Setting the Stage, Part II

Why Compare the Classical Political Thought of China and India?

Amitav Acharya

The aim of this book is to compare classical Chinese and Indian political thought, especially as it relates to "global" or "world" order-building.[1] What is the rationale for such a comparison? What insights might one derive from such an exercise that are not presently available from the literatures on political science, international relations, and political philosophy? And what are the key referent objects or questions that would make such an exercise useful and meaningful? In this essay, I offer some thoughts on these and related questions from the perspective of an international relations (IR) scholar (albeit one who takes a very broad view of that discipline), although much of my argument can be extended to other fields in the social sciences and humanities.

GREECE AND ROME, CHINA AND INDIA

Western scholarship often holds up Greece and Rome as the definitive sources of concepts and approaches to political science, history, philosophy, and IR. In IR, for example, there is a common tendency to go back to the Greco-Roman period when tracing the origins of democracy, diplomacy, anarchy, and empire. As Daniel Deudney writes:

> Action and words from classical Greece and republican Rome stand enshrined as foundational in the modern conception of the West as a distinct civilization, and ancient writers and events have exercised a startlingly powerful presence in all aspects of Western thought, particularly about politics . . . For two millennia Western thinking about politics and history has been a long dialogue with the ancient figures of Herodotus, Hippocrates, Socrates, Plato, Thucydides, Aristotle, Livy, Polybius, Cicero, Tacitus, and others. The works of major modern political theorists such as Machiavelli, Montesquieu, and Rousseau are as much about ancient writers and experiences as modern ones.[2]

This Greco-Roman centrism is the forerunner and foundation of modern Eurocentrism. Thus, the idea of anarchy is traced back to the Greek city-states system,

democracy to the Greek *Polis*, and rationalism to Greek philosophers like Thales and Aristotle. Herodotus is the "father" of history, Thucydides of realism, and so on. Although Deudney stresses republican and not imperial Rome, it is the Roman Empire (not the Persian Empire, which predated it and was as extensive) that is held up in the West as the ideal type and even a model for all great empires. Indeed, the Victorian and Edwardian apologists of the British Empire often invoked the Roman Empire to legitimize British colonialism in India. And after the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, both critics and supporters of the invasion likened America to a new Rome. In the vocabulary of international relations or political thought, Greco-Roman dominance is commonplace because its ideas and contributions are approximations to the contemporary institutions and practices of world order.

Yet the history of world politics and order-building did not begin with Greece and Rome. The Sumerians, along with the Egyptians, invented the institution of universal divine kingship (which was adored and adopted by Aristotle, pupil of Plato, the philosopher of the *Polis*). The city-states system was Sumerian in origin (between the fourth and third millennia BC).[3] It was a system of internally independent city-states, with a shifting leadership (or collective hegemony). The "great kingship" over all the city-states was not hereditary, and its main function was to arbitrate among fellow rulers. The earliest recorded diplomatic system was what scholars now call "Amarna Diplomacy" (early to mid-fourteenth century BC), and the great powers of the period were Egypt, Hatti, the Kassite kingdom of Babylon, Assyria, and Mittani. This was a "Brotherhood of Kings," or a "club" of powers, based on a fairly equal status for all of them.[4] This club utilized diplomacy, communications (through a common Akkadian language), gift exchanges, and marriages to maintain stability and order. The ancient Middle East also gave rise to the idea of universal empire (hegemony), well before the rise of the Roman Empire.

The Indian and Chinese civilizations, the subject of this project, emerged earlier than, but overlapped with, the Greco-Roman civilizations and contributed much to the political, strategic, and economic interactions of the pre-modern period. After the seventh century, Islam served as a bridge between the classical and modern eras, between the East and the West, and between ancient Greek (as well as Indian and Chinese) knowledge and the Renaissance. Yet mainstream Western narratives have ignored or marginalized the contributions of these and other non-Western civilizations. In explaining the Renaissance, European artists, scientists and scholars are given all the credit for the revival of classical Greco-Roman ideas, while the contribution of the prior ideas and practices of the Egyptians, Sumerians, and Persians to the rise of the Greek civilization, and that of the Muslims to the preservation of Greek knowledge after the collapse of the Roman Empire, are forgotten. The Renaissance and the Enlightenment are contrasted with the East's backwardness, its lack of scientific rationality, or otherworldliness, while the massive intellectual debt of Renaissance Europe to the ideas and innovations of China,

India, and Islam are sidelined. The Greco-Roman heritage is seen as more progressive, scientific, advanced, and democratic and its practices and ideas as universal and applicable to all. Such assumptions serve as the bedrock for modern social sciences and humanities.

