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International Order in Ancient India

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INTRODUCTION

Did ancient India display a propensity towards balance-of-power or hegemony? The balance-of-power versus hegemony debate is one of the core debates in International Relations (IR) theory.[1] Ancient India witnessed a hegemonic international order dominated by a single polity for roughly five-and-a-half decades (~260–205 BCE) under the Magadha-centered Mauryan Empire. Mauryan domination was exceptional but relatively fleeting in the nine centuries from the emergence of the sixteen *mahajanapada*-states (or "great-territorial" states) in 600 BCE until the second phase of hegemony under the Gupta Empire (post-320 CE). However, the absence of hegemony/domination in the pre-Mauryan period and in the five post-Mauryan centuries (~205 BCE–320 CE) was not characterized by a balance-of-power system. Instead, I make the case for a de-centered *mandala* ("circle" or zone of competition) international order in these centuries when ancient India was an "open" region of the larger South-West Eurasian international system.[2] The aim of this chapter is to explain the emergence of Mauryan hegemony/domination, and to elucidate the *mandala* international order that prevailed in the pre-/post-Mauryan period.

I argue that Mauryan domination was the combinatorial outcome of four causal factors: (i) expansionist ideas, (ii) the relatively "closed" South Asian region from 305 to 205 BCE, (iii) inefficient relational balancing (and the absence of systemic balancing), and (iv) the contingency of Magadhan geography.[3] In the absence of Mauryan domination, the *mandala* order prevailed in ancient India. The Indic *mandala* order comprised six interacting zones (or *mandalas*) that were the primary sites of inter-polity competition. Most polities sought to dominate their own respective *mandalas* (with only a few expanding outwards into other *mandalas*). However, the extremely competitive multi-polity system meant that even as many polities rose and fell within individual *mandalas*, only a few were able to dominate their own *mandala*, and no single polity was able to dominate all the Indic

mandalas during this period (with the exception of Mauryan-Magadha). The presence of multiple *mandalas*, and multiple competing polities within these *mandalas*, gave rise to a truly de-centered international order. This *mandala* order was held together by ideas related to the management of power asymmetry in a region where the "deep structure" was marked by political and cultural heterogeneity.[4]

In other words, contra Waltz, I demonstrate that the "India of Kautilya" (or the period under analysis here) did not practice systemic "balance of power politics."[5] Similarly, contra Wight, I show that despite "common [macro-]culture," the Indic system did not "end" in a "universal empire" (or hegemony/domination).[6] As such, the study of ancient India contributes to "Global IR" as it expands our repertoire of international orders beyond power balances and hegemony.[7] In fact, the *mandala* order is also distinct from the historic Sinocentric orders as it was de-centered power-politically and ideationally.[8]

The rest of this chapter is divided into six sections. The first section provides a brief history of ancient India as part of the larger South-West Eurasian international system. This is followed by a theoretical explanation of the concept of the *mandala*. The third section explains the rise of Mauryan domination (~260–205 BCE). I argue that even as the Mauryas sought political domination only in the Indian subcontinent, the domain of their ideational domination was system-wide (or the South-West Eurasian international system). The subsequent section applies the concept of the *mandala* to the post-Mauryan period for a theoretical analysis of the international history of these centuries. In the fifth section, I demonstrate that the concept of the de-centered *mandala* order can help us understand the emerging order in the contemporary Indo-Pacific. The theoretical generalizations that emerge from India's ancient history can spatially and temporally transcend the domain of their origin, thereby contributing to Global IR. Finally, given the comparative nature of this book project, I conclude with a theoretical and empirical comparison of international order in ancient India and China.

ANCIENT INDIA (AND THE SOUTH-WEST EURASIAN INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM)

Ancient India was an "open" region of the South-West Eurasian "interregional-scale international system."[9] The emergence of the sixteen *mahajanapadas* in sixth century BCE was nearly simultaneous with the domination of northwestern India by the Persian-Achaemenid Empire (until 330 BCE).[10] After the conquest of the Achaemenid Empire by Alexander the Great, northwestern India fell under Hellenistic domination (~327–305 BCE).[11] Although northwestern India came under Mauryan domination for a century (~305 BCE—205 BCE) after the Mauryan-Seleucid Treaty of the Indus, the collapse of the Mauryan Empire (in 181 BCE) saw four centuries (~second century BCE–second century CE) of conquest-migrations in northwestern, north-central, and western India of the Bactrian-Greeks,

Scythians/Shakas, Parthians, and finally the Kushans, whose empire stretched from Central Asia to the Ganges.[12] These interactions are crucial theoretically, and Lieberman has cautioned against treating "India" as an autonomous unit in world history because the Achaemenids and Kushans (among others) politically connected parts of India with the world beyond.[13] At the same time, it should be noted that the sixteen *mahajanapadas* stretched in an arc from Magadha in the eastern Ganges to Gandhara (in contemporary Afghanistan-Pakistan) and Kamboja (in modern Tajikistan).[14]

However, ancient India was home to multiple polities beyond the ones noted above. For example, around the time of Alexander's conquest of northwestern India, there were twenty-eight small states in that part of the subcontinent alone.[15] Similarly, the southern states like the Cholas and Pandyas were not members of the club of "great" states noted above.[16] While the nature of the historical sources mean that we do not have the complete list (or number) of states during these centuries, a broad geopolitical profile can nevertheless be sketched.[17] When Magadha was expanding into Anga around 545 BCE in the eastern Ganges, Gandhara (and other parts of the northwest) fell under Achaemenid sway. Meanwhile, Magadha continued with its relentless expansion and annexed the "great" states of Kosala, the Vajjian Confederacy, Avanti, and most of northern and central India by the time of Alexander's invasion of the northwest (~327–6 BCE). The northwest then became a part of Alexander's Seleucid successors, while the Mauryan dynasty assumed power in the Magadhan Empire under Chandragupta (in 321 BCE).

The Mauryans and the Seleucids had a politico-military encounter that culminated in the so-called Treaty of the Indus in 305 BCE as a result of which the northwestern regions came under Mauryan domination.[18] Later, Chandragupta's grandson Ashoka fought a particularly bloody war with Kalinga (in contemporary Odisha) in 260 BCE, thereby eliminating the only serious challenger to Mauryan domination in the subcontinent. While the Cholas, Pandyas, Satiyaputras, and Keralaputras continued to exist as independent states in the deep south as did Tamraparni (Sri Lanka), the Mauryan Empire stretched from southern Afghanistan to Karnataka, and from Baluchistan to Bengal.

However, Mauryan domination lasted only for a few decades (~260–205 BCE). In 205 BCE, the Seleucids marched towards India again. However, they did not encounter the Mauryas (whose empire had begun to shrink). Instead, the Seleucids met with Subhagasena, who was the ruler of a northwestern state that had heretofore been a part of the Magadhan Empire.[19] In the meantime, the Mauryan dynasty collapsed while the Magadhan Empire continued to shrink to its original core as many erstwhile polities that were annexed by Magadha, such as Kalinga, reappeared.[20]

The Bactrian-Greeks then descended into northwestern India after 181 BCE, and as "Indo-Greeks" reached Malwa in the south and Mathura in the east. They even attacked Pataliputra, the capital of Magadha, from where they were

pushed back.[21] In the first century BCE, King Kharavela of Kalinga emerged victorious over the Indo-Greeks in the eastern Ganges while also fighting with the Satavahana rulers of the Deccan and the Tamil polities of the deep south.[22] The Satavahana Empire that had emerged as a major power in the western Deccan defeated Magadha in 28 BCE.[23] In the following century, the Satavahanas found themselves in a rivalry with the Western Shakas, one of three separate groups of Scythians who migrated to India in the last two centuries BCE, and who survived in western India until 415 CE.[24] The Western Shakas with their access to seaports maintained amicable relations with the Kushan Empire (first to third centuries CE) that controlled parts of contemporary Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Xinjiang, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and northern and central India, thus playing a crucial role in the establishment of the Silk Roads.[25] Not surprisingly, the Kushan Empire faced significant external challenges from beyond the subcontinent, and finally collapsed in the mid-third century under Persian-Sassanian assault. Subsequently, a Persia-oriented Kushano-Sassanid dynasty rose to power in northwestern India.

In order to decipher the general trends in the complex history of the subcontinent during these nine centuries (~600 BCE—300CE), Schwartzberg divided the Indian subcontinent into five "analytic regions"—the Northwest, North-central, Northeast, West, and South—that were the centers of the major polities.[26] In addition to these five centers, some polities arose in the "Far Northwest" (beyond the subcontinent in West-Central Eurasia) that brought some polities in the Northwest, North-central, and the West under their sway. In these nine centuries, only the Magadhan-Mauryan Empire (~260–205 CE) rose to dominate the entire subcontinent. Furthermore, apart from Magadha, no other power emerged in the subcontinent until 200 BCE that was able to control two or more of these five analytical regions for more than a decade, the occasional military foray notwithstanding. In the subsequent four centuries (~200 BCE–200 CE), there were 140 years without any power being able to dominate more than one of these five regions. When major powers dominating two (or occasionally three) regions did arise during these four centuries, they were centered either in the Northwest (the Shakas or the Kushans) or in the West (the Satavahanas) as opposed to the Northeast (Magadha's home region). Even then, at any given point in time, there were never more than two powers in the subcontinent each of whom simultaneously dominated two (or occasionally three) of these five regions. In other words, ancient India was a zone of multiple polities most of whom competed for power largely in the region of their origin.

