Mining the Past to Construct the Present

Some Methodological Considerations from India

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In this volume, and in the three workshops leading up to it spanning three years, a group of scholars working on India and China have been engaged in searching for ways in which Asian classics can be mined to develop a new Asia-focused international relations theory. In this chapter I attempt to explore some methodological problems facing such an enterprise, problems to which, I feel, our group has not always paid adequate attention. In this regard, I address two interrelated issues: (1) methodology: how can we use responsibly the systems of political science and philosophy developed by ancient Indian and Chinese scholars in constructing theories of international relations for contemporary times? (2) case studies: I present three examples of political theory from ancient India as case studies in the practical application of the methodology I have enunciated.

PART ONE

Methodological Considerations

I will organize my comments on methodology around five topics: (1) dangers of essentializing; (2) multiple voices; (3) problems of translation and definition; (4) importance of context; and (5) gleaning from the past for contemporary global order.

1. Dangers of Essentializing. Current historians of the religions and culture of ancient India are keenly aware of the danger of essentializing—that is, assuming there is and searching to discover the essence of a culture or a religion. Such assumptions—sometimes explicit, but often implicit—were common among an earlier generation of scholars, of both India and China. I cringe when people

begin sentences with "Hindus believe," "Buddhism is," or "Indian philosophy posits"—and their Chinese counterparts. As a young student, I was told that we—the students of religion, the historians—should learn from the social scientists in this regard. There are no essences to be discovered but only dynamic and ever-changing social, cultural, and religious institutions, practices, and beliefs. Today, however, I am astounded how easily these very scientists—be they anthropologists, sociologists, or political scientists—sink into essentialism when they speak about pre-modern or ancient societies. They seem to have absorbed the old British colonial image of "an unchanging India." Let us recognize that all societies and cultures, both modern and ancient, are historically dynamic, geographically diverse, and ever changing. Let us give back agency to the people we are studying: these changes do not simply happen; they are brought about by the work of individuals and groups.

Let me be blunt here at the risk of giving offense. In our past meetings, as I have had occasion to observe, I was dismayed when people talked about "Chinese thought" or "Chinese philosophy" as if it were one and singular, as if it has an unchanging essential core. I would never dare to make such blanket statements about India—ancient, medieval, or modern; India was and is diverse, vibrant, dynamic, and ever changing. So, when we talk about ancient Indian theories of statecraft and international relations, we must recognize that they were as diverse as such theories are in modern Europe or America. We would not ever speak about an American political science as a singular and essential entity. Let us be clear. There is no ancient Indian political philosophy. For sure, there are continuities and commonalities within the traditions, given that the past cultural and religious ideas and institutions influenced thinkers of later times. But such influences provoked not just acceptance or incremental change but also outright rejection. Continuities, however, do not constitute an essence. Speaking metaphorically, it is best for us to leave Aristotle and his essences behind and follow the Buddha, who insisted on the absence of any substance, any soul, behind the composite and every changing entities we encounter, including ourselves. A culture, the Buddha would have said, is like a river; there is an illusion of substance but the water is never the same.

My friend and colleague Roger Ames, who has partnered with me in writing the chapters on method, has argued strongly for what he terms "thick generalizations," which he distinguishes from essentializing. I can readily agree that generalization—moving from the particular to the general—is essential to all scholarly and scientific endeavors. Theory, after all, is a generalization that attempts to explain the atomistic and particular phenomena. But for a cultural historian, I still feel, such generalizations, unless done self-consciously, as Roger urges us to do, can flatten the contours of history that often contain rejections of the accepted views that often form the basis for those generalizations. For the cultural historian it is much more important to identify and understand the rich internal contours

of Chinese or Indian cultural history than to see how these cultures or philoso-phies differ from their "Western" counterparts. The multiple voices of the tradition should not be flattened to fit a preconceived notion of what "Chinese" or "Indian" culture or philosophy is. Even when we opt to choose a particular voice from that tradition, as we will do in the process of creating a new IR theory, we must be cognizant that it does not represent *all* of that tradition and that the very selection may distort our perception of that rich and diverse tradition.

2. Multiple Voices. A direct corollary of a nonessentialist and dynamic view of a cul-ture is the recognition of multiple voices in any given period of time and, a fortiori, across history. This seems like an obvious point, but even when scholars speak of multiple authors, there is a tendency to distill their voices into a singular position. In the ancient Indian legal tradition (Dharmaśāstra), this position is presented as an exegetical principle: all the authoritative texts, both the Vedas and the authori-tative legal texts called *smṛti*, present the same truth; any differences we detect in them must be eliminated using various hermeneutical strategies. So, the tra-dition itself presents the illusion of a seamless and uniform doctrine and law. Modern scholars often seem to be quite content to follow that lead.

Often the very terms and categories we use entice us to think this way. So we speak of Hinduism, Buddhism, Indian Philosophy, and the like, giving at least the impression that there are essences, substances, behind these terms, that they are in some sense univocal. There aren't. We must force ourselves to listen to the multiple voices in ancient India. Ashoka's views on state, religion, and morality were sin-gular and, as we will see, vastly different from those of Kautilya and Manu, or the authors of the *Mahābhārata*. We cannot and should not put them all into a blender to obtain a consistent and bland cocktail.

3. Problems of Translation and Definition. Ancient Chinese wrote in classical Chinese and ancient Indians wrote in several languages, but principally in Sanskrit. This is an obvious point, but it is often overlooked. Philosophical and scientific works use technical terms in both languages. We must be attentive to this problem, even as we use translated texts to understand those works and to draw inspiration from them in order to construct theoretical frameworks suitable for the contemporary world. Much is, indeed, lost in translation. When we use a translated English term, we frequently miss the old connotations and implicitly import modern meanings associated with the English term. Take, for example, the term "state," which is cen-tral to the work entailed in this volume. There are several Sanskrit terms translated as state, but the principal ones are *rāṣṭra* and *rājya*, both connected to a king, the *rāja*. In ancient India, except for the period of Ashoka's rule, a *rāṣṭra* meant a rath-er small territory ruled by a king, a polity that was always jostling for space and power with its neighbors. Inhabitants of such a state did not necessarily identify themselves as citizens of that state. Simply moving to a different polity was always

a possibility for subjects, and such large-scale migrations proved to be a danger that a king was advised to guard against. These states did not base their identity on ethnic, religious, or linguistic grounds. In contrast, for most of Chinese history, except for the period of the warring states, China was a singular empire with a central administration.