These disciplines often stress the attractive sides of Greco-Roman civilizations, while ignoring their shortcomings and dark sides. The Roman Republic is presented as the antecedent of republican government, even though Rome degenerated into one of the most brutally tyrannical empires in history. Athenian democracy is privileged over Athenian tyranny. Greek democracy is adored as an approximation of the modern democratic system and taken as the universal standard or model to which all societies must aspire. But Greek democracy had a very limited scope and span as a political system and degenerated into periods of tyranny and dictatorship. A clear majority of people in Athens were not part of the citizenry, including women, children, and slaves. The Greek idea of liberty often meant liberty for the *polis* rather than for the individual person, since only a small number of the Greeks qualified to be citizens; these included the propertied classes and other elites. Life in the *polis* could be stifling due to the stringent system of social discipline, fear of ostracization, and martial training. And while Greek civilization prized liberty for the city-states, it could not prevent warfare among them. It had a poor record in conflict management or maintaining peace and order. Also, Greek democracy does not come across as a very successful and exportable model.[5] Its longevity, or that of democracy in general, pales in comparison to that of the Eastern model, invented by the Sumerians and Egyptians, then perfected by the Persians, of universal monarchy or empire. Even after the Peace of Westphalia and the advent of the nation-state, Europe continued to feature monarchies and empires. Even in the case of scientific rationality, although the Greeks are credited with the invention of natural philosophy, they borrowed heavily from the Sumerians, the Mesopotamians, and the Egyptians. The Greeks, however, continued to assign causality to divinities and oracles in preparing for conflict and colonization. Plato, like Pythagoras, had much in common with Hinduism, which then and now believes in the existence of the soul. Thus, as it is increasingly being realized, the Greco-Roman age is not as enlightened or sanguine as is often depicted in the Western classics literature. Yet, its dominance in modern Western imagination persists.

At the same time, the non-West continues to suffer from epistemic prejudice, injustice, and neglect, without due regard for its rich intellectual heritage and practical contributions. Romila Thapar has pointed to the intellectual "inferiority complex" produced by Hellenocentrism:

> The superiority of Greek civilization has been so over-emphasized, as to produce an unfortunate inferiority complex among members of certain other civilizations. This has quite naturally resulted in an effort to prove that non-Greek cultures have identical values as those of the Greek-dominated ones. But progressive research shows

that every culture and every civilization has its own "miracle," and it is the purpose of historical investigation to reveal it. This cannot be achieved by seeking to discover identical values in every civilization, but rather by pointing out the significant values of each culture within its own context.[6]

Against this backdrop, a comparative study of classical Chinese and Indian political thought introduces a much-needed non-Western corrective to traditional approaches to political science, philosophy, international relations, and the related fields of social sciences and humanities. Speaking from an IR perspective, whereas Greece and Rome are considered in the West to be the classical foundations of modern statecraft, the discipline of IR as presented in the West privileges the advent of the nation-state with the Peace of Westphalia of 1648 as its modern foundation (hence the "international" in international relations). But if one studies IR with the nation-state as its core unit of analysis, one has less than four hundred years of history to play with. This is also the period of the rise and dominance of the West. If, however, one studies IR from the perspective of civilizations, one has over five thousand years of human history to reflect on and analyze. During the last five thousand years, civilizations have risen, fallen, survived, and failed. From this long-term historical perspective, no civilization can claim a monopoly over ideas or approaches to politics, justice, morality, and security. Many civilizations have contributed to the substance of philosophy, political science, and IR, including ideas about domestic political organization, interstate relations, and world order-building.

Taking into consideration the ideas and practices of other societies through history such as that of China and India[7] helps IR, political science, and philosophy to draw from the broad canvas of human interactions. The benefits of such an approach can hardly be overemphasized. Mindful of the dangers of historicism, and without assuming that the past may repeat itself, a historical analysis such as that available from a comparative study of Chinese and Indian political thought offers us a range of possible ways of organizing world order that either supplement or challenge existing concepts that are derived mainly from European history. Here, one might accept Wang Gungwu's argument: "History never really repeats itself and every event when closely examined is different." But "history can teach us about an important kind of reality." "When enough of the historical is knowable, that might go some way in preparing ourselves for what individuals and societies might do in the future."[8]

We are acutely mindful that the application of the comparative method in general and to history in particular has been controversial, because of its association with colonial-era comparative studies that looked at non-Western societies as inferior or deviant. As Benjamin Elman and Sheldon Pollock point out, comparative studies emerging during the European colonial period took Europe as the "standard" or "ideal type," or gave it "the defining status" (or "secundum comparatum"); "everything compared with it … was not just different, but deviant and even deficient."[9]