However, there are two further observations that are geopolitically salient. First, Fussman has argued that "at times, [the] Southern states were without any contact with the Northernmost ones."[27] For example, we do not know of any direct politico-military interaction between the Kushan Empire and the Cholas of the deep south even as long-distance trade certainly connected them. However, the lack of direct politico-military links cannot be reduced to a lack of interaction

capacity, as the campaigns of the Mauryas and Kharavela demonstrate that such capabilities could certainly be generated when needed.

Second, while Indic polities were at the receiving end of the invasions and migrations from West-Central Eurasia, the Bactrian-Greeks, Scythians, Parthians, and Kushans were eventually "Indianized."[28] For example, the Western Shakas were the first rulers in India to use Sanskrit as a language for the expression of political power (as opposed to sacral power).[29] (The Mauryas did not use Sanskrit, as noted subsequently.) Keay has even argued that the tag of "classical" India belongs to these "non-Indian successors" of the Mauryas for their contributions to Indian culture.[30] Notably, the *Arthaśāstra*, the classical Indian text of statecraft, "was probably composed" between 100 BCE and 100 CE "during the decline of Śaka rule or the rise of the Kuśānas," even as the text's exact geographic provenance remains unknown, although it was certainly based on traditions established in the preceding centuries.[31] The *Arthaśāstra* is important for our purposes because of its approach to foreign policy and the idea of the *mandala*.

THE *ARTHAŚĀSTRA* AND THE *MANDALA*

The *Arthaśāstra*, attributed to Kautilya, "approaches interstate relations from the perspective of a small state seeking to empower itself"[32] in a geopolitical environment of multiple large and small polities with "multivalent and heterogeneous traditions of kingship and statecraft."[33] The monarch of the small state seeking power vis-à-vis his rivals in ancient India had to contend with states with different regime-types (monarchies and oligarchies) in an environment where ideas of governance were informed by multiple traditions from within and outside India (Buddhist, Brahmanical, Jain, Persian, Hellenistic, and Central Asian).[34]

Kautilya proposed the *mandala* theory of statecraft (see Figure 14.1).[35] In any given *mandala*, several rival polities (A, B, and C) competed for power as they shared borders with each other. States with common borders were considered "natural enemies," while states on the other side of the natural enemies with whom no common borders were shared were considered "natural allies." Kautilya also identified "intermediate states" (P and Q) that were located between two enemies who could help any of the rival polities (A, B, or C). Finally, there was the "distant state" (X) that was outside the *mandala*, but it was powerful enough to help any rival polity or choose to remain neutral.

The goal of statecraft for an ambitious monarch was to dominate/neutralize rivals in the *mandala*, and to acquire wealth (including territory).[36] In theory, the monarch was advised to conquer the world "to its four directions"[37] as it would achieve all of these goals. However, it was recognized that war was "unpredictable" and "expensive."[38] Therefore, international politics was driven by a search for strategies "to outmaneuver and outwit the opponent."[39] Consequently, Kautilya advocated six foreign policy strategies: initiating hostilities (war), entering into peace pacts, remaining quiet (hiding), threatening others (distracting), seeking

(temporary) refuge as a subordinate of a powerful monarch, and pursuing a "dual strategy" of making (temporary) peace with one rival while fighting another.[40] In other words, these foreign policy strategies aimed at outfoxing the opponent in order to dominate him or to seek temporary truce/subordination (while searching for the opportunity to dominate the opponent). As such, the quest for interstate peace was not the dominant goal in international politics. Instead, the aim was the pursuit of political gain vis-à-vis the rival when the opportunity arose.

While Kautilya advocated the ruthless pursuit of power, his text is not without important ideational features. There were two important ideas guiding the international relations of ancient Indian monarchs in this period. First, the expanding monarch sought the status of a *cakravartin* ("paramount") ruler.[41] The concept of the *cakravartin* ruler is a multivalent idea. There is a tendency to equate the realm of the *cakravartin* ruler with the Indian subcontinent as the *Arthaśāstra* refers to the region between "the Himalayas and the sea" as the *cakravartin*'s strategic domain.[42] However, this title was not used by Ashoka to refer to himself even as his empire dominated the subcontinent.[43] By contrast, the rulers of the small(er) post-Mauryan kingdoms, most of whom remained confined to their own analytic regions, did refer to themselves as *cakravartins*.[44] As such, the idea of the *cakravartin* simply meant that the monarchs sought to expand and control translocal domains (as opposed to seeking domination over the Indian subcontinent).

Second, *dharma-vijayin* ("righteous conquest") represented the "ideal" conquest in ancient India.[45] As per the norm of *dharma-vijayin*, the conquering monarch was expected to be magnanimous in victory, seeking political submission of the vanquished (through tribute, troops, and symbols) instead of formally/institutionally incorporating the territory of the vanquished. In fact, the victor was expected to reinstate the ruler of the losing side, albeit as a subordinate monarch. Only the *asura-vijayin* ("demonic victor") seized the territory of the vanquished (at least in theory), thereby eliminating the losing state and its ruler. The incorporation of the vanquished through *dharma-vijayin* led to a form of empire-building that was obviously prone to fragmentation (when the opportunity arose). However, many *cakravartins* did formally incorporate the territories of the vanquished in practice, especially in regions close to the imperial center.

Finally, it should be noted that multiple *mandalas* of states existed in ancient India (Figure 14.2). Since the domain of strategic competition for most polities was limited only to their own "analytic region," as demonstrated by Schwartzberg, we can hypothesize the presence of five *mandalas* in ancient India (with a sixth *mandala* to the northwest of the subcontinent that directly influenced the developments in some of the other five). In other words, a *mandala* was a zone of amity and enmity over which paramountcy was sought. In theory, there were four factors that delimited the frontiers of any given *mandala*. First, the "righteous conquest" of subordinates that left them intact delimited the military reach of the domination-seeker as it became difficult to radially project power beyond the subordinates. It is well known in International Relations scholarship that a

state's ability to project military power declines with distance.[46] This issue was amplified for ancient Indian polities that sought to build empires through the norm of *dharma-vijayin*.

Second, the presence or absence of physical infrastructure such as roads and riverine networks circumscribed the frontiers of a *mandala*. Notably, paramount rulers such as Ashoka paid particular attention to the creation and maintenance of such networks of connectivity.[47] Third, political relationships as prescribed by the *Arthaśāstra* (such as seeking allies on the other side of the enemies) and "marriage alliances"[48] also bounded these *mandalas*. Political factors at the level of the individual (such as Ashoka's innovative leadership discussed subsequently) could also redefine the frontiers of a *mandala*.[49] Finally, it should be noted that these factors varied over time, and therefore the limits of the Indic *mandalas* were inherently fluid.

Ancient India can then be considered as "a patchwork of overlapping *mandalas*" with continuities into Western-Central Eurasia that could "expand and contract" vis-à-vis other *mandalas* after a powerful monarch dominated his own *mandala* (which then ceased to exist) while this expanding state became a part of the neighboring *mandala*.[50] Each of the *mandalas* also contained a number of subordinate states "some of whom could repudiate their vassal status when the opportunity arose and try to build up their own networks of vassals."[51] The following two sections will respectively discuss how Mauryan domination arose out of such geopolitical dynamism, and how the *mandala* order maintained itself in the absence of hegemony/domination.

MAURYAN DOMINATION

Political Domination

Mauryan domination resulted from a combination of four causal factors. First, the onset of the idea of the transregional *cakravartin* made territorial expansion and political domination the goals of warfare in ancient India in mid-sixth century BCE. Ancient Indian states had two dominant regime types: monarchic (where decisions were made by the king) and oligarchic (where decisions were made by many in large deliberative assemblies). All ancient Indian polities began their political careers as oligarchies that only fought over status, booty, and border territory.[52] However, domestic institutions influence (and are influenced by) wars and expansion.[53] Magadha and Kosala were the first oligarchies to transition into monarchies. This regime change corresponded with their respective territorial annexation of Anga and Kasi (~550 BCE) that transformed the goal of warfare in ancient India.[54] It is very likely that the Achaemenids provided the inspiration of this "empire-model" of a "transregional" polity through territorial annexation and/or political domination.[55] After all, the Achaemenids brought

all of the Northwest under their control during this period, and there was no pre-Achaemenid indigenous model of empire in India.

Second, the presence of multiple (five-to-six) *mandalas* (including some that partially overlapped and others that did not) along with the presence of multiple domination-seeking monarchies made systemic balancing difficult (at the pan-Indian level). Balancing strategies were only pursued against "local" rivals (within the same *mandala*) and not against powerful expanding monarchies in different *mandalas*. The English School has argued that the balance-of-power (as an order/systemic goal) obtains only when it is an intersubjectively held value among the system's major powers.[56] However, this understanding of the balance-of-power did not exist in ancient India where the intersubjectively held goal among the monarchs was to emerge as *cakravartin* rulers with extensive transregional domains. Notably, Kautilya's list of six strategies of dealing with other states discussed above does not include systemic power balancing (even as it allowed for temporary local/relational balancing through his idea of "natural enemies/allies").

