kingdom” controlled this vast space for only 81 years, from 1759 (when the Qing established the new realm of “Xinjiang” in the Zungharian and Tarim basins) to 1840 (when the Qing began to lose to the British in the First Opium War).⁸⁹ (More below.) Ge thus resorts to a minimal definition: the maximum territorial reach achieved under the Qin dynasty in 214 BC. This territorial space is 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 edge of the Yunnan-Guizhou plateau in the southwest, the Guangdong and Guangxi regions in the south and the coastline in the east.⁹⁰ This space encompasses all the arable lands in the north China plain, the Wei River valley and the Yangzi valley. Although boundaries shifted over time, Qin's territorial reach serves as a relatively reasonable benchmark because it defined for subsequent unified dynasties from the Han through the early Qing what it meant to rule “all under Heaven.” Court records call this Chinese space “*guannei* (inside the pass)” or “*neidi* (the interior)”, and the space

⁸⁶ Tan Qixiang, “Lishishang de zhongguo (Historical China),” in: *Qiusuo shikong (An Exploration of Time and Space)* (Tianjin: Baihua wenyi, 2000), pp. 2–4.

⁸⁷ Qixiang, “Historical China,” pp. 2, 3.

⁸⁸ Max Weber, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (eds.) (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 78.

⁸⁹ Ge Jianxiong, *Tongyi yu fenlie: Zhongguo lishi de qishi (Unification and Division: Insights from Chinese History)* (Beijing: Sanlian, 1994), p. 79.

⁹⁰ Ge Jian Xiong, *Unification and Division* (1991), pp. 106, 179.

between the minimal and maximal definitions – that is, Manchuria, Mongolia, Eastern Turkestan, Yunnan and Tibet – “*guanwai* (beyond the pass)” or “the periphery.” It is noteworthy that even the minimal definition yields only 991 years of unification throughout the long span of Chinese history up to 2000 (see Table 10.1). In short, *zhongguo* more often took the plural form than the singular form.⁹¹

How do the warfare dynamics work if *zhongguo* alternates between the plural and singular forms? In line with my earlier argument that war made the state in ancient China and deformed the state in early modern Europe, I propose that war made the state in eras of plural *zhongguo* and weakened the state in eras of singular *zhongguo*. That is, while China charted a state-strengthening course in eras of division, China followed the “European” state-weakening model in eras of unification.

Whether in the Warring States period or subsequent eras of division, war made the state as contending “central states” were compelled to

Table 10.1 *Chronology of Unification over the Interior (up to 2000)*⁹²

Dynasty or Period	Duration of Dynasty/Period	Duration of Unification	No. of Yrs of Unification
Neolithic period	5500–3000 BC	–	–
Longshan period	3000–2000 BC	–	–
Xia? ⁹³	2070–1600 BC	–	–
Shang	1600–1046 BC	–	–
Zhou	1045 ⁹⁴ –256 BC	–	–
Western Zhou	1045–771 BC		
Spring/Autumn	770–453 BC		
Warring States	453–221 BC		
Qin dynasty	221–206 BC	214–209 BC	5
Han dynasty	202 BC–AD 220		
Western Han	202 BC–AD 9	108 BC–AD 22;	130
Xin	9–24		
Eastern Han	25–220	50–184	134
Three Kingdoms	220–265	–	–

⁹¹ A more in-depth discussion, see Victoria Tin-bor Hui, “China’s Expansion to the Periphery: Why Some ‘Peripheral Regions’ Became Parts of China While Korea and Vietnam Did Not,” in: Geoffrey Wade (ed.), *Asian Expansions: The Historical Experiences of Polity Expansion in Asia* (New York: Routledge, forthcoming).

⁹² Years of unification are adopted, with some adjustments, from Xiong, *Unification and Division* (1991), p. 79.

⁹³ The existence of the Xia period is subject to dispute.

⁹⁴ All dates before 841 BC are rough estimates.