So, in these contexts how do we define "state"? Can we extrapolate from theories based on these ancient "states" to the modern nation-states? There are significant differences between ancient Indian and ancient Chinese political dispensations that militate against using their respective political philosophies to build IR theories without taking these differences into account. These issues need to be addressed if we are to use ancient sources responsibly.

4. Importance of Context. The three points I have already raised bring us to the centrality of context in understanding political theories formulated by ancient Indian or Chinese thinkers. The context includes, among others factors, the political, social, economic, and religious conditions of the time and the place. The context also includes the life circumstances of the author. Thus, we need to take into account whether the author was working for a king or state, whether he (it is invariably a "he") was a bureaucrat or military officer, whether he was from the rich elite or a common person—that is, if such information is available.

In the Indian context, the three authors I deal with were from different historical periods and from different sociopolitical backgrounds. Ashoka was a powerful emperor living in the middle of the third century BCE, who, however, repented his violent past and became a devout Buddhist committed to the end of killing and violence. Kautilya, who wrote three centuries later in the middle of the first century CE, was probably a bureaucrat and was within a specialized intellectual tradition that dealt with governance, law, and war. His work was addressed to kings and high government and military officials. Manu, who lived probably a century or so after Kautilya, came from a conservative Brahmanical background, intent on fostering Brahmanical privilege and exceptionalism. He also probably wrote for the classroom where Brahmanical education took place. During both Kautilya's and Manu's time, northern India was subjected to military invasions from northwestern regions, especially central Asia. They established large polities—first the Śakas and then the Kuśānas, in northcentral India. Manu, in a special way, reflects some of the social disruptions of these times.

5. Gleaning from the Past. Before application must come understanding. And understanding must be historically grounded. That is the reason for the four foregoing points I have presented. We can understand what an author is saying only if we understand his or her language and the socio-politico-religious context of his or her life. Contextual understanding is the only reliable and legitimate form of understanding. Humility is a virtue here. We can never be sure that we have

truly understood what an ancient thinker intends to communicate. And we must be humble enough to acknowledge it, knowing that our understanding is subject to correction and improvement as new data and new methods of interpretation open themselves to us. Just think of what the discovery of bamboo-strip writing from ancient China has done to our understanding of major Chinese texts. And in India the pivotal *Arthaśāstra* came to light only in 1905.

Once such an understanding is acquired, we can cautiously and tentatively—and let me emphasize *cautiously* and *tentatively*—move to the next phase: applying that understanding to contemporary issues. This is true in the areas of religion and philosophy. It is doubly true for the case at hand: attempting to glean inspiration and ideas to create a blueprint for a new global order.

PART TWO

Ancient India and International Relations Theory

So, with that methodological backdrop and with all the caveats that it engenders, I think it may be useful to present some test cases of using ancient theories to generate new knowledge for the contemporary world. The best way to undertake such an enterprise, I think, is to ask a series of questions from the ancient sources. Although not an expert on world order or international relations, I suggest that a theory must present ideas which seek to transcend the interests of individual polities and to provide a legal and moral framework for relations among such polities. We have several such frameworks, imperfect and subjected to criticism though they may be: for example, the UN Declaration of Human Rights, the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, the Chemical Weapons Convention, Crimes against Humanity, International Court of Justice, and so on.

Here are some ways we may want to interrogate our sources. In what ways do ancient theories attempt to rise above and beyond the specific polities within which they are embedded or on whose behalf the authors may have been working? How do they envisage law/moral code as transcending individual polities? Is there a transcendent source of law/morality that must be respected by each polity? Can one polity intervene in another when that transcendent law is violated by the authorities of that polity? In other words, does an ancient theory provide the basic ingredients to make it suitable as a source for creating a modern IR theory?

Ashoka. Ashoka (reigned ca. 268–232 BCE) consolidated the empire he inherited from his grandfather, Candragupta,[1] the founder of the Maurya empire, extending it to much of India, from Afghanistan to Bengal and south into what is today Karnataka. He left numerous inscriptions on stones and pillars containing the emperor's instructions and advice to his officials and subjects. Two features of Ashoka's corpus of writings stand out. First, we have them *in situ*

exactly as they were written at the emperor's command. Second, we know exactly when they were written down. In ancient Indian history, these two features of texts are unique.

Ashoka, however, does not explicitly articulate a foreign policy. His inscriptions are addressed to his officials and subjects, and his mention of foreign kings and his relations with them are given tangentially. Thus, we have to tease out what his thinking with regard to foreign states and rulers would have been.

The centrality of social and personal morality encapsulated in the term *dharma* in Ashoka's political philosophy is well known. He used his state bureaucracy and his inscriptional activities in his efforts to lead his people to cultivate moral virtues and to build moral character. I have previously described this as Ashoka's "civil religion," using *mutatis mutandi* the expression popularized by Robert Bellah (1970) within the context of the United States.

Taking a step back, it is clear that Ashoka, following in the footsteps of his father and grandfather, continued an aggressive program of territorial expansion, waging war against independent states bordering his growing empire. The most notorious of these was the war against the Kaliṅgas, what is today's Orissa, which he annexed eight years after his royal consecration, that is, in the year 260 BCE. This was a particularly brutal war, and in his 13th Rock Edict, Ashoka expresses remorse at the death and destruction he caused, with 100,000 killed and 150,000 taken away as captives. It is significant that the most common term Ashoka uses for kingdom, state, or empire is *vijita*, literally "conquered" and from the same verbal root as the Kautilyan term for king, *vijigīṣu*, which we will soon encounter.