Such Eurocentrism has hardly disappeared. A good example in Western comparative writings on civilizations is Henry Kissinger's 2014 book, *World Order*, which begins with early modern Europe (in two chapters), before turning to China, India, and Islam, sometimes rather disapprovingly (his chapter on Islam is subtitled "A World in Disorder"), and ends by presenting the United States as "Acting for All Mankind," and discussing President Woodrow Wilson—a confirmed racist—under the heading "America as the World's Conscience."[10] Kissinger thus not only reverses history, he also leaves no one in doubt that Europe represents the ideal-type of world order. Eurocentrism, with its strong racist framing and bias, was foundational to the emergence of international relations as a discipline about a century ago and this has significantly not abated to this day; and "EU-centrism" has been a central feature of the comparative study of regions and regionalism.[11] While there is a body of non-Eurocentric literature on the comparative history of civilizations,[12] the balance between Eurocentric and non-Eurocentric comparisons, we submit, remains overwhelmingly in favor of the former, not the least because it is embedded within more general histories of civilizations, and more importantly, in school and university curricula and in the more general popular discourses. In the words of Chinese international relations scholar Qin Yaqin, whose work draws heavily on classical Chinese history and philosophy, "no matter what you theorize about, its soul is Western."[13] While there have been attempts to diversify and "decolonize" the curriculum of disciplines like history and international relations, Canadian philosopher Justin Smith concludes: "The goal of reflecting the diversity of our own society by expanding the curriculum to include non-European traditions has so far been a tremendous failure." Speaking especially of philosophy, but in words that are applicable to all social sciences and humanities, he finds that "Western philosophy is always the unmarked category, the standard in relation to which non-Western philosophy provides a useful contrast. Non-Western philosophy is not approached on its own terms, and thus philosophy remains, implicitly and by default, Western."[14]

My highlighting of Greco-Roman centrism in the earlier part of this chapter does not, however, mean that Greece and Rome have not influenced the approaches of India and China to modernity. Neither do I assume India and China are approaching "modernity" in their own distinctive ways. Or that they are simply deploying a colonial modernity. These are extreme positions. Rather, the point is that the Greek and Roman civilizations have such an overwhelming influence in shaping the evaluation of what is considered modernity that alternative pathways have been ignored and marginalized. As the quotes from Deudney and Thapar suggest, there is a growing awareness that ancient Greece and Rome have dominated and shaped our thinking about history, politics, philosophy, etc. To redress this is one of the key objectives of this book. To this end, drawing from classical Indian and Chinese history could be an important step, as would be similar exercises involving other civilizations such as Islam and Africa.[15] Instead of using Eurocentric

standards, we acknowledge the notion of "multiple modernities" proposed by Eisenstadt,[16] which gives space to the ideas and worldviews of China and India to articulate their own approach to modernity. This is not a mutually exclusive situation. We do not assume or project that China and India will simply revert to their precolonial classical past, because of the enormous constraints and costs of such a move. At the same time, both are likely to take great account of their pasts as a way of not only challenging the dominance of the West but also finding ways to build and articulate and strengthen domestic politics and foreign policy.

In this volume, we do not avoid Western categories entirely, but at the same time we make no assumption about, in fact we challenge, Europe as a model and Western categories as superior. We are sympathetic to the "cosmopolitan comparison" approach proposed by Elman and Pollock, but we also do not want to convey the impression that a comparative approach can avoid engagement with European categories entirely. To have a dialogue between Western and non-Western scholarship (which we do not take as entirely homogenous; our contributors are drawn from both), one also has to deploy and target certain concepts that are part of the standard literature on humanities and social sciences (as with natural sciences) all over the world. Otherwise, the result would be a monologue, and can degenerate into parochialism.[17]

This volume also does not engage in "connected history,"[18] at least not in the sense of tracing how ideas from one civilization influenced the other, although we keep in mind examples of classical Buddhist ideas that traveled between the two civilizations (it was more of a two-way street than commonly presented).[19] Neither is this book a relational study—i.e., a study of China-India relations through the ages, as Tansen Sen has so masterfully done.[20] We do hope, however, that this book will be useful to policymakers and academics in thinking about China-India relations, and in being better informed and avoiding prejudices as the two countries become increasingly important forces in shaping world order.

Our major concern in this volume is to present the main elements of the classical political thought of China and India, especially to those who may not be familiar with them. The book is comparative mainly in the sense that it helps scholars and readers from China and India, who are already familiar (at least to some degree) with the classical traditions of his/her own country, to be better informed about the political ideas and institutions of the other. Such an exercise would hopefully engender a comparative sense of both civilizations, and engage in mutual learning, without presenting either as superior. In this respect, we are very encouraged that during the course of this project, a considerable amount of mutual understanding and learning has been accomplished. When the project started in 2017, few of the contributors had much of a sense of the other civilization's political and philosophical ideas; when the project ended, they were considerably more familiar with those of the other civilization. This is the kind of cognitive shift that the book seeks to stimulate in the minds of its readers, following in the footsteps of Elman and

Pollock (although our volumes focus more specifically and in depth on politics and philosophy).