Although it is a later text, "the *Arthaśāstra*'s principal thought of concentric, interacting polities is one that fits both the pre- and post-Mauryan times, that of the originally 'sixteen polities' of northern India and that of the re-emerging tribes and states of post-Mauryan times."[57] For example, when Magadha was expanding against Kosala and the Vajjian Confederacy in the Northeastern *mandala*, Avanti was engaged in warfare for supremacy with Vatsa in the North-central *mandala*, while Gandhara in the Northwestern *mandala* was oriented westward due to Achaemenid domination.[58] While Magadha's domination of the Northeastern *mandala* brought its rivalry with Avanti to the fore as the Northeastern *mandala* expanded and merged with the North-central *mandala*, it took Magadha "about a hundred years to subjugate" Avanti.[59] What is noteworthy here is that Avanti did not enter into an alliance with Kosala and the Vajjian Confederacy when the two had earlier allied in the face of Magadhan expansion, as the chief threat to Avanti then came from Vatsa.

In other words, while polities in ancient India did engage in external balancing strategies (e.g., the Kosala-Vajjian alliance), this happened mostly within the same *mandala*. Indian polities also engaged in other types of countervailing strategies, including co-binding and wedge strategies.[60] The Vajjian Confederacy practiced co-binding as it was a "compound republic" of several oligarchies (including Lichchhavi and Videha) that had banded together in the face of Magadhan expansionism.[61] However, Magadha sought political opportunities in the form of wedge strategies for expansion (in addition to open warfare), and eventually annexed Vajjian "not due to military defeat, but due to an effort to undermine the unity of the league."[62]

The presence of oligarchies (with their different war aims that eschewed territorial annexation or political domination) made external balancing even more difficult in a geopolitical environment of multiple *mandalas* with multiple expanding

monarchies. The monarchies enjoyed a distinct advantage over oligarchies in warfare in the long run for three reasons: (i) they had a centralized decision-making process; (ii) they maintained standing armies (paid for by the state) instead of relying on armed militia or mercenaries as in oligarchies; and (iii) they maintained an efficient fiscal-administrative system (managed by state bureaucracies) instead of relying on tax farming as in the oligarchies.[63]

Third, the collapse of the Achaemenid Empire and the Treaty of the Indus between the Mauryas and the Seleucids meant that ancient India became a "closed" region of the South-West Eurasian international system after 305 BCE. As a result of this politico-military encounter, the Seleucids ceded their domains in the Northwestern Indic *mandala*—Gandhara, southern Afghanistan, and Baluchistan—to the Magadhan-Mauryan Empire.[64] Most importantly, peace was maintained along their common frontier in the northwest over the next century (until the next Seleucid encounter with Subhagasena in 205 BCE).[65] Relative peace around this frontier for almost one century is noteworthy because this had been the zone of expansion from the sixth "Far Northwestern" *mandala* into the subcontinent before the Treaty of the Indus (~550–305 BCE), and because this was also the pathway for the post-Mauryan expansion of the Bactrian-Greeks, Scythians, Parthians, and Kushans (~200 BCE–200 CE).

The "closing" of this frontier for a century (~305–205 BCE) is significant because the Mauryans emerged as the dominant power in the subcontinent during this period (~260–205 BCE). It is widely believed in IR scholarship that "open" regions tend towards balances (or system fragmentation), while hegemonies are possible in "closed" regions.[66] While there are multiple mechanisms through which external powers in "open" regions cause balancing (or system fragmentation)—from the creation of new polities to financing local alliances against expanding powers—the "closing" of this frontier and the relative peacefulness of this Seleucid-Mauryan frontier is noteworthy because the Seleucids and the Mauryas fought many wars along their other frontiers in the following decades. Arguably, the maintenance of relative peace along this frontier—the foundations for which were laid down by a politico-military encounter while the relationship was subsequently maintained through diplomacy (e.g., Megasthenes was the Seleucid envoy to the Mauryas)—allowed the Mauryas to expend their military resources towards dominating the subcontinent as opposed to fighting costly wars against other powerful extra-regional adversaries trying to make inroads into the subcontinent.

Fourth and finally, given its geographical location, Magadha enjoyed a number of strategic advantages even as no other state in ancient India had access to *all* of them—fertile alluvial soil along the northern trade route, natural/geographical defenses for its capital city, and access to iron ores and war elephants.[67] Not surprisingly, Ashoka fought the most important (and perhaps the most destructive) ancient Indian war in 260 BCE with Kalinga, a powerful regional kingdom in the peninsula that had access to war elephants and was connected with Southeast

Asia through maritime trade (although it lacked Magadha's advantages in agriculture). According to Ashoka's inscriptions, the Kalinga War killed 100,000 people while displacing another 150,000 (although these figures are certainly exaggerated).[68] The Mauryans established their domination in the subcontinent after the Kalinga War.

I choose to characterize the Mauryan regional order in the subcontinent as "domination" instead of empire, hegemony, or leadership.[69] While subordinate states cease to exist as independent actors in international politics in imperial orders, small polities continued to exist in the deep south of the peninsula and in Sri Lanka after 260 BCE as noted above. In other words, even as the Mauryan Empire was organized as an empire, it did not "have" an empire in the south.[70] Similarly, while the subordinate states pursue the goals of the superordinate actor in international affairs in a hegemonic system, this was not true for subordinate actors in ancient India where Kautilya's prescription saw subordination as temporary and advised the subordinates to pursue "dual strategies." Finally, unlike those systems where the leadership of the superordinate is recognized as socially legitimate, the subordinate states in ancient India made the decision to accept this lesser status based on considerations of relative power (as opposed to social/ideational factors). The subordinate states submitted due to the exigency of power politics as they sought to "buy time" to improve their relative position. After all, the ultimate goal for all actors, including those that were (temporarily) subordinate, was to emerge as dominant actors themselves.

Mauryan domination resulted out of the interaction of expansionist ideas, the absence of systemic balancing, the strategic "closing" of India (~305–205 BCE), and Magadhan geography. Notably, neither of these four factors was capable of producing domination alone. Despite the presence of expansionist ideas in the post-Mauryan period, a second period of domination took five centuries to emerge under the Guptas. Importantly, Gupta domination emerged in an "open" international system with the Kushano-Sassanids (and later, the Huns) in the northwest of the subcontinent, thus showing that "open" international systems are also capable of producing hegemonies/domination.[71] Similarly, systemic balancing did not emerge in the Maurya-Gupta interlude due to the presence of multiple *mandalas* and different regime types (and is discussed subsequently). Finally, post-Mauryan Magadha continued to enjoy its geographical advantages. However, neither of these four factors automatically led to (Magadhan) domination.

Ideational Domination

There were two dominant axes of Mauryan (Ashokan) domination—political and ideational. However, the limited IR scholarship on Mauryan domination has ignored the ideational dimension as it treats India as an "autonomous" international system while ignoring the connections with West-Central Eurasia.[72] Ashoka sent diplomatic envoys to the Seleucids (to the immediate northwest of his empire)

and to other Hellenistic monarchs in Egypt, Macedon, Cyrene (in contemporary Libya), and Epirus/Corinth (in contemporary Albania/Greece).[73] While seeking political domination only over the Indian subcontinent, Ashoka sought system-wide ideational domination throughout the known world (in South-West Eurasia).

The Treaty of the Indus between Ashoka's grandfather Chandragupta and the Seleucids was a pact between "equals"[74] as the Seleucids ceded territory to the Mauryas (in the Northwest) in exchange for five hundred war elephants, while the two sides also entered into a marriage pact. The subsequent exchange of envoys between the Hellenistic world and the Mauryas created a world of "peer polities" in South-Western Eurasia.[75] The treaty also formally "bounded and thereby territorialized" the limits of both the Seleucids and the Mauryas for the first time.[76] Thus, the Mauryas established a finite limit to their political domination that was limited to the Indian subcontinent. Pollock has termed the Mauryan idea of "world conquest" limited politically to the subcontinent as "finite universalism"[77] because the Mauryas were not only aware of but were also in close contact with other territorially large bureaucratic polities that were literate, wealthy, and culturally sophisticated.