Table 10.1 (*cont.*)

Dynasty or Period	Duration of Dynasty/Period	Duration of Unification	No. of Yrs of Unification
Jin dynasty	265–420		
Western Jin	265–317	280–301	21
Eastern Jin	317–420		
16 Kingdoms	304–439		
Northern and Southern dynasties	420–589	–	–
Sui dynasty	581–618	589–616	27
Tang dynasty	618–907	630–755	125
Five dynasties and ten kingdoms	907–960	–	–
Song dynasties	960–1279	–	–
Northern Song	960–1126		
Southern Song	1127–1279		
Yuan dynasty	1279–1368	1279–1352	73
Ming dynasty	1368–1644	1371–1629	258
Qing dynasty	1644–1911	1683–1850	167
Republic of China	1912–	–	–
On mainland	1912–1949		
In Taiwan	1949–		
People's Republic of China	1949–	1949–2000	51
			Total: 991

pursue self-strengthening reforms to mobilize human and material resources. The war-make-state-and-state-make-war cycle would reach the logical conclusion when the most powerful and resourceful “central state” conquered all rivals and established the “central kingdom.” But what happened when there was only one victor left? The *Mencius*, a Confucian classic, had predicted circa 260 BC that “states . . . without the threat of foreign invasion will perish.”⁹⁵ Following this Mencian wisdom, I argue that unification weakened the “central kingdom” because, first, the ultimate victor was no longer compelled by the exigencies of war to keep up with state-strengthening efforts, and, second, the much enlarged empire should face the loss-of-strength gradient and so should experience reduction in state capacity – defined as the state’s ability to mobilize resources and implement policies – in areas further away from the capital. The burden of ruling a sizable *zhongguo* meant that

⁹⁵ *Mencius*, 6B15; dated by E. Bruce Brooks and A. Taeko Brooks, *The Emergence of China* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, forthcoming), p. 157.

the “central kingdom” had to depend on local leaders to maintain social order. The imperial state thus turned to a hybrid form of government that combined direct rule and indirect rule. The central court appointed magistrates down to the department and county levels, but gave them such scanty resources that they had to rely on the cooperation of “a range of extra-bureaucratic actors and groups, including local militias, clan and lineage associations, and members of the local gentry.”⁹⁶ The imperial state also did not provide a budget for support staff so that magistrates had to rely on a “sub-bureaucratic staff” of clerks, secretaries and tax-collectors who made their livings from imposing surtaxes and fees on local populations. If direct rule is the key to “modern” state capacity, then it is of immense historical significance that the post-Qin “central kingdom” lost the capacity for direct rule. Thus, although the Chinese state remained strong by world standards well into the Jesuit era, it was much weaker than its smaller Warring States predecessors.

When the Qin dynasty was first established in 221 BC, the new “central kingdom” still enjoyed a high level of state capacity. This is because Qin had created an immensely strong state equivalent to the modern totalitarian state, and all vanquished states had developed provinces and counties, which could be readily absorbed into Qin’s centralized bureaucracy. Yet, Qin’s First Emperor was not content with ruling only the territorial space inherited from the Warring States system. He sought to rule “all under Heaven” and conquered further to the Ordos in the north and the Nanling regions in the south (Guangdong and Guangxi). The high costs of sending massive armies to two frontiers in opposite directions brought about unsustainable levels of taxation and conscription. While the competent First Emperor could still hold the empire together, the Second Emperor imposed even heavier extractions and harsher punishments but was uninterested in the administration of the empire. In the face of massive rebellions, the Qin dynasty quickly collapsed in 206 BC.

The ensuing Han dynasty (202 BC–AD 220) in its early years was restricted to the territorial space of the Warring States system. By the time of Emperor Wu (r. 140–87 BC), however, the Han court had eliminated all internal rivals in northern China and thus proceeded to restore Qin’s maximum territorial reach. It is worth noting that the regions south of the Yangzi River were then inhabited by Yue peoples who spoke languages unintelligible to people from northern China. Because the Qin court’s control over this alien territory was tenuous,

⁹⁶ Patricia M. Thornton, *Disciplining the State: Virtue, Violence, and State-Making in Modern China* (Harvard University Asia Center, 2007), p. 24.

local leaders easily restored independence during the Qin-Han transition. After successful conquest, the Han continued to hold this territory through indirect rule.