With the above in mind, let me make the following points about the insights and benefits of a comparative study of the classical political thought of China and India.

CIVILIZATIONAL COMPLEXITY AND DYNAMISM

Despite their differences, China and India make up for a plausible exercise in the comparative study of political thought and practice. They are two of the largest and oldest continuous civilizations of the world.[21] Moreover, both have extended well beyond their original cultural core, whether through material (including conquest and trade) or ideational (cultural diffusion) means. Moreover, neither China nor India is a singular or monolithic entity. They are testimony to the fact that civilizations exist in the plural. Every civilization combines different, even opposite, characteristics and values: realist and idealist, spiritual and rational, just and unjust, humane and coercive. Stereotyping civilizations as benign or aggressive, materialistic or spiritual, is a very flawed way of looking at these entities. In addition, every civilization is influenced by other civilizations. It is a process of mutual influencing that defines the relationship among civilizations. This is as true of China and India as of other civilizations. India and China offer striking examples of this simplified rendering of non-Western civilizations in the West. While stereotyped as "otherworldly," with their politics seen as shaped by a deference to the divine or the Heaven (in the Chinese case), classical Chinese and Indian thought were much more complex and diverse. Some schools within Hindu philosophy (like the Samkhya and Charvaka schools) rejected the idea of a creator God. Buddhism, a reaction against Hindu orthodoxy, rebelled against Hindu notions of divine origin. In China, where before the advent of Buddhism spiritual concerns might have mattered less than in India, ideas such as the mandate of heaven and *Tianxia* were about managing very practical and secular concerns about political legitimacy and compromise. They coexisted with sacrifices and other rituals of purification. Eastern civilizations are not the singular, homogenous entities often depicted in the Western imagination.

What is also striking is that within a relatively short historical period, China and India each developed within themselves widely divergent, even opposing, ideas about domestic governance and interstate relations. Thus, while China during the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods witnessed the rise of the extremes of Legalism on the one hand and Confucianism and Daoism on the other, India within the relatively short span of the Maurya dynasty exhibited Kautilyan realism prescribing conquest and expansion, as well as Ashokan idealism urging abstinence from force and governance through morality and righteousness. The modern orientalist view of ancient India and China as the antithesis of

Greece/the West—that is, as despotic, mystical, imperial, and otherworldly—is misleading. The classical Indian and Chinese civilizations were fundamentally eclectic, combining rationalism and spiritualism, realism and idealism, republicanism and monarchy, and anarchic and hierarchic orders.

It also emerges from a study of China and India that civilizations are not passive or static entities but highly dynamic ones; the same civilization can generate different types of world orders through time. Thus, the Chinese civilization had an anarchic phase (the warring states) as well as a hierarchic phase (after the unification under Qin and under the tributary system). Similarly, the classical Indian civilization was anarchic before the Mauryas and hierarchic thereafter. The Islamic civilization has had many centers, thus displaying both anarchic and hierarchic tendencies and structures in different stages of its evolution.

THE PROMISE OF COMPARISON

It is against this backdrop that this project compares the classical political thought of China and India. Such a comparative study yields a number of benefits for scholars of international relations, political science, and political philosophy, although I will limit myself to IR here. First, the history of classical political thought in China and India helps us to test the validity of supposedly universal concepts and models of statecraft and international relations that we take for granted in contemporary political theory or philosophy. In other words, the comparative classical political thoughts of two of the longest and largest civilizations can go a long way toward redressing the problem of "tempo-centrism" or "presentism"—assuming the present to be eternal and universal through time, which pervades the social sciences and humanities today. Is the Westphalian notion of "international system" a truly universal category or is it a historically specific form? As noted, the term international system is associated with modern nation-states. The tributary system challenges the universality or timelessness of both the Westphalian system and the balance of power theory, which Western scholars generally trace to the time of the Greek city-state system and the Roman Republic. Does the balance of power logic really apply itself to different cultures across time? While some scholars equate Kautilya's ideas to a balance of power theory, this is misleading, since the ultimate objective of Kautilya's doctrine was to help the ruler achieve hegemony. As Roger Boesche argues,

> Kautilya, in fact, was not offering a modern balance of power argument . . . One does find this argument occasionally in Kautilya: "In case the gains [of two allies of equal strength] are equal, there should be peace; if unequal, fight," or, "the conqueror should march if superior in strength, otherwise stay quiet." Whereas these balance of power theorists suggest that a nation arm itself so that it can ensure peace, Kautilya wanted his king to arm the nation in order to find or create a weakness in the enemy and conquer, even to conquer the world, or at least the subcontinent of India.[22]