Unlike their "finite" political universalism, the Mauryan quest for ideational hegemony was boundless and truly universal. We know that states in a system of peer polities compete over status.[78] Analogous to the Mauryan claim to finite political universality in the Indian subcontinent, the post-Alexandrian Hellenistic polities were also competing for finite "universal lordship" in the Hellenistic world.[79] Since the Mauryans had given five hundred war elephants to the Seleucids and the two sides maintained close diplomatic relations, it is reasonable to assume that the Mauryans were aware of the Seleucid claims in the Hellenistic world. In fact, we know that Ptolemaic Egypt also sent a diplomatic representative to the Mauryas who "acted against Seleucid interests."[80] In such a peer polity system of mutually recognized political equality (and mutually agreed territorial limits), Ashoka resorted to "social creativity" by "finding a new dimension" in which he believed he was "superior" in order to claim higher status.[81]

Consequently, Ashoka, as an "innovator,"[82] turned to the ideational policy of propagating *dhamma* ("ethics") in the known world (and beyond). Asoka's *dhamma* was a complex policy of statecraft (not to be confused with the norm of *dharma-vijayin* discussed earlier) through which he seemingly renounced war, abjured violence, promoted the socioeconomic welfare of his subjects (and even animals), and encouraged sociopolitical tolerance between different ethnic groups, thereby calling for the moral transformation of the monarch, state, and society.[83] Importantly, in his edicts that were written in four languages (Prakrit, Gandhari, Aramaic, and Greek) and scripts (Brahmi, Kharosthi, Aramaic, and Greek) that were scattered through his empire, Ashoka proclaimed victory through *dhamma* in the entire known world. In his bilingual Greek-Aramaic inscription, Ashoka referred to himself as "the ruler of all things over the whole earth,"[84] and otherwise

claimed that "even where the king's envoys do not go, people have heard of dhamma and are conforming to it."[85]

In other words, Ashoka sought superior status vis-à-vis his Hellenistic contemporaries through his political ideas in a peer polity system as the domain of his ideational hegemony was system-wide (and even included those areas that were beyond direct contact). My interpretation of Ashoka's *dhamma* policy as a consequence of the geopolitics of status is distinct from the existing interpretations in the historical literature.[86] However, the geopolitics of status through which Ashoka competed with his Hellenistic contemporaries needs further consideration because it has recently been argued that their cultural competition extended into multiple domains, including script/writing and philosophical exchanges.[87] Notably, Ashoka was aware that his own rule extended over Greek and Persian peoples (where he left his edicts in Greek and Aramaic). Not surprisingly, Ashoka was convinced of his superiority over his Hellenistic contemporaries, and Basham has argued that "Asoka was the most powerful ruler of his time, and he seems to have been well aware of the fact."[88] In fact, at the peak of Ashoka's reign, the Mauryan Empire was the largest polity in the world.[89] While it may be overreaching to assert that Ashoka achieved system-wide ideational domination, I am simply arguing that unlike "finite" political domination limited to the subcontinent, the realm of Ashoka's ideational domination was truly universal.[90]

POST-MAURYAN *MANDALA* ORDER (~200 BCE–300 CE)

Magadhan-Mauryan domination was short-lived and ended by 205 BCE. India once again became an "open" region of the South-West Eurasian international system that saw new waves of conquest-migrants. The collapse of the Mauryan Empire meant that many erstwhile monarchies reappeared, perhaps due to the Mauryan form of empire-building that was informed by the norm of *dharma-vijayin*. At the same time, many oligarchies formed (or reappeared), especially in the Northwest and the western Deccan.[91] These centuries also witnessed the rise of new polities in the western Deccan (the Satavahanas), while the polities in the deep south (like the Cholas and the Pandyas) flourished through maritime trade.

In other words, the five *mandalas* or "analytic regions" of the subcontinent that were the domains of strategic competition for most states (along with the sixth *mandala* in the "Far Northwest") reappeared. While most post-Mauryan states were small and had limited reach (e.g., we know of forty-two Bactrian-/Indo-Greek kings, most of whom ruled over small kingdoms in the Northwest over two centuries),[92] others occasionally forayed across the *mandalas*. For example, the Satavahanas in the West defeated Magadha (although this did not result in their political control of the Northeast), while the Kushans eventually came to control not just the Far Northwest but the Northwest and North-central *mandalas* too in addition to leading military expeditions into Magadha in the Northeast.

However, we know very little about the "international order" during this period as it has not been studied by IR scholars, although Watson dismissed it as a "patchwork quilt of independent and warring states."[93] According to Thapar, the leading historian of ancient India, even as "there appears to have been no connecting theme in the post-Mauryan period" at first glance, "there was a theme, even as it was less immediately apparent in political events."[94] Thapar highlights the spread of Buddhism, commercial dynamism, and cultural efflorescence during these centuries. It should also be noted that the *Arthaśāstra* itself says nothing about international order in this zone of multiple *mandalas* as "[w]e read nothing of how a network of such polities might be fitted into larger political frameworks,"[95] because the text ultimately deals with the foreign policy choices of a small state seeking power. Nevertheless, we can derive the broad features of the *mandala* "international order" from the discussion above by approaching international order in an explanatory sense as "partly descriptive, [and] partly normative," as noted by Aron.[96]

There were four dominant attributes of the *mandala* international order in ancient India. First, ancient India was an "open" region of the South-West Eurasian international system that enabled the injection of extra-regional (human) resources along with their ideologies of statecraft and kingship. This "opening" also promoted trade and cultural exchange between Indic polities and the world beyond. Second, during this period (~200 BCE–300 CE), ancient India was a decentered region in terms of power politics. Unlike the period of Mauryan domination which was Magadha-centered, the post-Mauryan period did not witness the emergence of hegemony/domination. While multiple powers periodically emerged dominant within different *mandalas* during this period, it did not lead to the creation of systemic (multipolar) balances either for reasons related to different threat perceptions and regime-types as discussed previously. Notably, the intersubjectively held goal among the monarchies in the system was the quest for *cakravartin* status with extensive transregional domains (as opposed to the creation of power balances).

Although the Kushans or the Satavahanas may have risen to prominence in two or occasionally three *mandalas*, most post-Mauryan states competed for paramountcy only within their own analytic regions. Even at the peak of Satavahana, Western Shaka, and Kushan power, the system was not multipolar/polycentric because these powers did not interact directly, let alone coordinate to "run" the system.[97] Given that the geopolitical environment had polities informed by multiple traditions of governance that drew upon ideas from within and outside India, no single state (or "analytic region") emerged as the center for political ideas that radiated throughout India. In other words, ancient India was de-centered not only in terms of power politics, but also ideationally because no single state surfaced as the ideational center that provided ideas of governance that were emulated by all of the others. In the words of Pollock, India of this period represented a "geobody . . . whose center was everywhere and periphery nowhere."[98]

Third, despite this diversity, the *mandala* international order was normatively held together by ideas related to the management of power asymmetry.[99] While the subcontinent was incredibly diverse politically (and in terms of languages, religions, and ethnicities), a degree of sameness emerged in the geopolitical sphere and at the level of macro-culture. For example, the Kushan adoption of Buddhism did not require them "to give up" their own "indigenous" traditions or the patronage of other religions even as the Kushan emperor Kanishka came to be regarded as "a second Ashoka."[100] Kushan ruling ideology and imperial titles (along with the empire's languages and scripts) continued to draw upon Indic, Hellenistic, Persian, and Central Asian traditions.[101] In other words, the deep macro-cultural substratum of ancient India was supportive of political and cultural heterogeneity. Simultaneously, a degree of sameness emerged in the realm of power politics due to a multitude of factors: the threefold interaction of Buddhist institutions; long-distance trade networks, and their patronage by monarchs in addition to the spread of literacy after Ashoka; the historical memory of his rule; and the "Indianization" of the conquest-migrants.[102]

Informed by the norm of *dharma-vijayin* and the belief that wars were expensive and unpredictable, the domination-seeker sought political domination in international relations through the pursuit of various stratagems advocated by Kautilya (only one of which was war) as opposed to the elimination and incorporation of the vanquished, while the subordinate ruler thought of subordination as temporary. The aim of the subordinate ruler was to wait to seek advantage when the opportunity arose in order to become the domination-seeker (and eventually the *cakravartin* ruler). In such a system, the hierarchy between the dominant and subordinate state was linked to material power disparity and political opportunity. This hierarchy was not maintained ideationally or through formal institutions, and was quickly overthrown (or even reversed) when the opportunity arose as evidenced in the intense rivalry between the Western Shakas and the Satavahanas.[103] Fourth and finally, there were several *mandalas* in the system, some that partially overlapped and others that did not directly interact (see Figure 14.2). So local hierarchy in a given *mandala* was of no strategic importance to distant *mandalas*. However, the ideas related to the management of power asymmetry were common to all of them.

In other words, the *mandala* order represented dynamic geopolitical equilibrium where change was constant as polities frequently rose and fell within *mandalas* (and where the *mandalas* occasionally expanded and contracted). However, this change was not system-destroying because the new dominant and subordinate states were informed by the same ideas related to the management of power asymmetry (and because multiple *mandalas* continued to exist in a system supportive of political and cultural heterogeneity). Although "change" certainly existed in this system in the form of new waves of conquest-migrants, with the emergence of new polities, and due to changing patterns of trade, this was representative of

change within recognizable patterns that had historical precedents even as war and conflict was endemic. At the same time, this geopolitical order was neither imposed from "above" (by the dominant state) nor was it built from "below" (by the subordinate state). Instead, it was mutually constitutive of the dominant-subordinate relationship, and emerged out of the interaction of material power, political opportunity, and ideas related to the management of power asymmetry. This dynamic order pointed towards a deep plurality of polities and cultures.