The Chinese state in singular *zhongguo* would be weakened by not just the reversal of the war-make-state dynamics in the interior, but also the extension of war to the periphery. Throughout the long span of Chinese history, the Han dynasty (202 BC–AD 220) sent armies to the Western Regions (the Zungharian and/or the Tarim Basins), southern Manchuria, northern Korea and Southeast Asia; the Sui dynasty (581–618) to the Western Regions, southern Manchuria, northern Korea and Southeast Asia; the Tang dynasty (618–907) to the Western Regions, Mongolia, eastern Tibet, southern Manchuria and northern Korea; the Yuan dynasty (1279–1368) to Korea, Japan, Yunnan, Burma, Vietnam and Java (after subjugating the vast Eurasian steppe zone and the Song dynasty); the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) to the Western Regions, Mongolia, southern Manchuria, northern Korea, Burma, Vietnam and beyond in South and Southeast Asia; the Qing dynasty (1644–1911) to the Western Regions, Mongolia, Tibet, Nepal and Taiwan.⁹⁷

Why is it that war in the interior strengthened the state while war to the periphery weakened the state? First, the periphery was politically and culturally not part of historical *zhongguo* until the early twentieth century. (Even the southern half of “the interior” was culturally non-Chinese until the late Tang.) More importantly, the steppe zone was geographically distant and different. As argued above, attempts at domination must overcome the countervailing mechanism of rising costs of expansion (and that of balance of power).⁹⁸ In the Warring States era, the state of Qin could overcome the mechanism of costs partly because the system was relatively small, occupying only the central plain and surrounding regions in northern China. When the unified Qin dynasty expanded to both the south and the north, the empire disintegrated. What set the limits to Qin’s expansion? While the Qin had developed the capacity to mobilize massive armies of several hundreds of thousands, the ability to move and supply armies over long distances was a function of geography as well as state capacity. The vast periphery “beyond the pass,” in particular, is more similar to Africa than the Chinese interior in geographical features. According to Herbst, it is prohibitively costly for state-builders to establish control over inhospitable territories with low population densities and large supplies of land.⁹⁹ Similarly in historical China,

⁹⁷ For a more focused discussion of expansion and costs, see Hui, “China’s Expansion to the Periphery.”

⁹⁸ Hui, *War and State Formation*, pp. 24–6. ⁹⁹ Herbst, *States and Power in Africa*, p. 13.

long-distance campaigns beyond arable lands involved immense expenses on logistics. Expansion to the periphery thus repeatedly weakened the state. An ambitious court that ignored this geopolitical imperative would sooner or later face budget deficits. As Wong observes, while China's regular land taxes could generally meet ordinary expenditures, the extraordinary demands of military campaigns would lead to fiscal crises.¹⁰⁰ Although the imperial state could impose special land surtaxes, commercial taxes and forced "contributions" from the rich, there were strict limits to revenue extractions from an agrarian economy. When confronted with a budget crisis, the seemingly powerful "central kingdom" was forced to choose between two equally unpalatable alternatives: retrenchment, which would mean giving up immense human and material costs already invested; or heightened extractions, which could provoke peasant rebellions as in the Qin.

In the Han dynasty, the early official rhetoric attributed Qin's rapid collapse to ruthless expansionism and extractions. By the time the Han court had consolidated control over the entire "interior," however, Emperor Wu was tempted to seek domination beyond Qin's conquests to the Western Regions, southern Manchuria/northern Korea and northern Vietnam. It did not take long for Emperor Wu to turn budget surpluses into budget deficits. In order to generate new revenues from unprecedented salt and iron monopolies, the Han court held the "Discourses on Salt and Iron" in 81 BC. During the policy debate, scholar-officials criticized that "the farther we expand, the more the people suffer."¹⁰¹ The Han dynasty eventually lasted, partly because the court managed to increase revenues, and no less because it adjusted its ambitions to balance the books. (In Tillyan fashion, the extraordinary revenues from the iron and salt monopolies would become ordinary revenues for the rest of Chinese history.)