All this changed with Ashoka's conversion to Buddhism, probably two years after the end of the Kaliṅga war. It was after this pivotal event that Ashoka became fixated on his mission to propagate *dharma*. A cornerstone of Ashoka's definition of *dharma* is the abstention from killing extended to both humans and animals. His abhorrence of war comes out loud and clear. After his horrific military adventure in Kaliṅga, Ashoka says in his Rock Edict 13 that the greatest victory for him now is the victory of *dharma* (*dharmavijaya*). But this victory of *dharma*, in Ashoka's mind, is not restricted to his own empire. It is a victory he seeks in every territory and kingdom known to him:

> But this is for the Beloved of Gods [i.e., Ashoka] the foremost conquest, namely, the conquest through dharma. This again has been won by the Beloved of Gods here and among all the neighbors, as far as 600 Yojanas where the Yona king named Antiyoka resides; and, beyond that Antiyoka, the four kings named Tula-maya, Antekina, Maka, and Alikasundale; and, in the south, the Codas, the Pan-dyas, and as far as Tamraparni. Likewise, here in the king's domain, among the Yonas and Kambojas, the Nabhakas and Nabhapaṃtis, the Bhojas and Pitinikas, the Andhras and Paladas—everywhere they follow the dharma instruction of the Beloved of Gods.

Even where envoys of the Beloved of Gods do not go, after hearing about the dharma discourses, the ordinances, and dharma instruction of the Beloved of Gods, they conform to dharma and they will conform to it in the future. In this manner, this conquest has been won everywhere. In all cases, however, the conquest is a source of joy. And joy has been obtained in the conquest through dharma.

This joy, however, is truly insignificant. Only what is done for the hereafter, the Beloved of Gods thinks, bears great fruit.

The intention of Ashoka in sending these missions to faraway countries is clear: it was a missionary effort to spread his *dharma* philosophy, to get rulers of these countries, as also their subjects, to adopt Ashoka's moral philosophy in their personal lives, internal administration, and external affairs. How successful these missions were is hard to gauge, but Romila Thapar (1997: 126) thinks that at least in the west the missions did not amount to much. Thus, in Pillar Edict 7, the last of his inscriptions written in the twenty-seventh regnal year and consisting of a retrospect of his activities on behalf of *dharma*, Ashoka does not speak about his foreign activities but only of his domestic successes.

Yet, whatever the outcome, Ashoka's guiding principle in his foreign relations—as also his domestic policy—is clear: it is the moral philosophy rooted in *dharma* and fostering peaceful coexistence. In Rock Edict 2, however, Ashoka provides some details about what activities his *dharma* missions entailed. They included, significantly, the provision of medical knowledge and medicinal plants:

Everywhere in the territory of the Beloved of Gods, King Piyadasi, as well as in those at the frontiers, namely, Codas, Pandyas, Satiyaputras, Keralaputras, Tamraparnis, the Greek king named Antioch, and other kings who are that Antioch's neighbors—everywhere the Beloved of Gods, King Piyadasi, has established two kinds of medical services: medical services for humans and medical services for domestic animals. In whichever place medicinal herbs beneficial for humans and domestic animals were not found, he had them brought in and planted everywhere. Likewise, in whichever place root vegetables and fruit trees were not found, he had them brought in and planted everywhere. Along roads he had trees planted and wells dug for the benefit of domestic animals and human beings.

The final statement about planting trees and digging wells along roads may well refer to his activities within his own territory. Nevertheless, it is instructive that Ashoka thought that providing medical assistance was part of his *dharma* mission to foreign countries, as it was for domestic policy. Ashoka's *dharma*, thus, had a social and activist dimension. A point that we should keep in mind as we move to considering Manu is Ashoka's conviction that *dharma* is a moral force that stands above all kings and territories. It is a moral force to which all kings and all peoples must submit. And it is in this submission, in conforming to the demands of *dharma*, that Ashoka envisages domestic prosperity and, internationally, the elimination of wars and conflicts and the establishment of peace and tranquility. These points are elaborated by Rajeev Bhargava in chapter 4.

Kautilya. Kautilya, writing three centuries after Ashoka, provides a different voice with respect to domestic affairs and interstate relations. His work called *Arthaśāstra* (*KAS*) is a scientific treatise on political science encompassing both domestic and foreign affairs, and thus quite different from Ashoka's personal letters.

Except for the periods when the Maurya, the Gupta, and perhaps a few other regional empires ruled, the usual ancient Indian kingdom covered a relatively small territory. The result was that small states were butting against each other; they were thus forced to deal with each other either as enemies or as allies. Ancient Indian trade also was transregional and crossed state boundaries, forcing different kingdoms to establish relations with each other and to maintain trade routes. It was this political and economic reality that underlies the theories and policies enunciated by Kautilya in the second half of the *Arthaśāstra* devoted to foreign policy. It also underlies the theory of *maṇḍala* or circle of kingdoms espoused by Kautilya. His policies were developed within the scenario of numerous small states having to deal with and to outwit each other through military and diplomatic strategies. Foreign policy, therefore, occupies a central position in Kautilya's work.

Kautilya's attitude to foreign policy is based on the definition of the king as *vijigīṣu,* "one who desires to conquer." This adjectival term is derived from the desiderative form of the compound verb *vi- √ji,* (to conquer), from which are also derived common Sanskrit words such as *vijaya* (conquest). This is the pivotal concept in Kautilya's ideology of kingship as it relates to foreign affairs. In fact, this epithet is never used in the first half of his treatise, which deals with internal administration, bureaucratic structures, and law. Clearly the term in inapplicable when a king is dealing with his own territory and subjects. In all, this epithet occurs thirty-one times in the second half of the treatise. According to Kautilya, in his relations with other states and kings, the king he is addressing assumes the role of a "would-be-conqueror." It has been suggested in recent scholarship on the *Arthaśāstra* that *vijigīṣu* is "a potential conqueror state" (Shahi 2014: 71). This is incorrect and runs the risk I have already mentioned of introducing the notion of a modern state into the Kautilyan discourse. The term *vijigīṣu* always refers to an individual human being, in this case the king, rather than to an impersonal entity such as a state. This ultimate goal of conquest, which any individual *vijigīṣu* may have to postpone indefinitely or until the right circumstances prevail, dictates all the king's activities with respect to foreign affairs.