The *mandala* order should thus be conceived as self-regulating behavior that can emerge in a geopolitical environment even in the absence of a grand design or system-maker in a region with multiple large and small polities informed by heterogeneous traditions (even in the absence of a central authority over and above them). This self-regulating behavior was the outcome of the (selfish) self-interest of the dominant and subordinate states. As such, it represents a distinct type of international order compared to the better-known hegemonic, balance-of-power, and (Sino)centric systems. This order made ancient India into an open region of multiple *mandalas* (only some of which partially overlapped). The *mandala* international order was politically and normatively de-centered but was held together by ideas related to the management of power asymmetry. As in its better-known counterparts, the threat of conflict was ever-present in the *mandala* order as well. Nevertheless, the post-Mauryan *mandala* order was very durable and lasted for almost five hundred years (even as dozens of polities rose and fell and several *mandalas* expanded and contracted). The frequent conflicts notwithstanding, ancient India was economically vibrant and culturally dynamic as argued by Thapar, and in aggregate terms represented the largest economic center in the world according to Maddison.[104]

A DE-CENTERED *MANDALA* ORDER IN THE INDO-PACIFIC

One of the aims of Global IR is to develop concepts and theories from Asia's past, and have them temporally and spatially transcend the sites of their origins to provide insights into contemporary geopolitics. This is because contemporary IR has emerged out of Western historical experiences. For example, Gilpin has argued that "Thucydides' theory of hegemonic war constitutes one of the central organizing ideas for the study of international relations."[105] More recently, this idea has been repackaged as the "Thucydides's trap" to understand the emerging conflict dynamic as a result of the so-called "power transition" between the United States and a rising China.[106] While this Greek idea portends a looming conflict in the transition from American hegemony to Chinese hegemony, the *mandala* order provides us with an alternative view of contemporary dynamics.

Using the *mandala* framework, we can conceptualize the Indo-Pacific region—the primary region of the US-China strategic competition—as four (partially)

overlapping *mandalas* (or subregions): South Asia, Southeast Asia, Northeast Asia, and Oceania. These four regions interact directly and indirectly to varying degrees across military, economic, and cultural dimensions. In South Asia, China and India are the domination-seekers, while the United States is trying to prevent Chinese hegemony. In Southeast Asia, China and the United States are the domination-seekers, while the region itself is trying to prevent domination by any power through the various mechanisms related to the framework of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Japan and India are also trying to prevent Chinese hegemony in Southeast Asia. In Northeast Asia, China and the United States are competing for domination, while Japan is seeking to forestall Chinese hegemony. Although Oceania has not seen such great power rivalries in recent decades, Australia and New Zealand aim to remain the region's primary powers even as the United States, China, France, and others are beginning to compete for influence. In other words, the boundaries between these four *mandalas* are fluid and variable (and may further fluctuate over time). The degree of interaction across these four *mandalas* will depend on military factors (such as wars, military bases, and logistics agreements), economic factors (such are free trade agreements and investment patterns), and political relationships (such as alliances and clientage).

Notably, the *mandala* framework prognosticates a very different regional order in contrast to the Thucydidean power transition. While there are important differences between the contemporary Indo-Pacific and ancient India (such as the presence of nationalism as a major force in world politics today even as it was absent in ancient India), the *mandala* framework is representative of isomorphism across time and space (and should not be taken literally).[107] After all, significant differences also exist between Thucydides's world and ours.

The most significant parallel between ancient India and the contemporary Indo-Pacific has to do with the nature of imperial formations. The norm of *dharma-vijayin* meant that the domination-seeker did not extinguish the vanquished polity in ancient India; instead, its subordination was the main goal. In other words, a *mandala* needs both dominant and subordinate states by definition. Similarly, in the contemporary world, the norm of territorial integrity means that "state death" has become an exception (even as border conflicts continue).[108] However, this has not stopped the domination-seekers from pursuing "informal empires" through military means (such as occupation and bases), economic coercion, and through other forms of clientelist relationships.[109] As such, contemporary domination-seekers wish to cultivate subordinate states analogous to their ancient Indian counterparts. Not surprisingly, Cooper has argued that just because "we no longer live in a world of empires, in the conventional sense, does not mean" the "demise" of empires nor "of the possibilities of turning empire into new forms of political organization."[110]

Consequently, a few characteristics of the Indo-Pacific *mandala* order are worth highlighting. First, the Indo-Pacific is an "open" region as it includes external

powers such as the United States that is present in the region through alliances, forward military deployments, commerce, and culture. In this sense, the United States can be thought of as the Kushan Empire of ancient India with its genesis outside of the Indian subcontinent in the "Far Northwest" (even as it eventually expanded into the Northwest and the North-central regions, while making military forays into the Northeast).

Second, the Indo-Pacific is a de-centered region, both power-politically and ideationally. In the Northeast Asian *mandala*, the US and China are the most important power-political centers. However, Japan's strategic options preclude the characterization of Northeast Asia as a bipolar *mandala*.[111] By contrast, Southeast Asia has built a layered hierarchical order through the omni-enmeshment of all of the major powers of the Indo-Pacific: the United States, China, Japan, India, and Australia.[112] In the South Asian *mandala*, China and India are vying for geopolitical influence while the United States seems to be promoting Indian primacy.[113] In Oceania, China is in the process of emerging as an important strategic player in addition to the region's primary powers, Australia and New Zealand. At the same time, the United States, Japan, France, Indonesia, and India are paying renewed strategic attention to Oceania.[114] In other words, contrary to the belief in an incipient bipolarization of the Indo-Pacific due to the US-China competition,[115] there are multiple power centers within and across the four *mandalas* with variable reach and interests.

Similarly, the Indo-Pacific is ideationally de-centered too. In terms of domestic political models, China's authoritarian-meritocratic system is emerging as a distinct alternative to America's liberal-democratic system.[116] At the same time, consolidated "hybrid" regimes continue to exist in this region.[117] Likewise, in terms of politico-economic governance, there are at least four competing models in the Indo-Pacific: America's liberal-democratic capitalism, Japan and India's social-democratic capitalism, Southeast Asia's competitive authoritarian capitalism, and China's state-bureaucratic capitalism.[118] In other words, the region is not ideationally bipolar, nor is it America-centric. Furthermore, the Indo-Pacific is not moving towards Sinocentrism even as China will soon emerge as the largest economy in the world and the closest trading partner of almost all of the regional players. As such, political and cultural heterogeneity will remain a central regional trait.

Third, the management of power asymmetry is at the core of the emerging order in the Indo-Pacific. While the subordinate states of ancient India thought of subordination as temporary (and hoped to reverse it), the secondary states of the contemporary Indo-Pacific wish to maintain autonomy in their strategic decision-making while expanding their choices and options. According to Tellis, "many countries or regions attempting to avoid being penalized by the U.S.-China competition, seek to exploit it for their own ends, or hope to enmesh both rivals in order to promote their own interests."[119] Arguably, these ideas related to the management of power asymmetry in contemporary Indo-Pacific have emerged

out of the region's historical experience with colonialism and the Cold War, and may even be embedded in the regional institutions led by ASEAN.

Fourth and finally, the Indo-Pacific is neither hegemonic nor is the region practicing systemic balance-of-power politics. The Indo-Pacific is a region with multiple domination-seekers: the United States (the declining superpower that is trying to arrest and reverse its relative decline), China (the foremost rising power), Japan (a former great power that is trying to re-emerge as a "normal" great power), and India (another rising power). As these powers joust for influence, the region's secondary states are determined to prevent the domination of any single great power by giving all of them varying stakes in regional and national affairs. Even as relational balancing exists in the region (with India balancing against China in the South Asian *mandala* and with Japan doing the same in the Northeast Asian *mandala*), no systemic balances exist in the Indo-Pacific as the "Quad" forum of the United States, Japan, India, and Australia is not a multilateral security alliance. Nevertheless, the threat of conflict is real in the Indo-Pacific and is not simply about the rise of China (as multiple states seek power and strategic advantage). In other words, a dynamic de-centered order is organically emerging in the Indo-Pacific (that is neither top-down nor bottom-up) as the domination-seekers and the subordinate states pursue their own self-interested policies.