The fact that the Han was relatively long-lasting created a positive example for expansion, which effectively countered the Qin's negative example. Just as Han's Emperor Wu sought to emulate and surpass Qin's First Emperor, ambitious emperors in subsequent dynasties strove to emulate and surpass Emperor Wu. Unsurprisingly, every expansionist court soon exhausted accumulated surpluses and faced budget deficits. The Sui dynasty chose to increase extractions and suffered Qin's consequence. The Tang dynasty opted for partial retrenchment, but it was still weakened by another expansion-induced problem: warlordism. When the Tang court established permanent

¹⁰⁰ Wong, *China Transformed*, pp. 90, 94.

¹⁰¹ Quoted in Xiong, *Unification and Division*, pp. 111–12.

frontier armies to fight increasingly distant campaigns and to garrison increasingly distant military outposts in the Western Regions, it essentially “relinquished effective control over the military governors, whose troops came to owe primary allegiance to their immediate superiors rather than the distant authorities in the capital.”¹⁰² After the An Lushan Rebellion of 755, the seemingly mighty Tang dynasty disintegrated into a system of semi-autonomous warlords. The Mongol Yuan dynasty was better at controlling the steppe zone – after all, it was the Mongol homeland. Yet, after the Yuan had established itself in Dadu (Beijing), it was forced to give up the Western Regions because defending the area against competing Mongol forces was “a financial drain.”¹⁰³ The Ming dynasty harbored ambition to dominate the steppe in a Mongolian style, but expensive campaigns accomplished little other than driving Mongol forces to take evasive actions.

It was not until the high Qing that the “central kingdom” could finally project power to the periphery. This was made possible by two unprecedented developments. First, a “revolution in logistics” as Qing officials implemented state-strengthening measures to supply the powerful cavalry and infantry forces armed with Jesuit-made cannons. Second, a “commercial revolution” as the region south of the Yangzi River had become so productive that it was exporting vast quantities of agricultural products and handicraft goods to global markets. The Qing thus had a much deeper pocket to pay for the costs of expansion and administration than any previous dynasties. Nevertheless, the Qing could not change a hard fact on the ground: new conquests in the periphery continued to be a drain on imperial finance. When the Qing experienced budget deficits in the face of internal rebellions and foreign encroachment in the nineteenth century, it contracted increasingly larger loans with international financiers against future customs revenues. As the Qing court followed the “European” model of financing, it expectedly became increasingly weak and corrupt in the modern era.

The Qing’s logistical revolution in the eighteenth century deserves more attention. This episode of Chinese history offers another close-up account of war-making and state-making, restores agency to a formidable “Other” of the “central kingdom,” and explains how *zhongguo* expanded from the minimum definition to the maximum

¹⁰² David A. Graff, *Medieval Chinese Warfare, 300–900* (New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 14.

¹⁰³ Thomas T. Allsen, “The Yuan Dynasty and the Uighurs of Turfan in the 13th Century,” in: Morris Rossabi (ed.), *China Among Equals: The Middle Kingdom and Its Neighbors, 10th–14th Centuries* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), pp. 243–80, here at p. 261.

definition. In Chinese nationalist narratives, as noted above, the Qing is a corrupt dynasty that brought national humiliation to China. But the Qing was in fact “one of the most important cases of state building that has come down to us.”¹⁰⁴ While it is true that the Qing’s efforts at strengthening the state failed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, what is often overlooked is that its self-strengthening efforts in the early years were remarkably successful. It is also important to realize that the “China” that the Qing dynasty took over in 1644 was a small fraction of what the Qing achieved at its height in 1759. The early Qing faced intense competition from the Tsarist and Zunghar empires. While the Qing negotiated border-demarcation treaties with the Russians, it engaged in a life-and-death struggle with the Zunghar Mongols from the 1670s to the 1750s. In the seventeenth century, the Zunghar Empire ruled most of the Mongolian steppe and the Zungharian basin, dominated the Tarim basin and exerted immense influence on the Tibetan Plateau – that is, it ruled most of the periphery ringing the interior.