Kautilya thinks that the desire to acquire what one does not possess is an essential element of the very ideal of governance, which he calls *daṇḍanīti.* At the very beginning of his treatise, in dealing with economics, he notes the importance of economic activities: "By means of that, he brings under his power his own circle (*maṇḍala*) and his enemy's circle using the treasury and the army. . . . Government (*daṇḍanīti*) seeks to acquire what has not been acquired, to safeguard what has been acquired, to augment what has been safeguarded, and to bestow what

has been augmented on worthy recipients" (*KAS* 1.4.3).[2] This was turned into a proverbial saying by Manu (7.99) and repeated frequently by later authors. Early in the section on foreign affairs, Kautilya offers a definition of *vijigīṣu*: "The seeker after conquest (*vijigīṣu*) is a king who is endowed with the exemplary qualities both of the self [enumerated at 6.1.6] and of material constituents [enumerated in 6.2.28], and who is the abode of good policy" (*KAS* 6.2.13).[3]

The whole point of being a king was to expand his territory by conquest or through diplomatic strategies. But, of course, all the neighboring kings were operating under the same assumption. Correct strategy and good foreign policy separated the successful conqueror from the failures. Good policy required good counsel or *mantra*. Although counsel was important for all state affairs, it was of paramount importance when dealing with foreign powers. The group of counselors (*mantrin*) headed by the chaplain did double duty in advising the king on both domestic matters and foreign affairs. There was, however, a bureaucracy that specialized in dealing with other states. With reference to diplomacy, the most significant official was the envoy (*dūta*).[4] Kautilya speaks of three levels of envoys (*KAŚ* 1.16.2–4). The highest, the plenipotentiary, has the broadest authority to negotiate with foreign governments, and he is expected to possess all the qualities of a minister. The mid-level envoys are given circumscribed and specific missions, while the low-level envoys merely conveyed royal edicts and messages.

Internal security was another important consideration, because kings were constantly attempting to undermine and to destabilize neighboring states by infiltrating secret agents, assassins, and spies. Given normal trade relations and the mobility of wandering ascetics and similar itinerants, this was a difficult task. Border guards headed by the frontier commander (*antapāla*), often residing in a fort and assisted by friendly forest tribes (*aṭavī*), were responsible for border security to prevent infiltration of enemy operatives. On the other hand, Kautilya recommends a robust secret service with a wide variety of covert operations directed both internally and against neighboring states.

Finally, there was the military organization headed by the chief of armed forces (*senāpati*). Books 9 and 10 deal extensively with the various kinds of military forces and their deployment. In general, an army was supposed to have four kinds of regiments: infantry, cavalry, chariot corps, and elephant corps. The kinds of troops one would deploy in an actual military conflict would, of course, depend on the terrain where the fighting was to take place and the kinds of troops deployed by the enemy.

Obviously, it was too expensive to maintain a large standing army. Therefore, Kautilya recommends a small army consisting mostly of hereditary soldiers called *maula*, belonging to the heartland of the kingdom. These are the best and the most loyal of troops. Other troops could be mobilized when a war was imminent. Kautilya at one place points to four kinds of troops besides the hereditary (7.8.27). The first consists of hired troops or mercenaries (*bhṛta*). Then there are corporate

troops (*śreṇi*), who were probably men belonging to martial castes or guilds. They would offer their services to the highest bidder. The third comprised troops provided by an ally, and the last comprised those provided by a tribal chief (*āṭavika*). To this we should add troops provided by an enemy with whom the king may be temporarily allied, probably when he is attacking a common enemy.

In crafting his foreign policy Kautilya presents a theory of the foreign powers with which his ideal-typical king would have to contend. True to his desire to present abstract rather than historical realities, he enunciates the theory of *maṇḍala*, the circle of kingdoms. A king is surrounded in a circle by other states, and because they have common boundaries with him they are his natural enemies. Around these enemy kingdoms is a second circle of kingdoms. Given that they abut the territories of enemy kings of the first circle, they become his natural allies: my enemy's enemy is my friend. Those forming the third outer circle, by the same logic, are the enemies of his allies, and thus his own enemies—and so on. That this theoretical construct is artificial is obvious, but it also highlights the truism that you are most in conflict with your immediate neighbors. The only two kings Kautilya considers outside the *maṇḍala* theory of ally and enemy are the *madhyama,* who is an intermediate king located between two enemies, and the *udāsīna*, a powerful king who remains, or can afford to remain, neutral.

There is also a nonmonarchical type of state called *saṅgha* recognized by Kautilya. The term refers to confederacies where power is shared by leaders of clans. These confederacies, often erroneously termed republics (Jayaswal 1924), appear to have been common in the second half of the first millennium BCE. They are referred to in the Buddhist literature, and they probably gave their name to the Buddhist monastic order, the *saṅgha*. Kautilya is aware of both the strengths and the weaknesses of confederacies. I will discuss below his strategies with regard to these polities.

Although military might is important, Kautilya recognizes that it is a double-edged sword: one can lose a war just as easily—one might say, more easily—as one can win. War is inherently unpredictable. It is also expensive. So Kautilya recommends a variety of other strategies that are several steps removed from actual warfare and that can further the king's goals more effectively and less expensively.

One set of strategies called *upāya* (2.10.47) has four elements: conciliation (*sāma*), gifts (*dāna*), dissension (*bheda*), and military force (*daṇḍa*). The second set of strategies containing six elements is called simply *ṣāḍguṇya* (sixfold strategy; 7.1.1–19): peace pact (*saṃdhi*), initiating hostilities (*vigraha*), remaining stationary (*āsana*), marching into battle (*yāna*), seeking refuge (*saṃśraya*), and double stratagem (*dvaidhībhāva*). The four *upāyas* are discussed throughout the text, including the first half (Books 1–5), whereas the *ṣāḍguṇya* is confined mostly to Books 6 and 7. It appears that the former was a more general and widespread, and perhaps older, formulation of major foreign policy strategies, whereas the latter is a more sophisticated and nuanced strategy developed by the author of the sources

Kautilya used in crafting the second half of his treatise. Further, the *upāyas* appear to be concerned with policies both toward other kings and toward internal centers of power, whereas the *ṣāḍguṇya* is focused on strategies that a king himself would use vis-à-vis his external opponents. Although both lists contain the option of resorting to military force, the other components of these strategies are directed at achieving the desired objectives without war.