Despite this jostling for influence, the Indo-Pacific remains economically dynamic and culturally vibrant. In fact, it is possible that this state of affairs may continue for a few decades even as the intensity of interactions across the various subregional *mandalas* changes over time, while the region avoids hegemony, systemic balances, and the emergence of a single "centric" power. It is possible that a de-centered *mandala* order is the future of this region. Whether or not things pan out this way, the larger point is that IR theoretical generalizations drawn from the ancient Indian experience can provide us with new ways of looking at contemporary geopolitics (and for explaining actual state behavior). Global IR needs to pay more attention to such de-centered orders as many leading scholars are already arguing that the post-American world order will be de-centered.[120]

ANCIENT INDIA AND CHINA

In contrast to ancient India, where Mauryan domination gave way to a de-centered *mandala* order, the ancient Chinese multi-polity system that transformed into a system-wide empire in 221 BCE was relatively long-lasting (and survived until 220 CE under the Han dynasty). There are at least three important reasons behind the different geopolitical trajectories in ancient India and China. First, the concept of "peace" was understood differently in these two civilizations. Although the quest for political peace is absent in ancient Indian textual tradition (and is missing from the *Arthaśāstra*),[121] Olivelle has argued that Ashoka sought "universal peace" in practice through *dhamma*. According to him, Ashoka's *dhamma* is analogous to

the "democratic-peace" hypothesis of contemporary IR because Ashoka believed that universal peace would prevail if all polities adhered to his *dhamma*.[122] By contrast, China's multiple philosophical traditions had debated the concept of geopolitical peace centuries before the emergence of the Qin Empire in 221 BCE, and they all agreed that only such "unification" of the "civilized world" or *tiānxià* could guarantee it.[123] While a comparative study of the idea of peace in ancient India and China is warranted, it should be noted that Ashoka's idea of universal peace only emerged after his empire established its dominance although the Chinese idea of peace had been internalized over the centuries before the emergence of an all-encompassing empire.

Second, the Mauryan Empire was short-lived because the mode of empire-building was informed by the norm of *dharma-vijayin* that was prone to fragmentation as it left the vanquished rulers, states, and their traditions intact. In other words, ancient Indian empires and the *Arthaśāstra* lacked the idea of Weberian bureaucracies to govern the state.[124] By contrast, a meritocratic "recommendation system," the "forerunner of the more discerning civil-service examination system," was already in place under the Han.[125] Furthermore, empire-building in China not only included the bureaucratic incorporation of the vanquished kingdoms but also an empire-wide standardization of the "soft-technologies" of governance such as script. Meanwhile, the Mauryas used multiple scripts and languages, thereby maintaining regional differentiation. These differences are especially significant because even as "a discernable consciousness of being Chinese (called *Huaxia*)" had emerged by the time of the Warring States,[126] the "peoples" of ancient India "were never geographicized-and-politicized,"[127] and that sociopolitical equivalents of terms such as "India/Indian" did not even exist.

Third, ancient India was an "open" region of South-Western Eurasia that had been in close contact with other large, culturally sophisticated, and literate empires centuries before the emergence of Mauryan domination. By contrast, "China corresponded to the entire civilized world" after the Qin unification, and that "in its early centuries, the Chinese empire really did not confront any comparably organized governments or literate and economically productive cultures anywhere nearby," as "Rome and India were far away."[128] This made China not only "'a' civilization but the essence of civilization itself," and "[w]ithin the Chinese mental universe, there could only be a binary choice: Chinese or barbarian."[129]

A combination of the above three factors ensured the longevity of the imperial state in China and its subsequent political trajectory. The "strategic terrain" of the Chinese *tiānxià* corresponded with the "cultural core that originated with the ancient Huaxia (華夏) people," and to those who were "acculturated" through contact with them through invasions and migrations.[130] Not surprisingly, these core areas of Sinic culture have remained well-defined since ancient times even as they have gradually expanded. Consequently, "[i]nvasions from outside . . . had to be heroically resisted in defense of tianxia,"[131] although the Chinese tradition

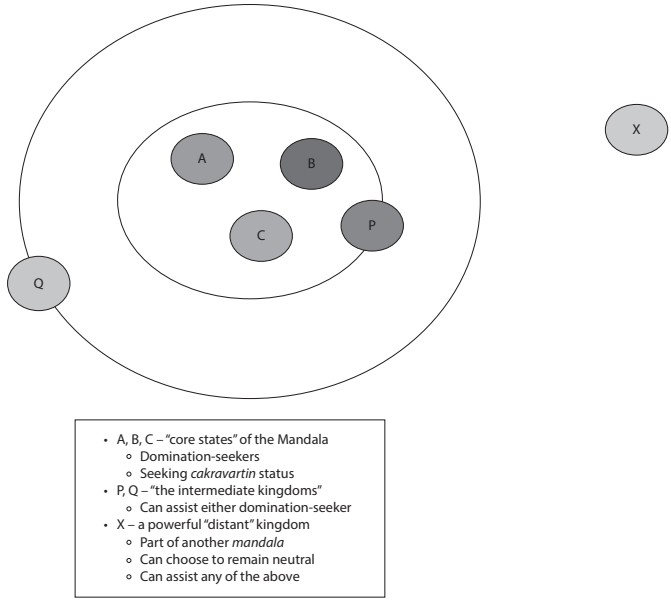

FIGURE 14.1. The Kautilyan *mandala*.

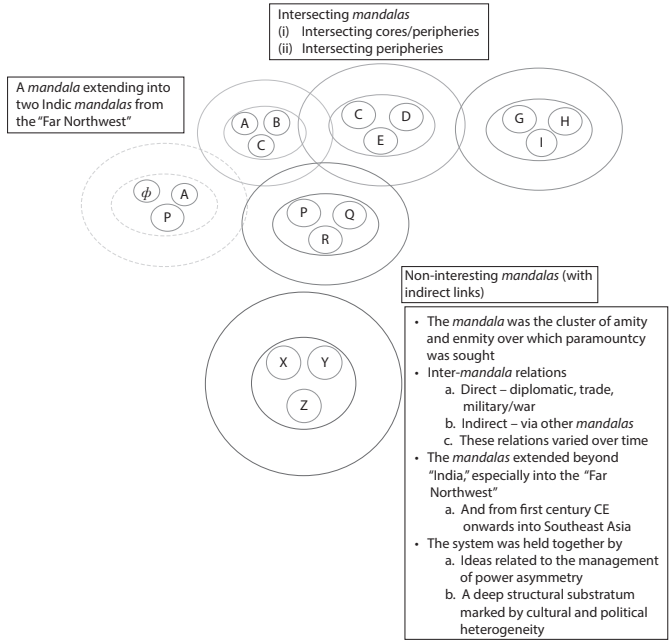

FIGURE 14.2. The *mandala* international order.

was flexible enough to accommodate the acculturated outsiders who adopted and adapted the civilization of this *tiānxià*. By contrast, no such association between state and civilization existed in ancient India. While the Chinese *tiānxià* was geographically "emplaced" (to borrow a term from Pollock),[132] the imperial geobody of the *cakravartin* ruler was malleable and along with the idea of the *mandala* began to spread to Southeast Asia, especially after 300 CE. Subsequently, India remained "open" not just in the northwest but also towards Southeast Asia over the following millennium.

NOTES

1. For the classic treatment of these issues, see Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1979); and Adam Watson, *The Evolution of International Society* (London: Routledge, 1992).

2. On "open" and "closed" systems, see Barry Buzan and Richard Little, *International Systems in World History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), especially chap. 3.

3. These factors are drawn from the following notable works: Stuart J. Kaufman, Richard Little, and William C. Wohlforth, eds., *The Balance of Power in World History* (New York: Palgrave, 2007); Randall L. Schweller, "The Balance of Power in World Politics" *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*, May 2016, DOI: 10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.119 (accessed 9 January 2019); and Dani K. Nedal and Daniel H. Nexon, "Anarchy and Authority: International Structure, the Balance of Power, and Hierarchy," *Journal of Global Security Studies* 4, no. 2 (2019): 169–89.

4. "Deep structure" refers to the shared macro-cultural substrate or the primary "social institutions" of an international system. See Christian Reus-Smit, "Cultural Diversity and International Order," *International Organization* 71, no. 4 (2017): 873–74.

5. Kenneth N. Waltz, "Reflections on *Theory of International Politics:* A Response to My Critics," in *Neorealism and Its Critics*, ed. Robert O. Keohane (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 328, 341.

6. Martin Wight, *Systems of States* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1977), 43, 46. Later, Watson argued that hegemony and domination are also possible instead of a single universal empire. Watson, *The Evolution of International Society*, 15.

7. Amitav Acharya, "Global International Relations (IR) and Regional Worlds: A New Agenda for International Studies," *International Studies Quarterly* 58, no. 4 (2014): 647–59.

8. On Sinocentric orders, see Yongjin Zhang and Barry Buzan, "The Tributary System as International Society in Theory and Practice," *Chinese Journal of International Politics* 5, no. 1 (2012): 3–36.

9. Barry Buzan and Richard Little, "The Idea of 'International System': Theory Meets History," *International Political Science Review* 15, no. 3 (1994): 240.

10. Willem Vogelsang, "The Achaemenids and India", in *Achaemenid History IV: Centre and Periphery*, ed. Heleen Sancisi-Weerdenburg and Amelie Kuhrt (Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 1990), 93–110.

11. Susan Sherwin-White and Amélie Kuhrt, *From Samarkand to Sardis: A New Approach to the Seleucid Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 91–97.

12. Osmund Bopearachchi, "Greeks, Scythians, Parthians, and Kushans in Central Asia and India," in *Eurasian Empires in Antiquity and Early Middle Ages: Contact and Exchange between the Graeco-Roman World, Inner Asia, and China*, ed. Hyun Jin Kim, Frederick Juliaan Vervaet, and Selim Ferruh Adali (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 251–74; and Sushma Jansari, "South Asia," in *The Graeco-Bactrian and Indo-Greek World*, ed. Rachel Mairs (London: Routledge, 2020), available at https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315108513.