Related to the above, a study of the classical Indian and Chinese civilizations suggests that the anarchy-hierarchy dichotomy considered to be a central element of international relations theory is an inadequate way of viewing interstate systems through history. This dichotomy focuses on material structure while bracketing the ideational elements of the system, or its moral purpose. Another way to analyze international systems would be along the realpolitik-normative spectrum and the intersection of the two. India and China offer powerful examples of how the classical world combined and reconciled the moral purpose of the state with realpolitik. In this sense, comparing classical Chinese and Indian thought might offer further support for Yan Xuetong's "moral realism."[23]

Second, comparing the classical thought of China and India helps in appreciating the multiple and global origins of current global norms, institutions, and practices that are now often solely credited to the West. One can offer a number of examples, including the origins of republican and anarchical systems in ancient China and India (as well as Sumer, as discussed earlier), which are overwhelmingly presented as a legacy of the Greco-Roman world. Another important example of this is the Just War tradition, whose roots in ancient China and India are analyzed in this project. The essays on diplomacy also serve a similar purpose. Another area that can benefit from a comparative study of China and India is the origins of human rights norms, which some writers claim as having had no place in classical non-Western thought.[24] But as Amartya Sen argues:

> The idea of human rights as an entitlement of every human being, with an unqualified universal scope and highly articulated structure, is really a recent development; in this demanding form it is not an ancient idea either in the West or elsewhere. However, there are limited and qualified defences of freedom and tolerance, and general arguments against censorship, that can be found both in ancient traditions in the West and in cultures of non-Western societies.[25]

These claims can be seriously tested by analyzing the doctrines of Confucius, Mencius, Ashoka, Kautilya, and the Code of Manu.

Third, a comparison between Chinese and Indian classical political thought might help to uncover ways of statecraft and order-building that have been absent in the European Western tradition and interstate systems, and/or received little attention from them. It may be possible to discover entirely new ways of promoting peace or extending hegemony that scholarship drawing only from Western history have missed or obscured. The *Tianxia* model is a leading example from China,[26] while Pollock's idea of "Sanskrit Cosmopolis"[27] also bears examination as a novel form of world order-building through the pacific diffusion of language, ideas, and political culture. The Indian *mandala* system (theorized by O. W. Wolters,[28] not to be confused with the *mandala* of Kautilya) in classical South and Southeast Asia offers another example of relatively distinctive approaches to politics and

interstate relations that are not captured in the existing political science, philosophy, or IR literatures. The classical *mandala* states of South and Southeast Asia represent "indigenous, culturally oriented" models of state that ought to be differentiated from "the Marxian and Weberian notions of the state with fixed boundaries and the rule of law over a given territory."[29]

Exploring and theorizing such patterns could considerably enrich the social sciences and humanities and offer policy prescriptions for managing order and securing peace that remains elusive in the current Westphalian global order. Sometimes, comparisons can lead to a more productive hybridization of different cultural and political concepts, including Western and non-Western ones, as has been done in the case of Western and Chinese concepts by scholars such as Yan Xuetong (especially his aforementioned "moral realism"). His and Qin Yaqing's "relational theory of world politics,"[30] which challenges Western IR to come to terms with classical Chinese approaches to statecraft, could provide inspirations for similar Indian efforts to develop new or hybrid theoretical approaches. Such an effort could benefit immensely from a comparative study of Chinese and Indian approaches to world order.

Fourth, the comparative study of Chinese and Indian classical political thought helps to answer some of the most important puzzles and questions facing history, political science, and IR. One such question is when and why an anarchic system becomes a universal empire. Or why some anarchic systems stay as such, as with Europe after Westphalia, while others transform into hierarchical systems, as with classical India and China. As noted, in the first millennium BC, both China and India had very well-developed "anarchic" systems—the republics of India and the warring states of China—before each established their first empires: the Maurya for India and Qin for China. What are the factors and modalities which contributed to the transition from anarchy to hierarchy and empire? Was it ruthless force and discipline imposed by the legalists for China and the Kautilyan realpolitik for Mauryan India? What was the role of ideas relative to material forces and organizational innovation? One can get a broader answer to this question by comparing China and India rather than limiting oneself to the Greek city-states or Rome's march from republic to empire.

Fifth, as suggested above, comparing Chinese and Indian classical thought helps to analyze the peaceful circulation of ideas in world politics. Political science and IR are not just about relationships based on power and wealth. They are also a relationship of different ideas. The "clash of civilizations" thesis proposed by the late Samuel Huntington ignores the varieties of ways, including pacific ways, in which civilizations have borrowed and exchanged ideas and engaged in mutual learning. If one takes the long-term view, the nearly two thousand years of recorded interaction between Chinese and Indian civilizations has been overwhelmingly pacific.[31] The history of civilizations may thus be told not in terms of blood, treasure, and conflict, but of the convergence of ideas, identity, and mutual benefit.