The central strategy that runs through all of Kautilya's foreign policy is captured in the word *atisaṃdhāna* and its nominal (*atisaṃdhi*) and verbal (*atisaṃdhatte, atisaṃdhīyate*) equivalents. There is an obvious connection between this term and *saṃdhi* as a peace pact or alliance. The origin of the term is probably to be located in precisely such a peace pact, which is used not to ensure peace but to outmaneuver and outwit the opponent—the prefix *ati* indicates the transgressive nature of this strategy. It uses the peace pact cunningly and skillfully—we could even say, deceptively, trickily, guilefully—to outsmart, outmaneuver, and finally overpower the king with whom he has concluded the pact. I have thus translated this term as "outwitting" (Olivelle 2011). At every step, Kautilya wants his king to pay attention to the larger picture and to use the tools at hand—whether it is negotiating a peace pact or initiating a state of hostilities, or even going on a military expedition with allied troops—in order to outwit and ultimately defeat the opponent. Much of Book 7 is given to the ways in which the strategy of outwitting an opponent can be used in diverse situations. This proverb highlights the centrality of good policy in foreign affairs:

> An arrow unleashed by an archer may kill a single man or not kill anyone; but a strategy unleashed by a wise man kills even those still in the womb.[5] (*KAŚ* 10.6.51)

Let us, however, take a step back, and look at Kautilya's views on alliances, which he calls *saṃdhi*.[6] This, as we have seen, is the first member of the sixfold strategy (*ṣāḍguṇya*), and it stands always in relation and contrast to the second member, hostilities (*vigraha*). The thesis I want to propose is that, contrary to how they have generally been depicted, *vigraha* and its verbal equivalents do not mean war, attack, fighting, or combat, and that *saṃdhi*, as also its verbal equivalents, does not mean peace or even a peace accord, at least in the modern sense of this expression. The terms used for warfare in the *Arthaśāstra* are the verb √*yudh* and the noun *yuddha*, as well as other terms such as *abhi-* √*han* and *abhi-* √*yuj*. Thus, for example, we have expressions such as: *aśvayuddha* ("cavalry charge": *KAŚ* 10.5.53), *hastiyuddha* ("attack with elephants": *KAŚ* 10.5.54), and the like, but never an *aśvavigraha*. The actual march into battle is always called *yāna*, along with its verbal equivalents. The suspicion that *vigraha* does not refer to actual warfare is further confirmed by several significant usages of this term, especially in its verbal forms.[7]

Let us now turn to the companion term *saṃdhi*, which does not imply a state of peace between two kingdoms or even a formal peace treaty, but a temporary

and focused contract between two parties aimed at accomplishing a specific goal, such as attacking a common enemy. While that contract or pact lasts, naturally, the two sides will be in alliance rather than at war with each other. We see that it also entails a strategy to overcome and outwit another king rather than the initiation of a time of peace or the conclusion of a peace accord. The *Arthaśāstra* (7.1.6) defines *saṃdhi* as *paṇabandha*, that is, a negotiated agreement. That *saṃdhi* is a tactic is made clear at *KAŚ* 7.4.17–18:

> If he were to foresee that the result can be secured alone and within a brief period of time, then he should initiate hostilities (*vigṛhya*) with the rear enemy and his backer and march into battle (*yāyāt*). Under circumstances opposite of the preceding, he should enter into a peace pact (*saṃdhi*) and then march into battle.[8]

In a footnote to this passage, Kangle (1972: 333) comments in surprise: "This is downright duplicity, making peace and then attacking the enemy when he is least expecting such an attack." But that is the whole point! One should not be surprised; *saṃdhi* is as much a strategy seeking tactical advantage over other kings as *vigraha*. That it is so is explicitly stated in a long passage stating the conditions under which a king should resort to *saṃdhi* (*KAŚ* 7.1.32).

The clearest statement linking *atisaṃdhāna* with *saṃdhi* is in *KAŚ* 7.6. Here the opening sentence states:

> The seeker after conquests [that is, the *vijigīṣu*] should outwit (*atisaṃdadhyāt*) the second constituent of the circle [i.e., the *amitra* or enemy] in the following manner.[9]

It is interesting that in these passages the *saṃdhi* is done with the *amitra*, one's natural enemy, rather than with an ally. So if we translate *saṃdhi* as alliance, as is often done, we should be careful to distinguish such an alliance from the *mitra*, the natural ally of a king within the ideology of the *maṇḍala* (circle of kingdoms).

So, far from being a peace treaty, *saṃdhi* is a strategic move on the part of a king, either because he is in a difficult position and wants to buy time or because he thinks that such a pact could ensure victory either over the king with whom he is entering into the pact, or over another king whom he wants to attack with the support of his new ally, or, ideally, over both. Another point to remember is that an alliance formed through a *saṃdhi* is temporary and has nothing to do with the ally/enemy (*mitra, amitra*) configuration coming from the theory of the *maṇḍala*, the circle of kingdoms. These allies and enemies result from the very nature of territorial contiguity. As we have seen, one can indeed form a *saṃdhi* with one's natural enemy. On this point, *saṃdhi* is very similar to another form of compact or contract, namely *sambhūya*, the coming together of individuals, especially businessmen, to join forces and to combine resources in order to accomplish a particular common task (*KAŚ* 7.4.19–22).