13. Victor Lieberman, *Strange Parallels: Southeast Asia in Global Context, c. 800—1830, Volume 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 656.

14. R. S. Sharma, *India's Ancient Past* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005), 147.

15. Dilip K. Chakrabarti, "Mahajanapada States of Early Historic India," in *A Comparative Study of Thirty City-State Cultures*, ed. Mogens Herman Hansen (Copenhagen: Reitzels, 2000), 382.

16. Noboru Karashima, "Beginnings of South India History," in *A Concise History of South India*, ed. Noboru Karashima (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014), 30.

17. Upinder Singh, *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India* (Delhi: Pearson, 2009), 256–471.

18. Paul J. Kosmin, *The Land of the Elephant Kings: Space, Territory, and Ideology in the Seleucid Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 31–58.

19. Kosmin, *The Land of the Elephant Kings*, 35–36.

20. Hermann Kulke and Dietmar Rothermund, *A History of India*, 4th ed. (London: Routledge, 2004), 73.

21. Kulke and Rothermund, *A History of India*, 74–76.

22. John Keay, *India: A History*, revised and expanded edition (New York: Grove, 2010), Kindle location 2597.

23. Kulke and Rothermund, *A History of India*, 74.

24. Jason Neelis, *Early Buddhist Transmission and Trade Networks* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 113, 126, 127.

25. Craig Benjamin, *Empires of Ancient Eurasia: The First Silk Roads, 100 BCE—250 CE* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 176–203.

26. Joseph Schwartzberg, "A Geopolitical Synopsis: The Evolution of Regional Power Configurations in the Indian Subcontinent," in Joseph Schwartzberg, *A Historical Atlas of South Asia*, 2nd impression (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 254–61. This paragraph draws from Schwartzberg's analysis.

27. Gérard Fussman, "Revising the History of Ancient India: The Need for a New Vision," Seventeenth Gonda Lecture, Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, Amsterdam, 20 November 2009, available at https://www.knaw.nl/en/news/publications/revisiting-the-history-of-ancient-india-the-need-for-a-new-vision (accessed 10 May 2019), 18.

28. Sharma, *India's Ancient Past*, 197.

29. Sheldon Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 67.

30. Keay, *India*, Kindle location 2518.

31. Mark McClish and Patrick Olivelle, eds., *The Arthaśāstra: Selections from the Classic Indian Work on Statecraft* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2012), xxxi–xxxii.

32. McClish and Olivelle, *The Arthaśāstra*, xxxii.

33. Mark McClish, *The History of the Arthaśāstra: Sovereignty and Sacred Law in Ancient India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 163.

34. On different regime-types in ancient India, see Thomas R. Trautmann, *Arthashastra: The Science of Wealth* (New Delhi: Allen Lane, 2012), 28–49.

35. Patrick Olivelle, trans. and ed., *King, Governance, and Law in Ancient India: Kautilya's Arthaśāstra* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 46–51.

36. McClish, *The History of the Arthaśāstra*, 165; and Olivelle, *King, Governance, and Law*, 43.

37. McClish and Olivelle, *The Arthaśāstra*, lxxi.

38. Olivelle, *King, Governance, and Law*, 49.

39. Olivelle, *King, Governance, and Law*, 50.

40. McClish and Olivelle, *The Arthaśāstra*, 122–23.

41. Upinder Singh, *Political Violence in Ancient India* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), 31–33, 486.

42. Olivelle, *King, Governance, and Law*, 350.

43. A. L. Basham, "Asoka and Buddhism—A Reexamination," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 5, no. 1 (1982): 135.

44. Sheldon Pollock, "Empire and Imitation" in *Lessons of Empire: Imperial Histories and American Power*, ed. Craig Calhoun, Frederick Cooper, and Kevin W. Moore (New York: New Press, 2006), 184.

45. Singh, *Political Violence*, 318.

46. Kenneth Boulding, *Conflict and Defense* (New York: Harper, 1962), 262.

47. Jason Neelis, "Overland Shortcuts for the Transmission of Buddhism," in *Highways, Byways, and Road Systems in the Pre-Modern World*, ed. Susan E. Alcock, John Bodel, and Richard J. A. Talbert (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 12–32.

48. Singh, *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India*, 261. Such marriages also played a crucial role in the international relations of early modern Europe. See Daniel H. Nexon, *The Struggle for Power in Early Modern Europe: Religious Conflict, Dynastic Empires, and International Change* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

49. For a general discussion of leadership factors in international relations, see Daniel L. Byman and Kenneth M. Pollack, "Let Us Now Praise Great Men: Bringing the Statesman Back In," *International Security* 25, no. 4 (2001): 104–46.

50. These ideas are borrowed from Wolters's scholarship on Southeast Asian *mandalas*. O. W. Wolters, *History, Culture, and Region in Southeast Asian Perspectives*, rev. ed. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 27. Kulke has specifically called for the cross-fertilization of ideas in South and Southeast Asian history, especially the concept of the *mandala*. While the *mandala* designates "a regional kingdom" in medieval Southeast Asian historiography, it refers to a "states system" in the *Arthaśāstra*. Hermann Kulke, "State Formation and Social Integration in Pre-Islamic South and Southeast Asia: A Reconsideration of Historiographic Concepts and Archaeological Discoveries," in *State Formation and Social Integration in Pre-modern South and Southeast Asia*, ed. Karashima Noboru and Hirosue Masashi (Tokyo: Toyo Bunko, 2017), 317, 327.

51. Wolters, *History, Culture, and Region*, 28.

52. Michael Witzel, "Early Sanskritization: Origins and Development of the Kuru State," *Electronic Journal of Vedic Studies* 1, no. 4 (1995): 17; and Schwartzberg, *A Historical Atlas*, 163.

53. Stuart J. Kaufman, Richard Little, and William C. Wohlforth, "Conclusion: Theoretical Insights from the Study of World History," in Kaufman, Little, and Wohlforth, *The Balance of Power in World History*, 242.

54. Romila Thapar, "The Evolution of the State in the Ganga Valley in the Mid-First Millennium BC," in Romila Thapar, *Cultural Pasts: Essays in Early Indian History* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), 391–92.

55. Sheldon Pollock, "Axialism and Empire," in *Axial Civilizations and World History*, ed. Johann P. Arnason, S. N. Eisenstadt, and Björn Wittrock (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 399.

56. Richard Little, *The Balance of Power in International Relations: Metaphors, Myths, and Models* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

57. Michael Witzel, "Brahmanical Reactions to Foreign Influences and to Social and Religious Change," in *Between the Empires: Society in India 300 BCE to 400 CE*, ed. Patrick Olivelle (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 488n121.

58. Hemchandra Raychaudhuri, *Political History of Ancient India* (Calcutta: Calcutta University, 1923), 109.

59. Sharma, *India's Ancient Past*, 150.

60. On co-binding, see Daniel H. Deudney, *Bounding Power: Republican Security Theory from the Polis to the Global Age* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 55–58. On the wedge strategy, see Timothy W. Crawford, "Preventing Enemy Coalitions: How Wedge Strategies Shape Power Politics," *International Security* 35, no. 4 (2011): 155–89.

61. William J. Brenner, "The Forest and the King of Beasts: Hierarchy and Opposition in Ancient India (c. 600—232 BCE)," in Kaufman, Little, and Wohlforth, *The Balance of Power in World History*, 99–121.

62. Brenner, "The Forest and the King of Beasts," 113.

63. Singh, *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India*, 265–69.

64. Kosmin, *The Land of the Elephant Kings*, 33.

65. Sherwin-White and Kuhrt, *From Samarkand to Sardis*, 96–97.

66. Kaufman, Little, and Wohlforth, *The Balance of Power in World History* (especially "Introduction" and "Conclusion").

67. Sharma, *India's Ancient Past*, 149–52.

68. Romila Thapar, *Early India: From the Origins to AD 1300* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2002), 181.

69. For the classic treatment of these concepts, see Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics*, 3rd ed. (New York: Palgrave, 2002). There is a vast literature on these concepts, and some of the more notable contributions include Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Adam Watson, *The Evolution of International Societies: A Comparative Historical Analysis* (London: Routledge, 1992); Michael W. Doyle, *Empires* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986); G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and Rebuilding of Order after Major Wars* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001); David A. Lake, *Hierarchy in International Relations* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011); and Ayse Zarakol, ed., *Hierarchies in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

70. On the distinction between "being" an empire and "having" one, see Charles S. Maier, *Among Empires: American Ascendancy and Its Predecessors* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 66.

71. While the emergence of Gupta domination remains to be answered in International Relations scholarship, it should be noted that the mode of extra-regional resource injection is of causal significance, and can lead to hegemonies in "open" regions. Manjeet S. Pardesi, "Mughal Hegemony and the Emergence of South Asia as a 'Region' for Regional Order-Building," *European Journal of International Relations* 25, no. 1 (2019): 276–301.