In Perdue’s Tilly-inspired analysis, the prolonged Qing-Zunghar struggle drove both belligerents to engage in “competitive statebuilding.”¹⁰⁵ To increase their “stateness,” both sides were compelled “to mobilize economic and military resources, build administrative organizations, and develop ideologies of conquest and rule.”¹⁰⁶ In a stereotypical Tillyan fashion, the mobilization of “grain, horses, soldiers, civilians, nomads, grass, uniforms, and weaponry”¹⁰⁷ from the interior to the frontier required the Qing to engage in “administrative innovations that built an increasingly centralized and coordinated bureaucracy.”¹⁰⁸ Such efforts further “transformed the fiscal system, commercial networks, communication technology, and local agrarian society.”¹⁰⁹ On the part of the Zunghars, competition with the Qing similarly compelled them to “undertake significant steps toward ‘self-strengthening’,”¹¹⁰ building fortified cities, manufacturing cannon and other weapons (and loading small cannon on camelback), developing mining industries to manufacture gunpowder, importing gun-casting and cartographic technology from Russians and Swedes, exacting payments of grain, animals and men from subject populations, and fostering trade and agriculture.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁴ Charles Horner, *Rising China and Its Postmodern Fate: Memories of Empire in a New Global Context* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009), p. 60.

¹⁰⁵ Perdue, *China Marches West*, p. 549. ¹⁰⁶ Perdue, *China Marches West*, pp. 18, 518.

¹⁰⁷ Perdue, *China Marches West*, p. 519. ¹⁰⁸ Perdue, *China Marches West*, pp. 549–50.

¹⁰⁹ Perdue, *China Marches West*, p. 527. ¹¹⁰ Perdue, *China Marches West*, p. 307.

¹¹¹ Perdue, *China Marches West*, p. 305; James A. Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads: A History of Xinjiang* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), pp. 90–4.

What tilted the balance in this “governance arms race” was the relative ease of state-building as shaped by Herbstian population-to-land ratios. The Qing court, once it had consolidated control over the populous interior, could bring “the full weight of Chinese wealth to overwhelm steppe warfare.”¹¹² The Zunghar Mongols, in contrast, occupied a vast steppe zone with low-density population centers sparsely distributed across pasturelands and oases city-states. Their resources were equally “widely scattered, from the valleys of the Irtysh, Orkhon, and other rivers to the salt and potential golden sands of lakes Yamysh and Balkash.”¹¹³ Because the Zunghars “had to collect much more fragmented materials over a vast, unintegrated space,” their state-building project was “much more challenging and, ultimately, ephemeral.”¹¹⁴

When the Zunghar Empire enjoyed the unified leadership of Galdan (1671–97), Tsewang Rabdan (1697–1727) and Galdan Tseren (1727–45), it could manage to survive between the expanding Qing and Tsarist empires. However, as James Millward points out, “For all their might . . . Central Eurasian nomad powers were fractious. Their customary acceptance of either lateral or patrilineal succession, depending on who won the political and military contest to inherit the khanship, ensured many numbers of bloody transitions and political fragmentations.”¹¹⁵ After the death of Galdan Tseren in 1745, the Zunghar Empire descended into bitter internecine struggles. Emperor Qianlong (1736–95) could then subjugate the Zunghar Empire once and for all in 1755–57 (and exterminate the whole Zunghar people). When Qianlong’s armies marched on to dominate the Tarim Basin in 1759, a new realm of “Xinjiang” (meaning new territories) was created. *Zhongguo* finally took on the maximum definition.¹¹⁶

In Perdue’s Tillyan account, however, success at eliminating an existential rival was a curse in disguise. The war-make-state perspective “not only helps to explain why the Qing grew; it can also explain why the empire fell.”¹¹⁷ The extermination of the Zunghar Empire and the delimitation of a fixed border with Russia “fundamentally changed the Chinese political economy of state-building while Europeans continued

¹¹² Peter Lorge, *War, Politics and Society in Early Modern China, 900–1795* (New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 172.

¹¹³ Perdue, *China Marches West*, p. 519. ¹¹⁴ Perdue, *China Marches West*, p. 518.

¹¹⁵ Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, p. 40.