The classical intercivilizational interactions between China and India reached its peak when a humble Buddhist pilgrim from the imperial Tang Dynasty took a long and hazardous journey to India where he spent sixteen years of travel, study, and document collection. But what is sometimes forgotten is that Xuanzang was by no means the only Chinese pilgrim to visit India in search of knowledge. He had been preceded by Faxian (who came through the desert and returned to China by sea), and followed by Yijing (who made both legs of his journey to India by the sea route). Nor was the "Nirvana traffic" (my term) a one-way flow of Chinese monks visiting India. A possibly greater number of Indian monks traveled to China, to preach, teach, translate, and advise. During the fifth and sixth centuries, a parade of Indian monks with names such as Gunarahhata, Gunavarman, Gunabhadra, Shanghbhadra, and so on, spread out in China founding monasteries and temples, translating Buddhist sutras (some of these Indian monks were fluent enough in Chinese to write books in Chinese). One prominent monk was Paramartha (Zhendi in Chinese), who, after arriving in China in 546 AD, spent twelve years in the area now called Guangzhou, playing a key role in the introduction of Mahayana Buddhism to China. Another monk named Bodhidharma, who had arrived a couple of decades earlier, crossed the Yangtze River and moved further northwest. Settling in the Shaolin temple already established by yet another Indian monk, Bodhidharma founded the sect of *Chan* Buddhism, which the Japanese borrowed, developed, and made famous worldwide as *Zen*.

The Nirvana traffic between India and China suggests that no civilization is an island. They are often interconnected with other civilizations. Civilizations exist in relation to others within a complex and influence each other. Moreover, civilizations respect and learn from each other. And they often do so peacefully. The Buddhist diffusion between India and China, or for that matter between India and Southeast Asia, which was through the maritime route via Southeast Asia, was overwhelmingly peaceful.[32]

CONCLUSION

Much has been written about the contribution of Greece and Rome in shaping Western civilization and modernity, and thus to contemporary theories and concepts of political science, philosophy, and international relations. This has led to an undue neglect of the role of the ideas and practices of other civilizations, such as India, China, and Islam. As a result, the so-called West versus the Rest debate or the idea of the "great divergence," which underpins a good deal of the conceptualization of world or global order today, rests on a remarkably narrow or one-sided narrative. A comparative study of the characteristics and contributions of other civilizations, especially those that preceded the rise of the West, is therefore important in developing a more balanced picture of the evolution of global order.

TABLE, PART 2.1 Classical Indian worldview and political order

- Transition from republics to empire (the Mauryas, established around 321 BC, before the Roman empire and the first Chinese empire).
- Main Realist Thought: Kautilya's *Arthaśāstra*, which advises a ruler to achieve hegemony through war, spying, alliances, and conquest. Kautilya also gave first detailed descriptions of the elements of a state.
- Main Idealist Thought: Ashoka's Law of Righteousness, abstinence from war, and humanism (protection of the people from cruel and unjust rule).
- Epistemology: rationalism blended with spiritualism.
- "World ordering": (1) "Chakravartin": the ideal universal king who represents the highest principles expected of a ruler (King Ashoka). (2) "Sanskrit Cosmopolis" (coined by Sheldon Pollock) through peaceful export of ideas and institutions abroad, such as Buddhism, Hinduism, and associated institutions to Asia and China, compared to spread of Greek ideas or "Hellenization" before and after Alexander through physical conquest.

TABLE, PART 2.2 The classical Chinese worldview and political order

- Transition from "anarchy" to empire of Qin established in 221 BC.
- Main Idealist Thought: Confucianism assumes the essential goodness of human nature and rule by virtue and example, with the belief that social hierarchy based on merit would inspire trust and confidence in the ruler. But ruler's legitimacy is conditional upon just and wise exercise of authority that served people's welfare and happiness. Elitist, but not an absolute justification for authoritarian rule.
- Main Realist Thought: Legalism, which assumes human nature to be inherently wicked, rejects Confucianism's idea of ruler's obligation to people and ruling by virtue and benevolence, emphasizing instead rule by a code of law strictly enforced by force and harsh punishment and the need for power and order above everything else. Underpinning the transition from the Warring States period to the Qin Dynasty in 221 BC, Legalism offers insights into how an anarchic system becomes an empire. Challenges balance of power theory. Balancing can fail, leading to hegemony.
- Epistemology: rationalism and ritualism.
- "World ordering": (1) Mandate of Heaven: if the ruler was not wise and just, the Heaven would withdraw its mandate and his right to rule; (2) *Tianxia* ("all under heaven"): idealized conception of interstate relations where highest unit is the "world" not the state (hence, the opposite of the Westphalian system); (3) Tributary system, a hierarchical system in which a leading power (China) enjoys deference by offering the benefits of trade, recognition, and protection.