72. The ideational dimension of Mauryan hegemony is missing from Watson and Brenner's analyses. Watson, *The Evolution of International Society*, 77–84; and Brenner, "The Forest and the King of Beasts." Also see Modelski's now dated work that is more interested in the textual analysis of the *Arthaśāstra* than in empirically analyzing ancient Indian history for its theoretical insights. He also reduces ancient India to the "Hindu World" despite the prominence of Buddhism and the presence of other religious traditions. George Modelski, "Kautilya: Foreign Policy and International System in the Ancient Hindu World," *American Political Science Review* 58 (1964): 549–60.

73. Klaus Karttunen, "Aśoka, the Buddhist Samgha, and the Graeco-Roman World," *Studia Orientalia* 112 (2012): 35–40.

74. Kosmin, *The Land of the Elephant Kings*, 33.

75. On "peer polity" international systems, see Jack Donnelly, "Beyond Hierarchy," in *Hierarchies in World Politics*, ed. Ayse Zarakol (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 255.

76. Kosmin, *The Land of the Elephant Kings*, 32.

77. Pollock, "Empire and Imitation," 182.

78. T. V. Paul, Deborah Welch Larson, and William C. Wohlforth, eds., *Status in World Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

79. Peter Fibiger Bang, "Between Aśoka and Antiochus: An Essay in World History on Universal Kingship and Cosmopolitan Culture in the Hellenistic Ecumene," in *Universal Empire: A Comparative Approach to Imperial Culture and Representation in Eurasian History*, ed. Peter Fibiger Bang and Darisuz Kołodziejczyk (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 67.

80. Klaus Karttunen, *India and the Hellenistic World* (Helsinki: Finnish Oriental Society, 1997), 264.

81. On "social creativity," see Deborah Welch Larson and Alexi Shevchenko, "Chinese and Russian Responses to U.S. Primacy," *International Security* 34, no. 4 (2010): 73.

82. On Ashoka's uniqueness in the contemporaneous world of his time, see Singh, *Political Violence in Ancient India*, 272–73.

83. Upinder Singh, "Governing the State and the Self: Political Philosophy and Practice in the Edicts of Aśoka," *South Asian Studies* 28, no. 2 (2012): 131–45.

84. Umberto Scerrato, "An Inscription of Aśoka discovered in Afghanistan: The Bilingual Greek-Aramaic of Kandahar," *East and West* 9, no. 1/2 (1958): 6.

85. Singh, *Political Violence in Ancient India*, 260.

86. These explanations interpret Ashoka's *dhamma* through the lenses of Buddhism, the Kalinga War, or factors "internal" to India. Nevertheless, my interpretation complements the existing explanations and can coexist with them.

87. Harry Falk, "The Creation and Spread of Scripts in Ancient India," in *Literacy in Ancient Everyday Life*, ed. Anne Kolb (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2018), 43–66; and Matthew Canepa, "Cross-Cultural Communication in the Hellenistic Mediterranean and Western and South Asia," in *Mercury's Wings: Exploring Modes of Communication in the Ancient World*, ed. F. S. Naiden and Richard J. A. Talbert (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 249–72.

88. Basham, "*Asoka and Buddhism*," 135. Neither Ashoka's India nor China's "Warring States" was aware of the other. Qin "unification" was completed only in 221 BCE, almost a decade after Ashoka's death in 232 BCE.

89. Rein Taagepera, "Size and Duration of Empires: Systematics of Size," *Social Science Research* 7, no. 2 (1978): 116.

90. It is often noted that the Hellenistic sources are silent on Ashoka's envoys. My interpretation based on status offers one possible explanation for this. Since Ashoka ruled over the most powerful empire of his day, silence was a prudent choice for his Hellenistic contemporaries. Acknowledgment of Ashoka's domination would have undermined their own claims of "universal domination," while challenging Ashoka may have resulted in a military showdown with him (and the loss of trade). Hellenistic silence can therefore be explained as a "cognitive" strategy to deal with the paradox of their own universal pretensions and the simultaneous existence of other powerful empires. On such strategies in a different context, see Rolf Strootman, *Courts and Elites in the Hellenistic Empires* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 11.

91. Thapar, *Early India*, 210, 226.

92. Singh, *A History of Ancient and Medieval India*, 374.

93. Watson, *The Evolution of International Society*, 84.

94. Thapar, *Early India*, 209.

95. McClish and Olivelle, *The Arthaśāstra*, lxxi.

96. Raymond Aron quoted in Stanley Hoffmann, "Report of the Conference on Conditions of World Order: June 12–19, 1965, Villa Serbelloni Bellagio, Italy," *Daedalus* 95, no. 2 (1966): 456.

97. While the Western Shakas were in direct contact with the Kushans and the Satavahanas, the latter two interacted indirectly via the former.

98. Pollock, "Axialism and Empire," 431, 434.

99. I am grateful to Robert Ayson for extensive discussions on this issue that helped me clarify my ideas.

100. Neelis, *Early Buddhist Transmission and Trade Networks*, 137, 140.

101. Harry Falk, "Kushan Religion and Politics," *Bulletin of Asia Institute*, New Series, vol. 29 (2019): 1–55.

102. On the emergence of broad cultural commonality amidst heterogeneity, see Thapar, *Early India*, 209–79.

103. On this rivalry, see Neelis, *Early Buddhist Transmission and Trade Networks*, 126–31.

104. Angus Maddison, *The World Economy: A Millennial Perspective* (Paris: OECD, 2001), 261.

105. Robert Gilpin, "The Theory of Hegemonic War," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 18, no. 4 (1988): 591.

106. Graham Allison, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017).

107. The author would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for emphasizing this point.

108. Tanisha M. Fazal, *State Death: The Politics and Geography of Conquest, Occupation, and Annexation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).

109. Alexander Cooley, *Logics of Hierarchy: The Organization of Empires, States, and Military Occupations* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012); and Atul Kohli, *Imperialism and the Developing World: How Britain and the United States Shaped the Global Periphery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).

110. Frederick Cooper, "Epilogue: Beyond Empire?," in *The Oxford World History of Empires, Volume Two—The History of Empires*, ed. Peter Fibiger Bang, C. A. Bayly, and Walter Scheidel (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 1274. Also see Calhoun, Cooper, and Moore, *Lessons of Empire*.

111. Barry Buzan and Evelyn Goh, *Rethinking Sino-Japanese Alienation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), especially chap. 7.

112. Evelyn Goh, "Great Powers and Hierarchical Order in Southeast Asia: Analyzing Regional Security Strategies," *International Security* 32, no. 3 (2007/08): 113–57.

113. Frédéric Grare, *India Turns East: International Engagement and US-China Rivalry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

114. Michael Wesley, "Oceania: Cold War Versus the Blue Pacific," in *Strategic Asia 2020: U.S.-China Competition for Global Influence*, ed. Ashley J. Tellis, Alison Szalwinski, and Michael Wills (Seattle: National Bureau of Asian Research, 2020).

115. Øystein Tunsjø, *The Return of Bipolarity in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018).

116. Eric X. Li, "The Life of the Party: The Post-Democratic Future Begins in China," *Foreign Affairs* 92, no. 1 (2013): 34–46.

117. Thomas Carothers, "The End of the Transition Paradigm," *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 1 (2002): 5–21.

118. Barry Buzan and George Lawson, "Capitalism and the Emergent World Order," *International Affairs* 90, no. (2014): 71–91.

119. Ashley J. Tellis, "The Return of U.S.-China Strategic Competition," in Tellis, Szalwinski, and Wills, *Strategic Asia 2020*, 32.

120. Barry Buzan, "The Inaugural Kenneth N. Waltz Annual Lecture—A World without Superpowers: Decentered Globalism," *International Relations* 25, no. 1 (2011): 3–25; and Amitav Acharya, *The End of American World Order*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Polity, 2018).

121. Richard Salomon, "Ancient India: Peace Within and War Without," in *War and Peace in the Ancient World*, ed. Kurt A. Raaflaub (Malden: Blackwell, 2007), 53–65.

122. Patrick Olivelle, "Aśoka's Inscriptions as Text and Ideology," in *Reimaging Aśoka: Memory and History*, ed. Patrick Olivelle, Janice Leoshko, and Himanshu Prabha Ray (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012), 175.

123. Yuri Pines, *The Everlasting Empire: The Political Culture of Ancient China and Its Imperial Legacy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 3.

124. A. L. Basham, *The Wonder That Was India: A Survey of the Culture of the Indian Sub-continent before the Coming of the Muslims* (New York: Grove Press, 1959), 123.

125. Dingxin Zhao, *The Confucian-Legalist State: A New Theory of Chinese History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 289.

126. Charles Holcombe, *A History of East Asia*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 13.

127. Pollock, "Axialism and Empire," 442.

128. Charles Holcombe, *The Genesis of East Asia, 221 B.C.—A.D. 907* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001), 30.

129. Holcombe, *The Genesis of East Asia*, 41.

130. Wang Gungwu, *Renewal: The Chinese State and New Global History* (Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong), Kindle location 307.

131. Wang, *Renewal*, Kindle location 2036.

132. Pollock, "Empire and Imitation," 182.