¹¹⁶ In the mid-nineteenth century, local leaders in Xinjiang rebelled against Qing rule when the Qing was under the onslaught of the Opium Wars and the Taiping Rebellion. Nevertheless, the Qing reconquered Xinjiang in 1876–8 and turned the region into a province in 1884.

¹¹⁷ Perdue, *China Marches West*, p. 546.

to invest in their wars.”¹¹⁸ When Emperor Qianlong received Britain’s Macartney embassy in 1793, he was not unaware of Britain’s rising power, but he had little interest in the weapons and manufactures the British had to offer – in sharp contrast to his interest in Jesuit-made cannons just decades ago. Perdue conjectures that had the Zunghar Empire held out, the Qing would have continued to engage in state-strengthening, possibly by purchasing the latest technologies from Britain.¹¹⁹ Paradoxically, Qing’s success at exterminating the Mongol empire eventually contributed to its subsequent weakness.

Had various peripheral empires and central states held out, the history of Chinese citizenship would also have taken a different course. If the Eurocentric theory of oriental despotism rests with the presumption of Chinese oneness, then it is of immense significance that *zhongguo* in fact alternated between the singular and plural forms. In general, while singular *zhongguo* was more despotic, plural *zhongguo* was more conducive to the development of citizenship rights defined as state–society bargains. Qin’s unification of the Warring States system already aborted the development of nascent Chinese citizenship.¹²⁰ Under the Qin dynasty, all elements of classical citizenship rights disappeared. Peasant welfare was abandoned: the imperial court increased tax burdens and further drafted more than 800,000 men to expand to the northern and southern frontiers. The principle of justice was eroded: punishments became so harsh 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 stifled: 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.

After the Qin Dynasty, the unified “central kingdom” continued to bury the classical bargains of legal protection and freedom of expression but restored that of peasant welfare. This may explain why sinologists hold the mistaken view that the Chinese know of only socioeconomic rights but not political rights. From the Han on, a key government function was to keep track of harvest conditions and grain prices so that officials could efficiently deliver famine relief. As Wong explains, this “strong interest in peasant welfare” was developed “not from an altruistic sense of charity or benevolence but because an economically viable peasantry was understood to be the basis for a politically successful government.”¹²¹ Does this mean that singular *zhongguo* could

¹¹⁸ Perdue, *China Marches West*, p. 550.

¹²⁰ Hui, *War and State Formation*, p. 178.

¹¹⁹ Perdue, *China Marches West*, pp. 563–4.

¹²¹ Wong, *China Transformed*, p. 77.

nevertheless promote human well-being? Theoretically speaking, a benign dictator could do a lot of good deeds. However, it was not reliable to count on the benevolence of every reigning emperor. As unification effectively turned “all under Heaven” into the Son of Heaven’s private property, there was no effective sanction to prevent the emperor from enslaving his subjects and exploiting their wealth. Ge Jianxiong observes that annual revenues were mostly spent on court consumption rather than public projects.¹²² Furthermore, as discussed earlier, when expansionist emperors faced budget crises, they were more tempted to increase taxes and corvee than to recall expeditionary forces.

In eras of division, in contrast, competing “central states” would again be compelled by international competition to introduce open policies to attract new talent and develop neglected regions to enlarge their tax bases. Of course, rulers in plural *zhongguo* remained autocratic – just as early modern European states were absolutist. And the classical bargains of legal protection and freedom of expression were not restored. But the very existence of a “central states” system necessarily gave rise to the “right of exit,” which made rulers aware of limits to extractions lest the people would move to competing “central states.” As the classic *Book of Odes* warns rulers, “Never have you cared for my welfare. I shall leave you and journey to that fortunate land.”¹²³ Europeanists argue that the right of exit served as an implicit check on arbitrary power, and even a substitute for formal representation in modern European politics.¹²⁴ Its importance in historical China should therefore not be underestimated. After all, population size was the basis of military power and economic wealth. Thus, the Tillyan paradigm allows us to see that the Chinese state was simultaneously more capable and less autocratic in eras of plural *zhongguo*.