Thus, we need to see these two terms, *saṃdhi* and *vigraha*, not as simple statements of facts—the states of war or peace—between kingdoms or states, but as

deliberate political and military strategies employed by kings against each other. The one who is able to execute them better will outsmart the opponent. Within the Kautilyan political ideology, there really is no place for peace as a value and goal to be sought after; at best, peace is an interlude when no open hostilities are taking place. A state of stability where established states with boundaries respected by other states exist in mutual respect and cooperation—*à la* Ashoka—is something that Kautilya would have seen as an anomaly, as something antithetical to the very idea of kingship. The centrality of the concept of *atisaṃdhāna* in Kautilya's political strategy cannot be overstated, and it is a feature of his foreign policy that has often been ignored by scholars.

Before leaving Kautilya, let me briefly explore a kind of polity different from monarchy, namely the *saṅgha* or confederacy that I have already referred to. Kautilya devotes Book 11 of his work entirely to the topic of confederacies. He considered them the most stable and strongest form of government, and if a king could have a confederacy as an ally, it would be better than any gain he can expect to get: "Gaining a confederacy is the best among gains, whether it is army or ally, for confederacies, because they are closely knit, are impervious to enemy assaults" (*KAŚ* 11.1.1–2).[10] He refers by name to eleven confederacies: Kāmbojas, Surāṣṭras, Kṣatriyas, Śreṇis, Licchivikas, Vṛjikas, Mallakas, Madrakas, Kukuras, Kurus, and Pañcālas (*KAŚ* 11.1.4–5). Kautilya recognizes that open assault is not very effective against a confederacy, because they are united in their fight against an external enemy. Sowing dissension (*bheda*), the third of the four *upāyas*, is the principal means of overpowering a confederacy. Kautilya goes into great detail about how this might be accomplished. I will cite just a couple of examples. The first involves rivalry among chiefs of confederacies:

> In the case of all of these, secret agents operating nearby should find out the grounds for mutual abuse, hatred, enmity, and quarrels among members of confederacies, and sow dissension in anyone whose confidence they have gradually won, saying: "That person defames you." When ill will has thus been built up among adherents of both sides, secret agents posing as teachers should provoke quarrels among their young boys with respect to their knowledge, skill, gambling, and sports.[11] (*KAŚ* 11.1.6–8)

Here, Kautilya demonstrates a fine grasp of psychology in getting the adults involved in the quarrels of their children. The common method of sowing dissension involves, naturally, sex.

> An agent working undercover as an astrologer should describe to one man a girl who has been chosen by another: "That man's daughter is bound to become the wife of a king and the mother of a king. Get her by giving all you have got or by using force." If he fails to get her, he should stir up the opponent's side. If he gets her, a quarrel is assured.
>
>   Or else, a female mendicant should tell a chief who loves his wife: "That chief, arrogant due to his youth, sent me to your wife. Because I fear him, I have come

carrying this letter and ornaments. Your wife is innocent. You should deal with him secretly."[12] (*KAŚ* 11.1.49–52)

Let me note, parenthetically, that a sentiment very close to that of Kautilya is expressed by the Buddha when King Ajātasattu sends his minister, Vassakāra, to the Buddha before he begins a military attack on the confederacy of the Vajjis, saying:

> I will root out these Vaggians, mighty and powerful though they be, I will destroy these Vaggians, I will bring these Vaggians to utter ruin! And bear carefully in mind whatever the Blessed One may predict, and repeat it to me. For the Buddhas speak nothing untrue!

Buddha replies to Vassakāra in a roundabout way, showing where he thought the strength of a confederacy lies:

> So long as the Vaggians hold these full and frequent public assemblies; so long may they be expected not to decline, but to prosper . . . So long as the Vaggians meet together in concord, and rise in concord, and carry out their undertakings in concord—so long as they enact nothing not already established, abrogate nothing that has been already enacted, and act in accordance with the ancient institutions of the Vaggians as established in former days . . . so long may the Vaggians be expected not to decline, but to prosper. *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* (trans. T. W. Rhys Davids)

It is this unity that Kautilya is attempting to break by sowing dissensions within a confederacy through deviant strategies for which he is well known.

When everything fails, however, a king must resort to military force to attain his objective, namely, the conquest of adjoining lands. Books 9, 10, and 13 of the *Arthaśāstra* are devoted to war: mobilization, military preparation, march, and capturing the fort. I will leave out the intricate details of the march, the various military formations, the foraging raids to obtain food for the soldiers, the ambushes, and other military tactics. The ideal-typical battle is waged in an open field with the two armies arrayed facing each other, although battles in less ideal terrain, such as forests, marshes, and water, are also discussed. Besides open and formal warfare, there are various kinds of special operations aimed at weakening the enemy, including surprise night attacks, burning the crops, and poisoning water supplies. When everything is said and done, the enemy can always escape into his fortress and barricade himself there. The whole of Book 13 is thus devoted to how one can capture a fort, first by trickery—inciting the people within the fort to sedition, drawing the enemy out of the fort by various tricks, destroying its food and water supply, and the like—then by laying siege, and finally taking it by storm.

The discussion of foreign policy and war, as also the entire treatise, culminates with instructions regarding the conduct of the victor and how a newly conquered territory should be pacified and its people induced to shift their loyalty to the new ruler (*KAŚ* 13.5). The incorporation of conquered territories into one's own

kingdom always posed challenges and dangers. Kautilya does not envisage a centrally controlled large empire. He instructs the victor to act magnanimously with the leaders and the people of the conquered land and "arrange for the veneration of all gods and hermitages" (*KAŚ* 13.5.11). He should not act as a foreign conqueror but as a local ruler: "Therefore, he should adopt the habits, dress, language, and conduct similar to theirs, and demonstrate his devotion to them during festivals in honor of the gods of the region, festivities, and recreational activities" (*KAŚ* 13.5.7–8).

Manu. Manu, writing a century or so after Kautilya, represents a very different intellectual and expert tradition from that of the *Arthaśāstra*. He was writing in a time and after a long period when Brahmanism faced strong challenges from a variety of sources, both religious—such as the Buddhist—and from foreign invasions setting up polities within India—such the Shakas and the Kushanas. Manu was within the mainstream of Brahmanism and was very much part of what Bronkorst (2016) has called the "reinvention of a tradition," in this case, of Brahmanism. A central element of this reinvention was making the Brahmin not simply the apex of a new pyramidal sociology—the system of social class or caste (*varṇa*)—but also the indispensable person for every king and ruler.