Such an exercise is also critical to building truly global disciplines of philosophy, history, political science, and international relations, all of which suffer acutely from Greco-Roman centrism and Eurocentrism. For example, the global IR approach argues that this substance and practice of "international relations" was not invented in the West, nor did it begin with the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. Other and older civilizations—e.g., India, China, Islam—pioneered different modes of governance, interstate systems, and world orders (how they viewed the world, and organized their own foreign relations to achieve stability and progress), and hence their contribution should be integral to the study of IR. Such a

broadening of what IR means, and its scope, can easily be applied to other fields such as history and philosophy. With the rise of the rest, e.g., China and India, it is even more necessary to pay attention to these "other" civilizations and their contributions. In IR as in philosophy, history, and related disciplines, a "global turn" would require drawing from the broad canvas of interactions among all civilizations, even as some have been more powerful than others at different stages in history. Insights from the classical political thought of China and India can help the imagining of such an inclusive "global order" (rather than a narrow world order in the manner of the "liberal world order") and contribute to building such an order at a time of profound turmoil and transition.

NOTES

1. "Order," as used in this project, refers to a situation of relative stability, or the absence of major conflict, through rule-governed behavior. Change is evolutionary, not revolutionary, and is mediated by norms and institutions that help to mitigate conflict. The distinction between "world order" and "international order" is not always clear, but world order does away with the assumption of nation-states as its unit. John K. Fairbank used the term "Chinese World Order" rather than "international system" to analyze the Chinese tributary relations (especially during the Qing dynasty), because it did not feature the principles of Westphalian sovereignty. A world order can thus be based on civilizations rather than states as its main unit. A world order can be less than global; arguing that a true "global order" has never existed, Henry Kissinger defines a "world order" as a "concept held by a region or civilization about the nature of just arrangements and the distribution of power thought to be applicable to the entire world." Kissinger, *World Order* (New York: Penguin Press, 2014), 2, 9.

Going by Kissinger's definition, the ancient civilizations of India and China (or Islam), despite having not yet been nation-states, and not having encompassed the entire globe, could still qualify as world orders. "Global order" is geographically and conceptually a broader category than "world order" or "international order." It is a recent or futuristic notion, a product of globalization, including both state and nonstate actors, unlike the narrow state-centric idea of international order or some conceptions of world order. Amitav Acharya, *Constructing Global Order: Agency and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

2. Daniel H. Deudney, *Bounding Power: Republican Security Theory from the Polis to the Global Village* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 91.

3. Adam Watson, *The Evolution of International Society: A Comparative Historical Analysis* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

4. Amanda H. Podany, *Brotherhood of Kings: How International Relations Shaped the Ancient Near East* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010). Here, there are some echoes of the European Concert of Powers in the nineteenth century.

5. Responding to criticism that Kautilya's *Arthasastra* was vastly inferior to the work of Plato and Aristotle, the Indian historian D. D. Kosambi writes: "Aristotle's royal pupil Alexander [the Great] did not put the learned Stagirite master's political ideas into action. Athenian democracy failed after a singularly brief span, for all the supposed wisdom of its constitution . . . disciples and admirers of Socrates . . . did less than nothing to bring the Sokratic ideal *Republic* into existence. In contrast, the Indian state . . . grew without a setback from small and primitive beginnings to its intended final size." Hence, Kosambi concludes: "'The Greeks make excellent reading; the Indian treatise [*Arthasastra*] worked infinitely better in practice for its own time and place." D. D. Kosambi, *The Culture and Civilisation of Ancient India*, reprint (New Delhi: Vikas, 2001; original publication 1964), 141.

6. Romila Thapar, *Ashoka and the Decline of the Mauryas*, 3rd ed. (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012), 268.

7. Amitav Acharya, "Global International Relations (IR) and Regional Worlds: A New Agenda for International Studies," *International Studies Quarterly* 58, no. 4 (2014): 1–13, at 9.

8. Wang Gungwu, "The Universal and the Historical: My Faith in History," Fourth Daisaku Ikeda Annual Lecture (Singapore: Singapore Soka Association, 2005), 6.

9. Benjamin Elman and Sheldon Pollock, "Introduction," in *What China and India Once Were: The Pasts That May Shape the Global Future*, ed. Sheldon Pollock and Benjamin Elman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), Kindle, https://www.amazon.com/What-China-India-Once-Were-ebook /dp/B07CX6ZB4L?asin = B07CX6ZB4L&revisionId = &format = 2&depth = 1.

10. Henry Kissinger, *World Order* (New York: Penguin Press, 2014). For another heavily Eurocentric account, see Niall Ferguson, *Civilization: The West and the Rest* (New York: Penguin Books, 2011).