The contrast between plural and singular *zhongguo* is even more pronounced if we extend the analysis from the interior to the periphery. First, steppe regimes were based on more egalitarian state–society relations, thus allowing some political freedom. However, the steppes did not provide a viable exit option for ordinary Chinese because they were hindered by both heavily garrisoned borders and their belief in Chinese cultural superiority. Second, while imperial emperors treated weaker

¹²² Xiong, *Unification and Division*, p. 201.

¹²³ Quoted in Kuhn, *Origins of the Modern Chinese State*, p. 118.

¹²⁴ Eric L. Jones, *Growth Recurring: Economic Change in World History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 118; Andrew Moravcsik, “Taking Preferences Seriously: A Liberal Theory of International Politics,” *International Organization*, vol. 51, no. 4 (1997), pp. 513–53, here at p. 518.

neighbors in Korea and Vietnam as inferiors, they were often forced to recognize powerful regimes in Inner Asia as equals, and even as superiors from time to time, despite the rhetoric of hierarchical tributary relations. Third, the steppe zone in Inner Asia was a land of plenty for millennia before it descended into poverty with its partition by the Qing and Tsarist empires. These three elements suggest that the prolonged independence of steppe regimes contributed to the relative stability of the historical Asian system until the high Qing.

Tilly and Chinese State-Making Today

Tilly's state formation paradigm is revolutionizing the study of Chinese state-making because it facilitates rethinking of both Eurocentric and Sinocentric received wisdoms. Contrary to the view that Chinese history has no significant military conflicts, war has in fact played a "central role in shaping and reshaping the definition of China and its political order."¹²⁵ Contrary to the perception that war brought about nothing but chaos and sufferings, war also stimulated the birth of Confucianism, Legalism, Daoism, Sunzi militarism and other schools of thought in the classical era – and they have remained the foundation of Chinese civilization to this day. And contrary to the belief that China was "patrimonial" and "despotic," war also created the supposedly "modern" phenomena of bureaucratization and citizenship in China 2,000 years ahead of Europe.

Does Tilly's approach still have relevance for Chinese state-making today? The People's Republic has followed the trajectory of singular *zhongguo*, imposing dictatorial rule and subjugating peripheral regions. Unlike previous eras, moreover, the availability of modern means of communication and transportation has significantly alleviated the loss-of-strength gradient, allowing Beijing to impose its will throughout an expansive conception of *zhongguo* close to the maximum definition. In Taiwan, the Nationalist party similarly built a police state in the early decades. But Chiang Ching-kuo eventually led the island state on to the trajectory of plural *zhongguo*, introducing democratic reforms to mobilize both domestic and international support in Taiwan's ongoing competition with Beijing.

Will the People's Republic ever become a strong and democratic state? Unification per se is not problematic. Indeed, the experience of the European Union shows that unification can be conducive to

¹²⁵ Lorge, *War, Politics and Society*, p. 3.

constitutional democracy, international peace and economic prosperity. What has haunted Chinese history is the means by which unification has been achieved and maintained – by “the barrel of a gun” in Mao Zedong’s oft-cited quote. Chinese intellectuals from Sun Yat-sen to Yan Jiaqi have understood this root problem of Chinese politics. They have advocated the federal-democratic model in order to restore diversity amidst unity.¹²⁶ Current Chinese leaders, however, claim that federal democracy is unsuited to Chinese culture and that it would lead to division and chaos. But Tilly’s paradigm allows us to see that the roots of plural *zhongguo* and citizenship are as indigenous to Chinese soil as the roots of unitary *zhongguo* and despotism. Chinese history in fact offers a rich indigenous democratic legacy. Now that Tilly’s paradigm is revolutionizing scholarly understandings of Chinese state-making, what is missing is Tilly-inspired new thinking among Chinese scholars and Chinese leaders. If Chinese leaders are genuinely concerned about the people’s welfare, Chinese history shows that there is no need to fear citizenship rights or regional autonomy.

¹²⁶ Yan Jiaqi, *Lianbang Zhongguo gouxiang (A Conception for a Federal China)* (Hong Kong: Mingbao chubanshe, 1992).