Manu's seventh chapter is devoted to the king, and, as has been repeatedly pointed out (McClish 2014; Olivelle 2004), he borrows much of his material on political science from Kautilya. I want here simply to focus on one aspect of Manu's discussion, namely the thesis that law—moral, civil, and criminal—defined as *dharma* is universal and not constrained by territory. In other words, law as *dharma* is supra-state and not dependent on legislatures or rulers. The view that moral law in some sense transcends the political structures of a state, or even general historical vicissitudes, is found in many cultures and religions—including, as we saw, in Ashoka—whether morality is viewed as based on some kind of natural law, divine revelation, or the will of god. But, what is significant for IR Theory, is that for Manu even law in the strict sense—that is, civil and criminal law—is also viewed as transcending any particular state or political structure, at least within the cultural geography of India. Kings don't make laws but only enforce them.

This view is not unique to Manu; it is articulated in other Brahmanical texts as well. But I have chosen Manu both because he more than any other author personifies the Brahmanical social and legal philosophy centered on the concept of *dharma*, and because his work has had a disproportionate impact on the development of Indian ethics, political science, and sociology.

In an early Vedic text, *dharma* is presented as a transcendent source of royal power connected with the cosmic king Varuṇa: "Varuṇa himself, the lord of *dharma*, makes him [the king] the lord of *dharma*. This, clearly, is supremacy, that he is the lord of *dharma*."[13] This statement, significantly, occurs in the ritual

consecration of a king (*rājasūya*). Varuṇa is well known as the divine enforcer of moral law and order, called *ṛta* in the *Rig Veda* and, when that term became obsolete, *dharma*. The central duty of the king as the "lord of *dharma*," then, is to make sure that he himself and all his subjects follow *dharma*. Thus *dharma*, one text tells us, is "the power superior to the ruling power" or *kṣatra; dharma* stands above the king as the power that confers on him the power to rule:

> It created *dharma*, a form superior to and surpassing itself. And *dharma* is here the ruling power (*kṣatra*) of the ruling power. Hence there is nothing higher than *dharma*. Therefore, a weaker man makes demands of a stronger man by appealing to *dharma* just as one does by appealing to a king. Now, *dharma* is nothing but the truth. Therefore, when a man speaks the truth, people say that he speaks *dharma;* and when a man speaks *dharma*, people say that he speaks the truth. They are really the same thing.[14] (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 1.4.14)

Here we have a conception of *dharma* that is universal, that stands above temporary rules and rulers, and that permits weak individuals to make demands of those who are strong—quite the opposite of what happens with the "law of the fish," *matsyanyāya*, where, in the absence of an authority to impose *dharma*, the bigger fish eat the smaller ones. *Dharma* is truth, and this transcendent nature of *dharma* is noted in another verse of the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (1.5.23):

> From which the sun rises,
> And into which it sets;
> The gods make it *dharma*.
> It's the same today and tomorrow.
>
> *yataś codeti sūryaḥ astaṃ yatra ca gacchati |*
> *taṃ devāś cakrire dharmaṃ sa evādya sa u śva ||*

The term and concept of *dharma*, however, were appropriated by different religious traditions, especially the Buddhist. During the last centuries before the common era, *dharma* was a site of contention. What is *dharma*? And how do we come to know it?—these were central issues in the epistemology of *dharma*. Within the Brahmanical tradition, the ultimate source of *dharma* came to be located in the Veda, which was thought to be eternal, self-existent, and without a human or divine author. Manu (2.6) spells out the sources of *dharma*, both ultimate and proximate:

> The root of dharma is the entire Veda, as also the recollection and conduct of those who know it; likewise the practice of good people, and satisfaction of oneself.
>
> *vedo 'khilo dharmamūlaṃ smṛtiśīle ca tadvidām |*
> *ācāraś caiva sādhūnām ātmanas tuṣṭir eva ca ||*

There is no talk here of king, legislature, or state: *dharma* stands above all the contingent social and political formations. Manu also speaks of punishment called

daṇḍa as a central aspect of *dharma*. The king wields *daṇḍa* against those who transgress *dharma*. The king's duty is not to create but to enforce *dharma*.

So, in Manu, as also in Ashoka, we have a concept of social order that is governed by a law that transcends any given political formation. This concept of *dharma* also governs what is lawful and permissible in the conduct of war, and in Ashoka even interstate relations.

Yet, Manu also allows for localized *dharma:* the *dharma* of a region, a village, or even a family. So we have a universal *dharma*, often articulated in legal treatises, and local *dharma* contained in the customs of the people. The only requirement is that the local *dharma* cannot contravene the *dharma* articulated in the authoritative legal texts.

CONCLUSIONS

The central conclusion from my brief foray into three major writers on ancient Indian political philosophy is that it is rich and diverse, and any attempt to distill it to one thing that we may prefer will both distort that complex reality and impoverish the rich Indian tradition. This was the main conclusion of my comments on methodology at the beginning of this paper.

Kautilya presents a unique view within Indian intellectual history, a view shared more broadly by the tradition of political science (*Arthaśāstra* or *daṇḍanīti*). His is the only extant scientific treatise from that tradition. His views on external relations are based on power politics that take as their central principle the enhancement of a king's power, wealth, and territory. It is a strong articulation of *realpolitik*, and it probably comes closest to the historical reality of ancient Indian kings vying for power and control against each other.

Ashoka is unique both in India and possibly in the world, because he is the only real king who has left us written documents of his own views and aspirations, his moral and political philosophy, in a deeply personal way.[15] Much of his political philosophy of coexistence and nonviolence based on *dharma*, nevertheless, soon disappeared from Indian political history, although it remained a cornerstone of Indian moral philosophy.