11. On Eurocentrism in IR, see Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan, *The Making of Global International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019). On "EU-centrism" in comparative regionalism, see Amitav Acharya, "Regionalism beyond EU Centrism," in *Oxford Handbook of Comparative Regionalism*, ed. Tanja A. Börzel and Thomas Risse (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 109–30.

12. A leading example here is John Hobson, *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2006).

13. Qin Yaqin, "Why Is There No Chinese International Relations Theory," *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 7 (2007): 325.

14. Justin Smith, "Philosophy's Western Bias," *New York Times*, June 3, 2012, https://opinionator .blogs.nytimes.com/2012/06/03/philosophys-western-bias/.

15. For an important recent contribution covering China, Southeast Asia, and Islam, see Hendrik Spruyt, *The World Imagined: Collective Belief and Political Order in the Sinocentric, Islamic and Southeast Asian International Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

16. S. N. Eisenstadt, "Multiple Modernities," *Dædalus* 129, no. 1 (2000): 1–29.

17. I have discussed elsewhere the dangers of civilizationalist arrogance and exceptionalism and some ways of avoiding it. Amitav Acharya, "From Heaven to Earth: 'Cultural Idealism' and 'Moral Realism' as Chinese Contributions to Global International Relations," *Chinese Journal of International Politics* 12, no. 4 (Winter 2019): 467–94.

18. One of the best articulations of connected history is Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Explorations in Connected History: From the Tagus to the Ganges* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Connected History: Essays and Arguments* (London: Verso Books, 2022).

19. See Tansen Sen, *Buddhism, Diplomacy and Trade: The Realignment of Sino-Indian Relations, 600–1400* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2003). In the modern era, India's thinking on "non-alignment" and opposition to great power military pacts influenced Chinese foreign policy in the 1950s, especially at the 1955 Asia-Africa conference in Bandung. Amitav Acharya, *East of India, South of China: Sino-Indian Encounters in Southeast Asia* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2017).

20. Sen, *Buddhism, Diplomacy and Trade*.

21. The view that Indian civilization is discontinuous, unlike China's, ignores the fact that the ideas and rituals of the Vedic India (mid-second millennium BC, contemporary of China's Shang and Zhou) are still extant today in the daily lives of a majority of Indians. And as Deep Datta-Ray has shown, the Indian epic *Mahabharata* continues to cast a long shadow over contemporary Indian ideas and practices of diplomacy and statecraft. Deep K. Datta-Ray, *The Making of Indian Diplomacy: A Critique of Eurocentrism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Amrita Narlikar and Aruna Narlikar, *Bargaining with a Rising India: Lessons from the Mahabharata* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). Both Chinese and Indian civilizations suffered frequent foreign invasions and extended periods of foreign rule, but both absorbed and were enriched by these external influences, and key elements of India's classical civilization have persisted to no lesser extent than China's.

22. Roger Boesche, "Kautilya's 'Arthasastra' on War and Diplomacy in Ancient India," *Journal of Military History* 67, no. 1 (January 2003): 19–20.

23. Yan Xuetong, *Leadership and the Rise of Great Powers* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018).

24. Jack Donnelly, "The Relative Universality of Human Rights," *Human Rights Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (2007): 281–306. Donnelly seems to associates human rights with capitalism or property rights, rather than culture or politics *per se*.

25. Amartya Sen, "Universal Truths: Human Rights and the Westernizing Illusion," *Harvard International Review* 20, no. 3 (Summer 1998): 42.

26. Zhao Tingyang, "Redefining the Concept of Politics via 'Tianxia': The Problems, Conditions and Methodology," trans. Lu Guobin and ed. Sun Lan, *World Economics and Politics* 6 (2015): 4, 22; Zhang Feng, "The *Tianxia* System: World Order in a Chinese Utopia," http://www.chinaheritagequarterly.org/tien-hsia.php?searchterm = 021_utopia.inc&issue = 021.

27. Sheldon Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture and Power in Premodern India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

28. O. W. Wolters, *History, Culture and Region in Southeast Asian Perspectives* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1982).

29. Craig Reynolds, "A New Look at Old Southeast Asia," *Journal of Asian Studies* 54, no. 2 (1995): 426.

30. Qin Yaqing, *A Relational Theory of World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

31. There are minor exceptions to the absence of military conflict between an classical Indian polity and a Chinese-backed one. This occurred in the mid-seventh century between Chinese forces of Tang envoy Wang Xuance and minor Indian king Arunasa, around the time of King Harsa's death. Sen, *Buddhism, Diplomacy and Trade*, 22–23.

32. Amitav Acharya, *Civilizations in Embrace: The Spread of Ideas and the Transformation of Power* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2012).