Manu and the mainstream of Brahmanical political thought were probably the ones that had the most influence on later political philosophy. I also think that Manu's views of law, both moral and civil, probably provide the best source for talking about a new IR Theory, although I am not competent to take that idea any further, let alone construct such a theory. But I think that, if IR Theory attempts to construct an international order based on laws that transcend any particular polity, then Manu's conception of *dharma* to which all Indian kings subscribed may offer some precedents. Manu, of course, envisaged only the cultural landscape of India, and his concept of *dharma* as transcending individual polities was easily accepted within that context. The task of a modern IR Theory would be to broaden that landscape to include a world constructed out of nation-sates.

I think such supra-state laws may have ecological dimensions as well. Manu, at least in the case of individuals, proposes punishments for what we would call ecological crimes. So, for example, Manu (11.143–145) talks about penances that people who cut down trees should observe:

> For cutting down fruit trees a person should recite softly one hundred ṛc verses; so also for cutting down shrubs, vines, creepers, or flowering plants. . . . For needlessly tearing out cultivated plants or ones that grow spontaneously in the forest, he should follow a cow for one day, subsisting on milk.

Similar penances are given for people who harm animals, even very small ones that lack bones (Manu 11.132–142).

Let me conclude with the caveat that I started out with: the states that we are dealing with in ancient India do not parallel the ones in contemporary times. The only ones that come close to such a parallel are the Greek kingdoms of west Asia mentioned by Ashoka. When attempting to construct theories for modern political realities, we must always guard against anachronism and the attempt to read ancient texts through modern lenses rather than taking them on their own terms. That is the respect we owe to these great thinkers of the past, the least we can do to their memory.

NOTES

1. Candragupta gained power in the aftermath of Alexander the Great's incursion into northwest India and his subsequent exit.

2. *tayā svapakṣaṃ parapakṣaṃ ca vaśīkaroti kośadaṇḍābhyām | . . . daṇḍanītiḥ alabdhalābhārthā labdhaparirakṣaṇī rakṣitavivardhanī vṛddhasya tīrthe pratipādanī ca ||* The Sanskrit term *labdha* and its cognates refer to any acquisition, but in the case of the king they refer in particular to the acquisition of territory by conquest . This is clear in Ashoka's RE 13, where he refers to the Kaliṅga territory as acquired by conquest: *laddhesu kaliṃgesu* (Sk. *labdheṣu kaliṅgeṣu*).

3. *rājā ātmadravyaprakṛtisaṃpanno nayasyādhiṣṭhānaṃ vijigīṣuḥ ||*

4. The *dūta* as envoy is mentioned also by Ashoka in RE 13.

5. *ekaṃ hanyān na vā hanyād iṣuḥ kṣipto dhanuṣmatā | prājñena tu matiḥ kṣiptā hanyād garbhagatān api ||*

6. We should also note that *saṃdhi* (normally spelled Sandhi) is a central concept in Sanskrit grammar. It refers to the way the last sound or letter in a word changes or is changed by sounds that immediately follow or precede it. So it refers to the euphonic combination of sounds, and in the political realm the political alliance of adjacent polities.

7. For further details and for a detailed analysis of *saṃdhi* and *vigraha*, see Olivelle 2011.

8. *yadā vā paśyet "na śakyam ekena yātum avaśyaṃ ca yātavyam" iti tadā samahīnajyāyobhiḥ sāmavāyikaiḥ saṃbhūya yāyād, ekatra nirdiṣṭenāṃśena, anekatrānirdiṣṭenāṃśena ||*

9. *vijigīṣur dvitīyāṃ prakṛtim evam atisaṃdadhyāt || KAŚ* 7.6.1.

10. *saṅghalābho daṇḍamitralābhānām uttamaḥ | saṅghā hi saṃhatatvād adhṛṣyāḥ pareṣām ||*

11. *sarveṣām āsannāḥ sattriṇaḥ saṅghānāṃ parasparanyaṅgadveṣavairakalahasthānāny upalabhya kramābhinītaṃ bhedam upacārayeyuḥ "asau tvā vijalpati" iti | evam ubhayatobaddharoṣāṇāṃ vidyāśilpadyūtavaiharikeṣv ācāryavyañjanā bālakalahān utpādayeyuḥ ||*

12. *kārtāntikavyañjano vā kanyām anyena vṛtām anyasya prarūpayet "amuṣya kanyā rājapatnī rājaprasavinī ca bhaviṣyati, sarvasvena prasahya vaināṃ labhasva" iti | alabhyamānāyāṃ parapakṣam uddharṣayet | labdhāyāṃ siddhaḥ kalahaḥ | bhikṣukī vā priyabhāryaṃ mukhyaṃ brūyāt "asau te mukhyo yauvanotsikto bhāryāyāṃ māṃ prāhiṇot, tasyāhaṃ bhayāl lekhyam ābharaṇaṃ gṛhītvāgatāsmi, nirdoṣā te bhāryā, gūḍham asmin pratikartavyam, aham api tāvat pratipatsyāmi" iti ||*

13. *varuṇa eva dharmapatir dharmasya patiṃ karoti paramatā vai sā yo dharmasya patir asad* (Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 5.3.3.9).

14. *taccheyo rūpam atyasṛjata dharmam | tad etat kṣatrasya kṣatraṃ yad dharmaḥ | tasmād dharmāt paraṃ nāsti | atho abalīyān balīyāṃsam āśaṃsate dharmeṇa | yathā rajñaivam | yo vai sa dharmaḥ satyaṃ vai tat | tasmāt satyaṃ vadantam āhur dharmaṃ vadatīti | dharmaṃ vā vadantaṃ satyaṃ vadatīti | etad dhy evaitad ubhayaṃ bhavati ||*

15. Richard Salomon (2012) observes that Ashokan inscriptions "are highly untypical": "In terms of format, contents, and tone, there is practically nothing in the later inscriptional corpus of the Indian world that even resembles Ashoka's inscriptions." He comments on how unique Ashoka is even in world history: "It can hardly be denied that Ashoka stands as a unique figure in Indian, and indeed in world history. And if so, why shouldn't his inscriptions be unique?"

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